

# My First Half-Century in the Iron Game

# 61

## Testing Strength: Part Six

Most of the people who are now interested in exercise probably never heard of Charles Atlas, and very few, if any, of the people still living who do remember him were ever aware of the facts involved in his career. Yet, not so long ago, it was difficult to find a national magazine that did not feature advertisements extolling the supposed benefits of his so-called Dynamic Tension form of exercise; the supposedly semi-magical style of exercise that would turn anybody into a Superman almost overnight, a closely-guarded “secret” style of exercise that produced the physique that won Atlas the title “The World’s Most Perfectly Developed Man.” A secret, however, that Atlas was more than willing to share with you in return for some of your money.

Most of the ads that Atlas ran over a period of about fifty years used a cartoon format that showed some skinny runt getting sand kicked in his face by a big bully on the beach, a bully that then ran off with the runt’s girl friend. But, then, the runt discovered the magic of Dynamic Tension, whereupon, within a matter of weeks, the runt turned himself into a big bruiser, returned to the beach, kicked the shit out of the bully and got his then somewhat used girl friend back. It is probable that a total of a million such ads appeared in magazines over the years.

So, just what were the facts? The ads run by Atlas claimed that he was “The Winner, And Still Holder, of the title of The World’s Most Perfectly Developed Man.” True or false? True in one sense of the word, but very misleading to say the least. About 1921 a contest was held to determine the winner of that title, and Atlas was the winner; then, a year later, he won the title again, so at least part of his claim was true. But the only reason he won was because he had literally nothing in the way of competition; by any standards, his physique was pitiful, but the people he competed against were even worse, a bunch of fat bar-room bouncers, retired piano movers and others of their kind, while Atlas was the only weightlifter in either contest, a piss poor weightlifter with a pitiful physique, but a weightlifter nonetheless.

But, the catch was, in order to sell his “get big and strong quick” secret Atlas had to convince millions of scrawny kids that he was not a weightlifter, that lifting weights was bad, to be avoided like the plague, dangerous, etc. Some of which statements eventually snapped back in his face when he was prosecuted for fraudulent advertising. And, during his trial, he stated that he was not, and never had been, a weightlifter.

Whereupon the judge asked him . . . “Have you ever used weights for any purpose?”

And Atlas said . . . “Yes, for the purpose of testing my strength.”

And the judge then asked him . . . “How often and for what length of time do you test your strength with weights?”

And Atlas said . . . “Three or four times a week, for a couple or three hours each time.” But that, of course, was not weightlifting. Sure.

His claim that he was “still holder of that title” was also true, because the title was copyrighted by the promoter of the contests and was never awarded again since no other such contests were held. His claims about the benefits of Dynamic Tension, of course, were pure bullshit; but he still managed to sell his secret to millions of poor fools who should have known better. Atlas is now gone, but his death did not stop many others from following in his footsteps; Joe Weider has also been prosecuted for fraudulent advertising, and that may have cost him a few bucks but did not stop him, and today he is only one among many such people milking an even bigger crop of suckers than Atlas ever had.

A physical therapist from New Zealand, Robin McKenzie, discovered by accident that extending the lower back sometimes helped to relieve lower-back pain; and in the years since he first became aware of that relationship, he has founded a whole new “school” of physical therapy, now conducts classes for physical therapists, chiropractors, medical doctors or anybody else willing to pay him in order to learn the “McKenzie Method.” I have visited McKenzie in his home in New Zealand and he has visited me in my home in Florida, and I have talked with him at great length both face

## The Arthur Jones Collection

to face and on the telephone, and I believe that I know him as well as anybody does and far better than most of his friends and associates do.

I have also spent a lot of time with a rather long list of people who are “true believers” in the McKenzie Method, two of whom are medical doctors who should not have been quite so easy to convince. I have also noted that the things that McKenzie says in front of his true believers and the things that he says behind their backs are quite different. There is, there has been for as long as I can remember, and there will be far into the future an enormous amount of jealousy throughout the medical community: medical doctors generally hate both chiropractors and physical therapists, and almost all physical therapists and chiropractors hate both one another and medical doctors. Which situation, given the attitude of competing people in all other fields, should not be surprising. Even in areas where the involved people have everything to gain and nothing to lose by cooperating, any such cooperation is the exception, not the rule. The members of any local, state or federal police organization generally go to great lengths in attempts to “protect their turf,” do not want any help from a different police organization. If such people devoted as much time to fighting crime as they do to fighting one another our crime situation would be greatly improved. To which utterly ridiculous situation we must add, of course, the negative results of all the infighting that constantly goes on within each of the many different police organizations. Why, then, are we surprised by the fact that the criminals seem to be winning the war on crime?

