

Ironman Articles

1970-1974

In Plain English

During 1971 alone, we have received more than 20,000 letters as a direct result of my articles and ads in Ironman – and within that same period of time, more than a thousand people have visited our training facilities in DeLand, Florida. Bulletin number 1 – our first publication – has been a “best seller” right from the start, a first printing of 5,000 copies is almost gone and a second printing will be required within another month. Bulletin number 2 – our second publication – sold more than a thousand copies during the first month.

Thus it might appear that we are “getting our message across” – and in many cases we are. But, in many other cases, we are not – which fact becomes more obvious to me day by day; primarily brought home during the many thousands – that’s right THOUSANDS – of phone conversations that I have held during the last year with weight trainees all over the world.

While I hope these conversations have been of value to the people who called me, there is no slightest doubt that I have learned a lot from them – among other things, I have certainly learned just how poor the written word is as a means of clear communication. But I have also learned that it is easily possible to go “too far, too fast” – so perhaps the fault is primarily mine. In my previous articles I have tried to take interested readers on a step-by-step guided tour through the jungle of modern weight-training – pointing out the animals along the way, explaining the dangers lurking in wait for the unwary and trying to outline common-sense precautions.

But perhaps I have forgotten that it took me thirty years to fully understand even some actually very simple points – maybe I have been expecting too much from my readers. So this article is intended to be the start of a basic primer of weight-training – an attempt in the direction of understanding.

To begin with, I want it clearly understood that I don’t even pretend to know all the “answers” – but it should also be understood that at least ninety percent of everything published on the subject of weight-training is simply untrue. Which is not unusual in itself – because a very high percentage of everything that has ever been printed on any subject was also untrue. But in the field of weight-training, a great deal of the false “information” that has been published was written by people who were aware that it was false – and a lot more of it was written by people who simply did not know what they were talking about. In Bulletin number 2 I remarked that, “...you can NOT learn how to train a race horse by asking a race horse.” Which should be an obvious point to anybody – but which, in fact, seems to be a point that has been overlooked by almost everybody.

Contrary to widespread opinion, the field of weight-training has NOT moved forward during the last twenty years – it has simply grown larger. Long before the use of drugs, there were many men on the scene who could easily hold their own with the best of today – prior to the use of food supplements, there were many men who came very close to reaching the limits dictated by their individual potential. Paul Anderson is probably the strongest man who ever lived – Doug Hepburn set records fifteen or twenty years ago that have never been equaled by anybody even close to the same bodyweight – John McWilliams had the largest muscular arms in history – Bob Peoples (at a bodyweight of less than 180 pounds, thirty years ago) deadlifted poundages that most super-heavyweight lifters cannot duplicate today at even twice his bodyweight. None of these people used drugs – most of them never heard of food supplements during their best years.

Exceptional individuals? Certainly they were exceptional men – but just how many Sergio Olivas are there, how many Arnold Schwarzeneggers or Casey Viators? Outstanding men are always rare – they always have been and they always will be. The average woman doesn’t have much in common with a “Playmate” either – and, in fact, you might not recognize some of the “playmates” if you met them on the beach the day after their latest photo session; without the benefit of “air brush” touching up which is routinely done with such pictures, without the apparently gravity-defying proportions resulting from photographing these girls in upside-down sets, and without the careful selection of only one or two “acceptable” photographs from literally hundreds of pictures, you just might get a true impression of these girls – which might be fatal to the dream-world impression that such magazines are trying to put across.

The Arthur Jones Collection

But such outright deception is not limited to the girlie magazines – the same sort of hogwash is presented as fact in almost every issue of almost every magazine devoted to the field of weight-training. I have personally – and accurately – measured the upper arms of most of the leading bodybuilders on the scene today, and up to the present moment (January 3, 1972) I have measured only one 20-inch arm. At the NABBA show in London, Sergio Oliva's arms literally dwarfed the arms of any other contestant there – yet Sergio's arms actually measured ONLY 20.5 inches. I am personally prepared to bet a thousand dollars that nobody in that contest can get his arms to a muscular size that will equal Sergio's even when they are pumped and flexed, as compared to Sergio's cold and relaxed. Let me very clear about this statement – I plainly mean that Sergio's "cold" arm, hanging straight and relaxed at his side, is larger than the arm of any other man in that contest, even when such arms are "pumped" and flexed.

