

Ironman Articles

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Is It Worth the Price?

BELIEVING something doesn't make it true; for thousands of years, millions of people sincerely believed that the earth was flat – and some people still do. And as of the moment, many people – perhaps most people – sincerely believe that bodybuilders, as a group, are a bunch of fruits and nuts; but in this case, far from being a myth, such widespread belief is founded on an uncomfortable amount of truth – while the fruits are far less common than most people think, the nuts seem to occur in bunches like grapes. As I have said many times before, I am no longer at all surprised to find an actually very insecure little boy lurking underneath a set of muscles that would do credit to an adult gorilla.

And just what makes me think I am so superior? Well, to begin with, I don't consider myself superior to anybody – but I would have to be an outright fool to overlook the plain fact that I am certainly “different” from quite a number of people that I have met; and while Will Rogers often stated that, “... he never met a man he didn't like,” I do think he was spreading it a bit thick in that instance. Either that, or he just didn't meet some of the people I have known.

And what does this have to do with weight-training? Unfortunately, quite a lot – too much, in fact. While it is perfectly true that progressive resistance exercise is capable of producing worthwhile results that are literally unobtainable in any other manner, it is equally true that most people (even most medical doctors) look upon the whole field as an utter fraud. Which widespread opinion prevents most people from ever learning the truth – casts the whole subject in such a bad light that most reasonable people avoid weight training like the plague.

And while I am certainly no longer naïve enough to think that I can change the world, or even do much in the way of redirecting fools – I do think that the concentrated efforts of a few reasonable people can do quite a lot in the way of halting the spread of insanity; if we can't heal the sick, perhaps we can at least inoculate the upcoming generation of young bodybuilders with the needle of truth – and if the present unhealthy trend can be reversed, perhaps weight training will someday be accorded the reasonable consideration it truly deserves.

As a first step in that direction a totally new type of physique competition will be held in Los Angeles on a date to be announced in the future. Open to anybody with reasonable qualifications for major physique competition, this contest will offer a total of \$50,000.00 in cash prizes, as follows: a cash prize of \$25,000.00 for 1st place; \$7,000.00 for 2nd place; \$5,000.00 for 3rd place; \$2,000.00 for 4th place, and \$1,000.00 for 5th place – plus \$2,000.00 for each best body-part winner: best arms, best chest, best back, best legs, and best abdominals.

Prior to the physique competition, a week will be devoted to a series of careful tests to be conducted by a group of doctors from a number of universities and research foundations; among other things, tests will be made to determine accurate body-part measurements, drug usage, performance ability, and related physiological factors – all entrants will be required to sign a release permitting free and unrestricted publication of the data thus determined. But none of this information will be made known to the panel of judges until after the contest has been concluded and prizes have been awarded; in short, the judging will be based strictly on appearance – but afterwards, the actual facts will be published.

Let it be clearly understood in advance that there is no intention to “hurt somebody” – on the contrary, we are simply making a sincere attempt to determine and publish the truth; in an effort to clear the air – in order that millions of young bodybuilders of the future will not be led into attempting to duplicate impossible (and false) measurements and performances.

Secondly, we can think of no other possible manner to bring together a large group of outstanding physical specimens for the purpose of conducting accurate tests for scientific purposes; the results of which tests should prove of enormous value to everybody interested in the field of physical training.

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Thirdly, it is at least hoped that a contest conducted in this manner will attract enough attention outside the actually very narrow field of weight-training to “change the image” of bodybuilding in the overall public mind; in this direction, a one-hour, color film on the subject of exercise in general, and weight-training in particular – with the contest and physiological testing being the highlight of the film – will be made for television. And it is at least possible that major – and “serious” – coverage of the contest will be afforded in national publications outside the field of weight-training.

Additional details will be published in later issues of Iron Man and other magazines – but in the meantime, if you consider yourself a potential world-class physique, start training hard, the contest WILL BE HELD; and with a chance at a \$25,000.00 cash prize, you can be reasonably sure that “everybody” will be there.