Given the fact, and it is a fact, that McKenzie will either get rich, or lose his ass, depending upon his ability to convince thousands of people that the McKenzie Method provides the “solution” to almost all lower-back problems, he has now found himself in a very similar position to that of Charles Atlas. To be successful, Atlas had to convince people that his method, and only his method, would solve all of their problems, that everything else, particularly weightlifting, was bad. McKenzie is now doing exactly the same thing. Atlas knew that his claims were lies, and so does McKenzie.

Yes, it is certainly true that extending the lower back sometimes brings about a relief of lower-back pain, but it is also true that doing so does not change anything, does not cure the problems that cause the back pain. Changes in the lower back can be produced in only two ways, either by surgery or by proper exercise; although, in a very real sense, even that statement is not quite accurate, since exercise does not “produce” changes but, rather, “stimulates” changes.

Sitting at a table in the kitchen of my house in Florida, talking frankly with me with no witnesses to our conversation, McKenzie told me that he had a problem. Shortly before that conversation he had started holding classes on the McKenzie Method for chiropractors, but had then discovered that he was getting a strong “back lash” from physical therapists, all of whom hate chiropractors. So, he said, his problem was this: he would have to choose between physical therapists and chiropractors, apparently could not even hope to reach both groups. Then, he went on to say that there were 50,000 physical therapists in this country but only 30,000 chiropractors (his stated numbers, not mine); therefore, on the surface it might appear that he should go with the physical therapists and drop the chiropractors, since it appeared to be an “either/or” situation. However, he said, only ten percent of physical therapists deal with spinal problems, while a hundred percent of chiropractors do; so, he said, he would rather have a hundred percent of 30,000 than ten percent of 50,000.

Just what he has done since that conversation I do not know, apart from the fact that he still tries to deny the benefit of exercise for lower-back problems, but it was obvious to me, based upon the words that came out of his mouth, that he was interested in only one thing: money.

And I do not object to his desire to make money, but I do object to the fact that he is willing to lie in order to do so. Several years ago, McKenzie ordered about \$200,000.00 worth of MedX machines from me, and we shipped them to him in New Zealand; but, somehow, he never quite got around to paying for them, so eventually we had to repossess them. After which, according to one eye-witness report, he was trying to test lower-back strength by holding a bathroom scale against the subject’s back; meantime, of course, still telling people that lower-back strength was unrelated to lower-back problems.

When I first spoke with McKenzie, he told me that he did not know just why extending the lower back sometimes reduced pain, all he knew, he said, was that it frequently worked. So I explained the situation to him, made him aware of something that he had never even suspected. It has been generally believed for many years throughout the medical community that extending the lower back reduces the disc space in the rear of the spine, thereby increasing the pressure

## The Arthur Jones Collection

on the spinal disk in that position. Well, in fact, extending the lower back does not REDUCE the disc space; instead, it INCREASES the disk space, thereby reducing pressure on the disc. And this is not a matter subject to reasonable differences in opinions; all that is required is a series of lateral X-rays of the lower spine in three positions. Whereupon, what happens to the rear disc space becomes immediately obvious. Which raises an interesting question: just how could millions of medical professionals look at billions of X-rays and all of them fail to see what was happening? Just why was I, of all people, the first one to notice this? Probably because I had not been brainwashed into seeing what I expected to see.

Such “opening up” of the rear disc space as you move into the fully-extended position of the lumbar spine is not on a scale that can be seen only with a microscope; instead, it is a literally dramatic increase in disc space that can be seen from across a large room with normal vision. Nevertheless, most, by far a great majority, of medical professionals still remain unaware of this situation, and many will attempt to deny it even when it has been demonstrated to the satisfaction of a goat, even when they have seen it with their own eyes.

Even properly performed rehabilitative exercise performed on a MedX Lumbar-extension machine will not remove the pain resulting from all cases of lower-back problems, but it damned sure works a lot better than any other treatment for such problems now known by man; in about eighty percent of all cases of chronic lower-back pain, pain that has not been removed or reduced by any other treatment, not helped by surgery, physical therapy modalities, chiropractic manipulations, or anything else, will either be gone or greatly reduced following a few weeks of treatment with a MedX machine.

If and when the government ever takes any meaningful steps in the direction of sanity, which I doubt, it could come to pass that all cases of lower-back pain will be treated first with MedX machines, that any other treatment will be prohibited until and unless MedX treatment has been tried and has failed. A simple federal law to that effect would save the people in this country a minimum of \$80,000,000,000.00 a year; that being B for billion, not M for million. Who else did you ever hear of that has invented or discovered anything of equal value?