Yet several other contestants "claimed" measurements larger than Sergio's. Secondly Sergio was obviously the heaviest man in that contest – by at least twenty pounds – and yet he weighed only 233 pounds at that moment. While other contestants claimed that they weighed 240 pounds or more. If weightlifters were permitted to put themselves into classes on the basis of claimed bodyweights, then we would probably see examples of 300 pounders lifting in the 148 pound class – so why not put bodybuilders to the test as well?

But my real point is this – most of the so-called "progress" during the last twenty years is phony. Most of the leading bodybuilders of today are seldom if ever as big as they claim, almost never as heavy as they claim, nowhere near as strong as they claim – and, as a natural result, thousands of young bodybuilders are literally beating their brains out trying to duplicate impossible measurements.

Just who has the "best" physique is unfortunately a matter of opinion – opinion subject to bias, friendship, propaganda, and outright bribery; but measurements and strength performances are not a matter of opinion – such things are subject to measurement.

The average trainee will never be able to duplicate the muscular size of Oliva or the strength of Paul Anderson – but the average trainee can make gains that are probably far beyond the actual expectations of most trainees, and such gains require absolutely nothing even bordering on the outright fanaticism that is so common in weight-training circles today.

Unfortunately, many of the commercially involved interests in this field think it is necessary to actually encourage fanatic beliefs – so they print anything that might even throw doubt on the subject, doubt hopefully intended to cause you to buy their products. Which sort of activity certainly isn't limited to the field of weight-training – but dishonesty is dishonesty, whether it is encountered in this field or in any other field.

While it is certainly true that any legitimate business has a right to make a reasonable profit – indeed, must make at least some profit in order to stay in business –fraudulent businesses have no slightest justification for even a bare existence; and, contrary to popular opinion, there are really no effective laws – or at least, there is no effective policing of the laws that do exist – for the purpose of stopping fraudulent advertising.

At an earlier point in our history – before national advertising became common – a product lived or died on the basis of its quality; bad "word of mouth" would put a company out of business before it ever had a chance to grow big – in those days, "quality" meant something, and people were prepared to stand behind their products, only in that way could a product find widespread acceptance.

Until about twenty years ago, about the only thing you could even hope to sell a weight-trainee was a barbell – and, in those days, barbells were built to last almost forever. So, once having been persuaded to buy a barbell, a customer was effectively removed from the market; as a result, the companies in this field were quite small – profits were lean, sales were strictly limited.

Then somebody discovered a totally new, much larger, fantastically profitable market –health foods; a whole new world of potential profit was opened up – and, at the moment, no end appears to be in sight. Now – and let there be no slightest doubt on this subject – I am certainly not "against" a good diet, and I am just as certainly not in favor of the poor diet of the average person, and I certain am aware of the value of an actually "good" diet.

The Arthur Jones Collection

For more than twenty years I was closely and directly involved in the importation of a very wide variety of delicate wild animals – keeping such animals alive and healthy in captivity is primarily a matter of diet; one missing ingredient can be the difference between a death rate of 90 percent or one of less than 1 percent – so I learned long ago that a proper diet is of utmost importance. I also learned that there are three distinct requirements in the way of a proper diet – these are, (1) a proper variety of foods, (2) a proper amount of food, (3) and the “quality” of the foods.

Without a proper diet, good gains from even the best type of training are impossible – but it should also be clearly understood that no diet will build muscular size or strength without proper training. The problem then obviously becomes, “... just what is a proper diet?”

