

My First Half-Century in the Iron Game

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Perhaps the most dangerous debate in the history of civilization is the ongoing controversy regarding the relative merits of “nature” and “nurture” ... in effect, which is most important, genetics or experience?

It is not now “politically correct” to say that all of us are not equal, that all of us cannot reach any possible level of ability if we are properly educated. Sure. Well, as my father told me many years ago ... “You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear”.

It is not considered to be “polite” to say that intelligence is genetic, in spite of massive evidence to that effect and no evidence to the contrary. But such wishful thinking on the part of academics and other wrong-headed types will not change the simple facts: people are not “equal,” in any sense of the word, do not have the same potential, cannot reach the same levels of ability, are limited by their inherited traits, things that were determined before they were born. If, in the face of the evidence, you believe otherwise, then you are a fool.

Certainly experience is necessary in order to reach the highest possible level of both mental and physical ability, so experience does influence the final outcomes; but no amount of experience of any kind will help if you are too stupid to learn from that experience. Somebody once said ... “We learn, when we learn, only from experience; and then, only from our mistakes, our successes merely serve to reinforce our superstitions.”

Somebody else said ... “Success comes from good judgment, good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment.”

Most of the problems in the world today are apparently the results of people trying to perform the impossible, the impossible for “them.” They see or hear about what somebody else did, and then make the mistake of assuming that they can do as well. And perhaps they can, if they happen to be an identical twin of the person they admire. Otherwise, forget it.

Fifty-seven years ago, when I first became seriously interested in exercise it did not take me long to learn that weightlifting was by far the most productive form of exercise; even though, at that time, almost all of the supposed “experts” were convinced that weightlifting was bad, was almost evil, would make you “muscle-bound,” would ruin your heart, would rupture you, would make you slow and clumsy. Which opinions were firmly held by almost everybody in the scientific community, and by all of the coaches of that period.

To this very day most of those utterly stupid opinions are still believed by many people who should now know better; should know better, but generally do not know better.

Literally tens-of-thousands of supposedly “scientific” research programs have been conducted in claimed attempts to determine the “best” method of training for various purposes, to increase strength, muscular size, muscular or cardiovascular endurance, flexibility or athletic performance of one kind or another. Yet, in practice, most of the resulting theories and practices that have been produced by such research is worthless, or worse than worthless. At least ninety-nine percent of the physical education programs being used in schools today are simply stupid; a total waste of time at best, and counterproductive or dangerous at worst. Very few people are helped, nobody is helped to a meaningful degree, and quite a few people are hurt.

If we were forced to evaluate the benefits of exercise based upon the results of current physical education programs in use in schools today, the only sane conclusion would be to decide that it was utterly worthless; the only results of such programs are the provision of employment for thousands of coaches and the wasting of the time of millions of students.

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Numerous studies conducted during the last forty or fifty years have clearly established the literally pitiful physical condition of most of the people who have been exposed to such physical education programs in their schools. The very few exceptions, and they are damned few, are a result of the fact that some few people are simply “naturals,” people who will do better because of the fact that they were born with a very high level of potential ability; but even these could have done much better if they had been exercised properly.

More than twenty years ago, I wrote, but never published, an article named “Something less than Zero;” in which I pointed out the fact that physical education programs were doing far more harm than good. Which certainly does NOT mean that exercise is “bad;” but, rather, that exercise as it was being applied was utterly wrong, worse than worthless. The same thing is still true today.

And just “when,” you may ask, will this situation change for the better? In my opinion, probably never; because the myths and superstitions are now so firmly established that it will probably be impossible to re-educate all of the people involved.

The very fact that you are reading this article almost certainly means two things: ONE, you are interested in exercise, and, TWO, you are not satisfied with your results. If you were not interested in exercise you would not bother to read this article, and if you were satisfied with your results you would not be reading this article; because, in that case, you would be convinced that you already know everything of value on the subject of exercise.

During the last twenty-five years I have written and published four books and several hundred articles on the subject of exercise, a total of perhaps a million words; but if you memorized all of my publications you still would not know much of value. I have found that meaningful communication is all but impossible when it depends upon the published word; primarily, it appears, because there is no “feedback” from the audience. You can never know whether or not your attempted explanations were really understood by the intended audience. Sure, they end up with an “impression,” but it will seldom have much in common with the impression that you were trying to establish. People usually hear what they want to hear, what they expect to hear, that which agrees with their already-established opinions.

So, when your statements fly in the face of their opinions, they either fail to understand what you said or reject it out of hand; but, in either case, real communication does not occur.

It has been firmly established that when the population of any type of animal exceeds a certain point, when the “density” of the population of animals within a given amount of land becomes too crowded, the animals seem to go insane, start doing things that are obviously counterproductive, even dangerous for the survival of the herd. In my opinion, that state of affairs now exists among people; I can think of no other possible explanation for many of today’s widespread activities, the drugs, the violence, the crime, the destruction of the cities and the schools. None of which offer much hope for the survival of mankind in the long run; any of which, continued much beyond the current state of affairs, will eventually destroy civilization, has already destroyed a large part of it.

It is now seriously estimated that several large countries in Africa have already reached a point where half of the total population is infected with AIDS, and AIDS is also spreading like wildfire in several Asiatic countries, particularly in Thailand where prostitution is openly practiced on a wide scale. And if you are foolish enough to believe that you can meaningfully change people’s sexual practices then you are in for a rude surprise. And don’t count on a cure for AIDS in the near future, if ever. About four-hundred years ago, when it was first introduced into Europe, Syphilis killed more than half of the entire population of Europe within a few years; AIDS will probably be worse in the long run if the current situation means anything.

Some few people, damned few, appear to be immune to AIDS, seem to have a natural resistance to it, and it is probable that eventually they will be about the only survivors apart from an even smaller number of people who have sense enough to avoid the risk. But, as history has clearly proven, when it comes to sex then very few people will avoid the risk. Eventually, we will probably have a much smaller worldwide population of people who just happened to have a natural immunity to AIDS; and, given the much longer incubation time involved with AIDS, this may take much longer than it did with Syphilis in Europe hundreds of years ago, but it nevertheless is almost certainly the final outcome.

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And just what does all of this have to do with proper exercise? Quite a bit as it happens; because it is simply another example of the general stupidity of most people, people who refuse to learn from observation and experience, who are forced to repeat the mistakes of others and even fail to learn from their own mistakes.

Healthcare costs in this country have already reached a point where we simply cannot afford them on a universal scale, and they are rapidly increasing, so when we reach a point where we are attempting to care for a few million people with AIDS then the whole society will come unglued. Count on it.

If you have any sense at all, you will avoid AIDS like the plague, because it is a plague of the worst sort; if not, you will be among the victims. And if you are interested in exercise, you will base your opinions upon your own experience, will stop paying attention to any of the current crop of supposed “experts.”

Few, if any, of whom could find their own ass if given twenty attempts with a bright light and an arrow on the target and with an Indian guide leading them by the hand.

Suggestions: ONE, never train more often than twice each week; TWO, perform only one set of each exercise; THREE, carry each set to a point where you cannot continue the movement in good form; FOUR, move rather slowly, do not throw the weight up and do not drop it back down. If that fails to work then you may not have the ability, the potential for greater improvement.