

My First Half-Century in the Iron Game

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Somebody once said . . . “Figures do not lie, but liars figure.” Today, a lot of things that are presented as “news” are actually nothing apart from assumptions based upon figures, so-called statistics; and very few people ever doubt the truth of the assumptions or wonder about the source of the figures upon which they were based. But they should, because most of them are pure bullshit.

About twenty years ago, when the aerobics craze was already well underway, it was frequently stated in the newspapers and on television that there were 25,000,000 people in this country that were hard-core joggers, most of them, or so the stories went, doing their best to run a hundred miles each week. Such quoted figures were seldom questioned by anybody, but they should have been.

If there really had been that many joggers running that much every week then it would probably have been impossible to drive a car on most of our streets and highways because they would have been filled up with joggers and there would have been very little room left for cars. If those figures had been correct, then more than ten percent of the total population would have been jogging regularly; and, of course, since the total population includes babies, small children, cripples, lunatics, old people, prisoners, hospital patients and many other categories of people who obviously were not fanatical joggers, that means that about forty percent of the normal adults were joggers. Really?

Think about it: do you really believe that four out of each ten normal adults that you know are joggers? Personally, I doubt if it is actually as many as four out of a hundred. And if my assumptions as stated above are reasonably accurate, as I believe they are, then just how many hard-core bodybuilders do we now have in the country? Again: look around you at all the people you see on the streets, and ask yourself just what percentage of them are bodybuilders. As a percentage of the total number, damned few.

Which means, if you are a bodybuilder, that you are a member of a tiny minority, not an average member of the “crowd.” And, to many members of that crowd, you are looked upon as a freak of some kind. And while it is certainly true that body-building competitions, physique contests, are now much more common and attract far bigger crowds than they did even a few years ago, it does not follow that such shows are truly popular with many average people. A fact that is still clearly established by the general lack of interest in such shows that is shown by the media; most of them get little or nothing in the way of mention in newspapers, general magazines or on television. And when they do attract any media attention it is more likely to be in the form of thinly-veiled ridicule than it is in the way of praise; more likely to be presented as a freak show rather than a beauty contest.

And, along those same lines, the “powers that be” are now seriously considering removing the swim-suit competition part of the annual Miss America Contest; and don’t be surprised when they change the name to the Ms. America Contest; all in the name of “political correctness,” of course, since calling a young woman “Miss” is no longer considered proper. Whether a woman is married or not is apparently no longer considered to be any of your business.

Personally, I am convinced beyond any shadow of a doubt that proper exercise could be, and should be, one of the most important contributions to a healthy lifestyle for almost literally everybody, men, women, and children; but I am also convinced that it still remains the most generally ignored factor related to healthcare; and in spite of at least some improvement in the overall attitude towards exercise that has come about during the last thirty years, I see very few indications of any additional improvement in the next thirty years. So, in general, the public is still missing the boat.

Dr. Kenneth Cooper was largely responsible for the aerobics craze: he was initially criticized by the scientific community because he did not bother to get the approval of the supposed “experts” before publishing his first book on the subject, a book that became a bestseller and started the jogging mania that followed and that still continues. In fact, Cooper knew something less than nothing about exercise when he wrote that book, but it nevertheless influenced millions of people. And, eventually, when the other supposed gurus in the scientific community finally got around to noticing just how successful Cooper had become because of his book, they immediately tried to climb aboard the bandwagon.

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Initially, Cooper was almost violently opposed to any sort of exercise apart from jogging, and he made the additional mistake of believing that if some was good then more was better; that is, if twenty miles of jogging a week is good, than a hundred miles is better. Which, frankly, is nothing short of insanity. But, eventually, he apparently began to come to his senses: because, fairly recently, he said . . . “Anybody who performs more than one hour of exercise a week is not doing it for physiological reasons.” Or words to that effect.

Today, several hundred colleges and universities in this country are performing what they call scientific research in the field of exercise physiology, and many thousands of supposedly scientific articles are published each year in a large number of supposedly scientific journals; but, with damned few exceptions, such research has usually been a complete waste of time and money, and if any of these people have actually discovered anything of the slightest value then it has not come to my attention. Ridiculous as they usually are, you can learn a lot more of value by reading current body-building magazines than you can by reading everything published by the scientific community.