In the direction of answering that question in an undeniable fashion, I am going to conduct the following experiment. Within the next few months I will visit a major university for the purpose of being LOCKED INTO A ROOM for a period of exactly twenty-eight days, four weeks to the minute, no more and no less. During which time I will be constantly observed by the physiology department of the university in question.

Prior to entering the locked room, I will be carefully and accurately measured, weighed, and tested by the doctors in charge of the university – I will be photographed, X-rayed, tested and checked in every way possible. Not only for my starting size and strength but for my “condition” – stroke-volume of my heart, resting pulse rate, etc. In short, prior to this experiment the doctors in charge will know everything about me in a physical sense that it is presently possible to measure.

During the four weeks that I will be locked up, these same doctors will observe, monitor and carefully record literally EVERYTHING that I do – exactly what I eat, how much I eat, when I eat, how often I eat, how much I sleep, and literally EVERYTHING else that I do. My urine will be collected and tested for protein utilization and liver function, my blood will be frequently tested for cell count and blood sugar levels, my breathing will be checked for oxygen-uptake studies, etc.

During that four weeks, I will train a total of exactly fourteen times – each day for five days of the first week, and then three times each week during the last three weeks. The first five “break-in” workouts will be extremely brief, averaging well under thirty minutes each – none of these first five workouts will be a “full” workout, being intended merely to get me over any initial soreness.

Then, during the final three weeks, I will train three times weekly, each workout being a “full body” workout –requiring less than fifty minutes each, a total weekly training time of approximately two and a half hours; two and a half hours PER WEEK, not per workout.

These listed training times being TOTAL times – including all required rest periods between exercise or between sets; in effect, I will go into the gym, and less than fifty minutes later I will leave the gym.

Then, after exactly twenty-eight days, I will again be tested by the same group of doctors that tested me originally – and FULL results of both the “before” and “after” tests will be published, together with photographs and measurements. Which facts will be certified by the physiology department of the university involved.

There will be no “growth drugs” – there will be no hanky panky – there will be no overstated gains – there will be no touched-up photographs; if I make a fool of myself, then everybody will know it – because the results will be printed regardless of what happens, win, lose, or draw. While it remains a matter of opinion whether you can or cannot “fix” a physique contest – you certainly can NOT fix the entire physiology department of a major university.

Twenty years ago, under such conditions, I could have made gains that would literally defy belief – but, quite frankly, at my age, I no longer know just what to expect; but the results should be interesting – regardless of what the outcome proves to be.

Some people will naturally wonder why I selected myself as the subject for such an experiment; and the answer is quite simple – because I “know” how I will train, and I could never be quite sure just how somebody else might train. I will train properly – very briefly, infrequently, but very hard.

The Arthur Jones Collection

Secondly, I will use no conventional training equipment – all my training will be strictly limited to a few major pieces of Nautilus equipment. I will do no squats, will perform no barbell exercises of any kind, won't use a chinning bar or parallel dip bars.

I “could” conduct the same experiment at home – but if so, the results would always be open to doubt; some people would accept my word for what I did and some would not – so, only in order to remove even the possibility of any deception or misrepresentation, I will conduct the experiment under close supervision by responsible people who will not be a party to anything except the exact truth.

I will have a telephone, a few books, and a typewriter in my room – so I can continue to conduct required business by phone and can devote most of my time to writing; so the time won't be wasted.

After the experiment, and the following testing is completed, I will return home and continue to train as and when I have the available time. Then, at approximately 90 day intervals, I will return to the same university for additional testing for the purpose of recording my continuing progress. This follow-up training, unfortunately, can NOT be done under certified conditions, so it will then be necessary for people to take my word for what my training and diet consists of during this later period. But my continuing progress, at least will be an indisputable matter – if I fail to make continuing progress, then the tests at 90 day intervals will clearly indicate such a poor result, and if I do make progress then that result will also be a matter of undeniable fact.

