# My First Half-Century in the Iron Game

**ArthurJonesExercise.com**

# 45

If my experiences, and my observations, have taught me anything of real value, it is primarily this: very little turns out the way we expect. Results may be better than you expected, or worse, but will seldom be exactly what you expected. Which, I suppose, is the primary justification for education of any kind: an attempt to gain the knowledge that you need in order to be able to anticipate results.

But I have also learned that reaching a point where we have a clear understanding of cause and effect is very difficult; that is, even when we do produce the desired result we seldom know why, usually tend to give the credit to factors of little or no real importance; which attitude, unavoidably, means that we continue to do things that serve no purpose.

Over the course of the last twenty-five years, during which time I have been the principle speaker in several hundred medical seminars, I have frequently asked medical professionals two related questions: first, I ask them when they graduated from medical school; then, assuming that they have been out of school for at least ten years, I ask them just how much of all they were taught in medical school they still believe. Answers to these questions vary, of course, but a typical answer to the second question usually falls somewhere between ten and twenty percent: that is, they no longer believe from eighty to ninety percent of what they were taught, have learned from their own experience that most of what they were taught was simply wrong.

Given the vast amounts of time and money that have been devoted to medical research, you might be tempted to believe that current medical protocols are based upon solid facts that have been clearly established by scientific proof; but, in fact, medicine is still one of the most controversial, and largely unproven, fields of study in existence today. That being true, as it is, we should not then be surprised to find that the subject of exercise physiology is perhaps even more confused.

As recently as thirty years ago, the subject of exercise was generally ignored by almost all of the people in the medical and scientific communities, and even today I suspect that 99 out of every hundred doctors know something less than nothing about the potential benefits of exercise. It has recently become common practice for people who publish suggestions about exercise programs to make a point of stating that you should always consult with your doctor before starting any exercise; but such statements are not made in good faith, are instead made in an effort to avoid any possible liability in the event that somebody suffers as a consequence of following the published advice. Then, if they get sued, they can always claim . . . "Well, I told you to consult your doctor in advance; so it is not my fault that you got hurt."

Personally, I never knew anybody who consulted a doctor before starting an exercise program, although I am sure there have been at least a few people who did; and, perhaps, here and there, in a very few rare cases, such consultation may have served some worthwhile purpose. But, in general, it would be a complete waste of time and money, because most doctors know nothing about either the benefits or problems associated with exercise.

But, if that is true, as it is, then just where can you go for meaningful advice on the subject of exercise? And, as the Chinese say . . . "Rots of ruck." If there is a source of meaningful advice on the subject of exercise lurking out there somewhere then I have been unable to find it; any such guru must have spent his life hiding out in a cave, because nearly sixty years of searching on my part has not brought him to my attention.

The relatively rare individuals who have been the most successful in the field of body building have, in my opinion, been successful largely in spite of their efforts rather than as a result of any real knowledge. Most of these people do not even know what they have done, have usually tried just about everything that come to their attention; some of which things, obviously, did help to produce the results they were seeking, but many, probably most, of which things served no purpose, may even have been counterproductive. So seeking advice from such people is an exercise in futility at best. Some of these people, not many of them but a few of them, are at least honest, but none that I ever met or heard of were truly knowledgeable. John McWilliams, who may have had the largest muscular arms in the history

of the world, and had them more than fifty years ago, told me, when I asked him just how he developed such huge arms . . . "By praying and drinking large quantities of water." When I showed a picture of John's arms to Sergio Oliva, he shook his head and said . . . "That's too big."

While it is certainly possible to learn how to do relatively simple things by asking people who can do them, not many people have ever stopped to consider just why that is possible. Such things can be rather easily learned primarily because they involve immediate results: when you hit a nail with a hammer, you do not have to wait a few days, or weeks, to see what will happen, and thus cause and effect are immediately apparent. But when the results of your actions are not immediately apparent, then the situation becomes far more complicated; trying to stimulate muscular growth by exercise is an example of a more complicated situation: you do something today, but the results, if any, do not show up until much later.

And, added to that complicating factor, is the fact that you seldom do only one thing at a time; during the course of a workout you may perform several exercises for the same muscle, so you later cannot determine the actual results stimulated by any one of the exercises. Which means, of course, that you are doing things without knowing what the results will be; which might well be a very clear definition of insanity.

Throughout my life I have been far more interested in "why" than I have been in "how." Don't tell me how to do it, tell me why it works. When I first started flying, more than fifty-six years ago, my first instructor told me quite a few things about "how," and fewer things about "why;" some of which things did not seem to make much sense, and some of which were simply stupid, were wrong, did not work at all or did not work in the way I was told that they did. Yet, today, more than a half-century later, I still hear pilots making statements that are utterly stupid, while trying to do things that are simply impossible. Largely due to the fact that I was always concerned with the "why" as well as the "how," I have at least managed to survive a lot longer than most of the pilots who started flying at about the same time I did. Along those lines it might be interesting to note that only 5 percent of the German fighter pilots survived the Second World War; that is, 19 out of every 20 were killed. In general, our casualties were lower, but were still a lot higher than they should have been. Primarily, I believe, because most of our pilots did not really understand the "why" of what they were trying to do.