Yet these people, the scientists, are the supposed “experts” that the media, the medical community and the government go to for advice on the subject of exercise; they would learn a lot more of value if they sought the advice of a typical Gypsy fortune teller, because in that case they would not get their heads stuffed with a lot of pure bullshit based upon utterly meaningless research performed by a group of near idiots.

More than twenty years ago, when we were conducting strength-training research at the West Point Military Academy, I went to great lengths in my attempts to assure that the results of that research would not be ignored on the grounds that I was not a recognized member of the scientific community; so I refused to be involved with any of the testing procedures that were performed before and after the period of time during which the cadet subjects were exercised in order to determine the results of that exercise program. In effect, the cadet subjects were carefully tested before the exercise program was started and then tested again after the program was completed, and the measured differences were clear proof of the results of the program. Such so-called “pre and post” testing is always conducted in connection with such research.

But, of course, just “how” the testing is conducted, and “who” conducts the tests is also important; the testing tools must be accurate, the tests must be conducted properly, and the people conducting the tests must be both knowledgeable and honest. So, at my suggestion, the commanding officer of the Physical Education Department of West Point, Colonel James Anderson, selected the people who conducted all of the tests, and he made sure that none of these people had any association with either me or West Point; in effect, he and I both wanted all testing to be conducted by “outsiders” who could not be influenced by either me or him. In fact, I had never met, or even spoken to, any of the people who were selected to conduct the tests; and, while they were there conducting the tests, I avoided them like the plague in an attempt to assure that I could not later be accused of having influenced them in any way.

Most of the people who conducted these tests were sent to West Point by Dr. Kenneth Cooper, and were members of his staff at his Aerobics Institute in Dallas. I paid for all of this, of course, but Cooper’s people were never aware that I was even involved in the program in any way.

So they conducted their pre and post tests and were literally stunned by the results, because we had produced far better results in only six weeks than Cooper could have produced in six years, and they knew it. So then they returned to Dallas and presented their results to Cooper, and he refused to even read them; when handed the test results by his own people he glanced briefly at the first page and then threw the entire report across the room, declaring in a loud voice that the results were impossible. And they would have been impossible for him, because he did not know what he was doing and thus assumed that nobody could produce better results than he could; which, unfortunately, is a typical response from almost all of today’s crop of supposed “experts” in the scientific community.

We were interested, primarily, in producing strength increases, but also knew that the program we were using would greatly increase aerobic capacity as well, even though we did no conventional aerobic training on any kind; while Cooper was interested only in increases in aerobic capacity, and was also convinced that he was the sole expert on that subject in the world. So, when he saw our results, as measured by his own people, he simply refused to believe them.

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Compared to a so-called “control group” of subjects who were trained for the same length of time in a conventional manner, our group did so much better that the comparison was simply ridiculous.

The control group reduced their average time for a two-mile run by an average of 20 seconds, while our group reduced their time by an average of 88 seconds, 4.4 times as much as the control group.

In our group, the average increase in flexibility in one area was ten times as much as it was for the control group, eleven times as much in another area, and twenty-three times as much in a third area. While overall strength for our group increased by 60 percent, with almost nothing in the way of a strength increase for the control group.

Additional aerobic testing was conducted by Cooper’s people using treadmills, stationary bicycles and other tools, and such testing was conducted with both our group and the control group; and, in all cases, our results were, in Cooper’s mind, simply too good to be true.

And, in general, Cooper’s reaction is typical of the scientific community; but, here and there, once in a great while, somebody comes along who is not quite as stupid, or as arrogant, as most scientists are. Such people are rare, but they do exist.

Only last Friday, two days ago, I was shown the results produced at a university in Syracuse, New York, by Dr. Jay Graves: he tested the isolated lower-back strength of a large group of oarsmen, elite athletes who row boats in competition. These men practice two or three hours a day, six days a week, and would be expected to be far above average strength in their lower-back muscles; but, in fact, their lower-back strength was only average for an untrained man, which is actually quite low. So much for the benefit of rowing as an exercise for lower-back muscles.