While I certainly do not expect to end up looking much like Sergio Oliva after four weeks of training – or forty years, for that matter – I do think I will surprise a few people. But perhaps I will be the one that gets surprised – but, in either case, we will all soon see.

And we will see in DETAIL – because, afterwards, we will print an exact “blow by blow” account of EVERYTHING that went on during that carefully supervised four weeks of training; my exact diet insofar as type of foods, source of foods, variety of foods, amount of food, etc. – as well as an exact repetition by repetition description of my precise workouts, detailing the “form” used, number of reps performed, amount of resistance used, etc.

In short, the follow-up information that will be published will be complete down to and including the last tiny detail – and it will be true information, undeniably true.

If I can get good results from such brief but proper training – after the way I have almost brutally abused myself for what now seems like at least a thousand years – then it should be obvious that most people can produce somewhat similar degrees of results from similar training programs. Some will do much better, some will not do as well, and only about one in a million will end up looking like Sergio as a result – the difference in the final results being primarily determined by individual potential – but almost anybody can and will make very worthwhile gains from an actually very small amount of proper training, and without the use of drugs of any kind.

And, I would like to add just for the record, I am personally NOT the ideal subject for such an experiment – while my exact age is nobody's business by my own, I will mention that I have one daughter past the age of twenty-five and one grandchild; also, it has not so far been my fate to have an exactly “easy” life – I have been bitten by poisonous snakes more than twenty times and have a permanently stiff thumb as a result of one such bite – I was badly mauled by a lion many years ago and got a broken neck during the process, an injury that has caused me trouble ever since, involving (as it did) the nerves that lead to my arms – I have been shot through both legs and will never gain have full use of either leg – my right arm was busted up so badly that I haven't been able to straighten it fully in more than thirty years, and my left arm had the triceps ripped out by the roots, so now I can't fully straighten either arm.

Excuses in advance? Some people will think so – but in fact, I merely want to set the record straight, fully.

I have had malaria repeatedly, tick-bit fever, and “who knows what” other tropical diseases – I have worked an average of at least fourteen hours a day for more than thirty years and have probably averaged less than five hours of sleep a night during that period; most of my teeth are gone – or ruined – from too many years in places where you didn't dare brush your teeth with the water, my ears were damaged many years ago by too many big engines and big guns, and my eyes certainly are not what they once were. The less said about my hair the better – and some people say my face looks like a map of Europe, a map made just after the last war.

The Arthur Jones Collection

So I don't expect to win any physique contests – or any beauty contests, either – but we will all see what I can do with my body in an actually very brief period of time.

Some people have recently seen fit to state in writing that you can NOT make good gains unless you train at least five days a week, and that you must train several hours during each workout – so I want it clearly understood that such training will literally make good gains IMPOSSIBLE. A man who makes progress on such a program is literally gaining “in spite of his efforts” – rather than as a result of proper training – and anybody who can make any degree of progress on such a program would make actually spectacular progress on a correct program involving less than twenty percent as much weekly training time.

One author also stated in a recent article that, “... a three times per week training schedule is not ENOUGH for a man who wants to make good gains.” And he is right – in most cases, it is TOO MUCH; quite contrary to common belief, an advanced man should train LESS than a beginner – most of our advanced men are now training only twice each week, for less than an hour during each “full body” workout.

A beginner isn't strong enough to overtrain easily – so a beginner can actually stand more training than an advanced man can; but if an advanced trainee is training properly (and that primarily means “hard enough”), then he literally can't stand much if any more than two weekly workouts, and certainly not more than three weekly workouts under any circumstances.

Once I am back home from the university experiment, I will switch to a twice-weekly training routine – and as time goes by, I will gradually REDUCE my workouts. Rather than training MORE as I become stronger, I will train LESS – as I have to do in order to prevent overtraining, as ANYBODY must do to prevent overtraining.