Look around you at the other people that you encounter in the gym, and then do the same thing a year later; if you do, you will notice that a lot of the people who were there a year earlier are no longer on the scene, and over a period of five years you will probably find that the drop-out rate is something above 90 percent. Why? Because people do not continue to do things that produce no worthwhile results; not unless, that is, they are crazy.

Not everybody can look like Arnold, regardless of what they do, and not everybody even wants to look like Arnold, but they do want to produce at least some worthwhile results in return for their efforts; so the very fact that such a high percentage of people drop out of an exercise program after a relatively brief period is clear proof that their results did not come up to their expectations.

So, since your doctor knows nothing about exercise, since almost all of the supposed "experts" in the scientific community generally know less than nothing about exercise, since most of what is published in various magazines is written by people who are interested only in trying to sell you something, since the advice you get by asking apparently successful body builders is usually worse than worthless, just where can you go for meaningful advice? Well, I could, I suppose, suggest that you do it the way I did, by trying to figure things out for yourself and by basing your opinions upon the results of your trial and error experiments, but, unless you are both smarter and luckier than I ever was, that is a long, hard road; then, if you ever do get it figured out, it will probably be too late to do you any good.

If you believe that most body builders habitually lie about the size of their arms, and they do, you should hear the stories that people tell about the sizes of snakes and crocodiles: most supposedly scientific books list crocodiles with a length of thirty feet or more, and rattlesnakes more than eight feet in length; but, in fact, the longest crocodile accurately measured in modern times (that is, since the age of dinosaurs) is 17 feet, 8 and 1/4 inches in length, an animal that is still alive and in captivity in St. Augustine, Florida. While the largest rattlesnake ever listed by anybody who was not a liar was 7 feet, eight and 1/4 inches in length. And please remember that both of those reptiles were outright freaks, far larger than average, about as common as ten-foot men.

The largest arm I ever measured on a man was 20 and 1/8 inches in circumference, measured "cold" and accurately; the man was Sergio Oliva and at that time his arms literally dwarfed anybody else's arms.

Accurately measuring an arm is not as simple as it might appear, for several reasons: one, most tape measures are not accurate, are almost always "short" of their stated length, and thus tend to overstate the measurement, two, the size of your arm does not remain constant throughout the day, your arms are largest when you wake up in the morning and smallest just before you go to bed, are larger before a meal than they are after a meal, and, of course, are quite a bit larger immediately after arm exercise, so these factors must be considered in order to produce an accurate measurement.

You cannot buy an accurate tape apart from a steel tape, but a steel tape is useless for measuring your arms because it is too stiff and will not follow the contour of your arm; but you can make an accurate tape from thin paper such as newsprint stock, use it once and then throw it away because it will tend to shrink within a day or so. Then you must measure your arm at right angles to the bone, and must measure it following the first "flex," because flexing your arm even once will tend to increase its size because of some degree of muscular "pumping."

Once having figured out just how to get an accurate measurement of my arm size, I then maintained an accurate record of such measurements for a period of about thirty years, and since I also maintained records of my strength levels it then became possible to see the relationship between size and strength, and these careful records produced some rather surprising observations. I found that size increases do not come gradually, but, rather, occur suddenly, so quickly that I was never able to determine just how little time was actually involved. Usually, such sudden bursts of growth occurred at night, while I was asleep, and such increases in size almost always occurred in increments of a full half-inch.

I also discovered that strength increases "followed" size increases: that is, the size increase occurred first and the strength increase came a bit later. The result being that a graph of arm size looked like a stair step while a graph of arm strength looked like a line curving back and forth; strength would increase rapidly following a size increase, then would slow down, and finally would reach a peak and then maintain that level until another size increase occurred, whereupon strength would rapidly increase again.

It thus appears that the size increases did not "produce" the strength increases, but, rather, made them possible.

The strength measurements that I used at that time were rather crude compared to the ones we use today, but they were at least accurate enough for my purposes at that time; I based these strength measurements on my ability to perform an isolated exercise in perfect form for ten full repetitions performed at a slow speed of movement and with no "cheating." My best performance in a barbell curl was nine repetitions with 165 pounds, when my upper arms were 17 1/8 inches "cold," the greatest size I ever reached. But, as it happened, curling was always one of my strongest abilities; the best I could ever do in a bench press was nine repetitions with 280 pounds, which was not very good considering my stripped weight of 205 pounds.

But, all any of us can do is the best we can; as I have said many times before, people are not "equal."