The only thing that Nautilus machines do that barbells don't do is provide HARDEST POSSIBLE work – with a barbell you are working only “part” of a muscle, actually a rather small part, no matter how hard you think you are training, no matter how much you train; with Nautilus machines, you are working almost literally “all” of the same muscles – or, at least, you should be, you can be if you train properly. But the same principles are involved regardless of what you are using in the way of training equipment – you must work as hard as possible, but you must NOT work too long, nor too often, and as you get stronger you must work even less insofar as the “amount” of training is concerned.

So let there be no slightest doubt on this point, either – we are now building the best exercise tools in existence, by far the best; there is simply no reasonable grounds for a comparison between Nautilus machines and any other type of training equipment – and, along with these machines we are advocating by far the best system of training in existence, the only really sane system of training, the most productive system.

Strong words? Perhaps – but true; and anybody who disagrees with the above points is either badly misinformed or is attempting to tout some other method or system of training for their own commercial advantage.

And what about my own commercial advantage? Well, I am certainly commercially involved – now; but I just as certainly had no desire or intention of being so involved even as recently as two years ago- such involvement was almost literally forced upon me. But, once having decided to take the plunge, I decided to go all the way – never having been one to do things in a half-hearted manner, I have gone as far as I could as fast as I could. And, as I said earlier in this article, perhaps I have gone “too far, too fast” – maybe my articles have simply contained too much information that is new to most weight-trainees, it could be that I have exceeded the attention span of some trainees.

If I was twenty years old again (Lord forbid), or even forty years old, and if I was content to waste a large part of my time – then I might also be content to proceed at a leisurely pace. But since I don't have as many years left as most of the readers of Ironman, and since I don't really want to spend the rest of my life trying to explain a few actually very simple points to a lot of people who have been systematically brainwashed into believing almost everything but the truth – I am naturally anxious to “get on with it,” to proceed as rapidly as possible, so I can later move on to a few other things that also interest me.

The Arthur Jones Collection

But while I am involved, I am “going all the way” – and thus I have been willing to spend a good part of almost every day supervising the training of the hundreds of trainees that have visited DeLand during the last year; and I have been willing to spend many, many long hours (when I really had a lot of other things that required my attention) talking to the thousands of people who have called me within the last twelve months. And, while talking to such a great number of active trainees either in person or on the phone, I have been forced to a number of obvious conclusions.

Almost all of these trainees share common misconceptions – they simply do not understand even the basic principles involved in weight-training; they know little or nothing about “form” – they are not even aware that you must train “progressively” – and they have no slightest idea what actually “hard” training consists of. Yet, in the very face of such a huge lack of almost any worthwhile information on the subject, they tend to consider themselves well informed.

And it almost always comes as a shock to such people when we are given the opportunity to introduce them to actually hard training; having been doing as many as sixty sets for their arms in each of several weekly workouts – and having produced little or nothing in the way of results from their efforts – such people are not quite surprised to find that only ONE, or at the most TWO, sets is all they can stand, if they are actually hard sets. And then they are even more surprised to find themselves growing again at a very rapid pace.

One self-confessed “expert” recently remarked in one of his articles that it was a joke to even consider a brief workout as hard – but I hereby tell him very carefully that he can NOT follow one of our trainees for even as much as ten minutes and stay on his feet; three or four minutes of actually hard training will make him vomit – ten minutes or less will put him on the floor, “out like a light” – and a full workout of forty minutes or so would kill him stone dead. And if he thinks differently, let him come down here and try it –and if I am wrong, then I will pay for his trip.

“But,” many readers are probably now thinking, “I don’t want to get sick.” Neither do I – and I have met very few (if any) people who do like to become sick as a result of their training. But it isn’t NECESSARY to become sick – if a careful “break-in” program is followed for a week or so, then almost anybody can train in an actually hard manner, in an actually correct manner, and WITHOUT GETTING SICK.

In fact, after a few weeks of proper training, the average trainee will start feeling so good, so full of energy, so “alive,” that there is then a rather great danger that they will fall into a trap – many such trainees then decide that they need to train even more; they are so pleased with their gains that they are prone to make the mistake of assuming that even more training would produce even better results – but it won’t, quite the contrary, if they train MORE, then they will gain LESS. And if they train much more, then they won’t gain at all.

I used to think that an advanced man could gain well from as much as twelve weekly hours of hard training – but I now realize that most advanced men make best progress on as little as two hours of weekly training, or even less than two hours. Nor is this a matter of merely saving time – we would be willing to train SIXTY hours a week, if that was what was required for best-possible results; but we have found that very brief workouts are an actual REQUIREMENT – more training will NEVER produce better results, and much more than two or three hours of weekly training will literally make gains impossible, or will produce results so slowly that you would have to measure them with a microscope over a span of years.

If you are constantly eating like a pig, then you might have to train almost constantly simply in order to keep from becoming as fat as a pig – but you still won’t make good gains; gains in weight, perhaps – in the form of pure fat, outright lard, which any weight-trainee can do well without.

But what a waste such a schedule of eating and training really is – a waste of good food that your body can NOT use for any worthwhile purpose, and will probably end up storing an unwanted fat – a waste of training time and energy that literally can NOT produce good results, because it drains your recovery ability so much that good progress becomes impossible.

Your body can USE only so much food, in any form – any surplus will be wasted at best, and stored as fat at worst, and will put an unrequired strain on your overall system in either case; your system can STAND only so much training, even light training, and can stand even less proper training, actually HARD training, the only type of training that will stimulate growth.

The Arthur Jones Collection

Certainly you must eat “right” – but you just as certainly must NOT eat too much, you must not eat too much of anything; not unless you are training to be a circus fat-man – which you soon will be if you consume as much as many self-proclaimed nutritional “experts” tell you that you should, limiting your intake of food strictly to their brand of products, of course.

Thousands of poor kids – and an equal number of people who are neither kids nor poor – are so confused by the maze of conflicting propaganda that they literally don’t know which way to turn, what to believe, what to do, how to train, what to eat. Thus, understandably, many of them try a bit of “everything” – apparently assuming that they are playing it on the safe side; and the wolves that are growing rich off of such misguided souls laugh all of the way to the bank every morning.

Many of these people have strongly – and I mean STRONGLY – advised me not to “rock the boat,” not to “mess up a good thing,” but all I can say is, “... a good thing for whom? Certainly not a good thing for the poor misguided trainees who all too frequently are actually lead to believe such garbage, such outright hogwash, such lies, such fraudulent claims.”

If and when we have anything in the way of worthwhile advice on the subject of diet, we will be quick to print it – and we are doing a lot of serious work on such factors at this very moment; but when we do have something definite to say, we will be able to support it in an undeniable way, with proof, not phony “claims,” and we will be able to produce authentic, valid, large-scale, unbiased, uncommercially-tainted research to back it up.

In the meantime I would advise all trainees to buy their products from people they respect – and I would also advise them to extend their respect very, very carefully; the size of a man’s arm has no relationship with the size of his brain, and even less relationship to his honesty and integrity – all three of which items, brains, honesty and integrity, seem to be in very short supply in this field at the moment.

I have said this before – now I will say it again; you do not need Nautilus equipment to make good gains from weight-training, you can make enormous gains from proper utilization of a barbell – and it should be noted that I do not sell, have never sold, and will never sell, barbells. You can make even better gains from Nautilus equipment – but you can make very good gains without it; IF you train properly – and the proper training principles are the same regardless of the tools that you have available.

Up to this point, our business has grown so fast that it almost frightens me – and the pace of growth is constantly increasing; at first we built machines one at a time, then by the dozen, now by the hundred, and it will very soon be by the thousand. Which is fine – except that it leaves me very little time for anything else, no time to do the things that I really want to do.

And still I see hundreds of examples of simple misunderstanding.