Now – as promised in previous articles – I will point out a few things that can be applied to training with any type of equipment; well-proven but largely unknown – or misunderstood – points that can be the difference between outstanding success and outright failure.

1. Regardless of what kind of equipment you have available, restrict your workouts to not more than three weekly – the so-called “split system” of training is ALWAYS A MISTAKE.
2. In almost all cases, two sets of any one exercise will produce better results than any other number of sets – and more than three sets of an exercise should never be performed; and – before increasing your number of sets from two to three – try doing only one set of each exercise in each workout.
3. For best results, a workout should never exceed a total length of an hour and a half – and most people will gain most rapidly on a schedule of three weekly workouts of approximately one hour and twenty minutes each, or shorter.
4. Drugs will NOT help your progress – regardless of widespread opinion to the contrary.
5. The number of repetitions in any one set should never be less than six – nor more than twenty; and best results will usually be produced by sets of eight to twelve repetitions – but every set of every exercise should be carried to a point of utter failure, where no additional movement is momentarily possible. It is almost literally impossible for most people to work too “hard” – but it is easily possible for anybody to work too “much.”

This last point, the required “intensity of effort,” is one which cannot be overstressed – but it does seem to be a point which can easily be misunderstood; personally, I have about reached the conclusion that it is simply impossible to make most people understand what you mean when you mention “working to the point of failure.” So long as reasonably good form is being maintained, then it is impossible to work too hard – but even that isn’t enough; after it becomes literally impossible to produce ANY AMOUNT OF ADDITIONAL MOVEMENT — when you are exerting maximum-possible force and NOTHING IS HAPPENING, then at least two more repetitions should be performed by “cheating” – but such cheating should NOT involve sudden jerking, and it should be limited to the minimum amount required to make the movement possible. Do not cheat to make the movement EASY – cheat only enough to make the movement POSSIBLE; make the movement as hard as you can – the harder, the better. Properly performed, two such cheating repetitions performed immediately after the maximum possible number of repetitions done in a strict manner should leave you feeling like you just climbed a tall building with your car tied to your back – you should be breathing very hard, your pulse should be very rapid, you should be sweating freely, and you should find it necessary to sit down for a moment after the set is finished; if you merely “feel like” sitting down, then the set wasn’t hard enough – you should have to sit down to avoid falling down.

All of which above outline of the required “style of training” is easy enough to put into words – but putting it into words and getting people to understand those words seem to be two entirely different matters; and even when people do understand what is being said, they usually refuse to practice such a style of training – making all sorts of excuses and attempting to rationalize a much “easier” style of training. Most bodybuilders seem to be perfectly willing to perform almost any “amount” of training – but avoid anything even approaching actually “hard” training. Then they wonder

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why it takes them ten years to produce the results that should have been produced in six months. They seldom if ever train hard enough to produce any growth stimulation – and they train so much that growth would be impossible even if growth stimulation was being produced.

6. In spite of widespread opinion to the contrary, it is NOT necessary to devote your entire life to training in order to produce good results; in fact, all of the weight of very clear evidence supports the contention that a normal life is actually required for producing best-possible results – many of the greatest bodybuilders of all time produced their best results at a time when they were working full-time at a hard job. Bodybuilders who attempt to explain their own failures by offering the excuse that they have to work are either lazy or misinformed, or both – or simply unwilling to admit that their individual potential will never permit them to reach championship class.

And remember, a championship class physique is just that – an outstanding example, one out of thousands (or even millions); we can't all be champions, no matter how we train.

But even if you do happen to be one of those actually very rare men, a man with the potential to be a champion, would such an accomplishment be worth the price of devoting your entire existence to efforts intended to produce the ultimate physique; is it ever worth that kind of a price? Personally, I think not – but that, of course, is merely my own opinion; however, it is not an “opinion” that such an accomplishment does NOT require such a price.

Now – in full awareness that the following statements will bring screams of outrage from several directions, from people with commercial interests that will possibly be affected by these remarks – I intend to point out a couple of very simple steps that almost anybody can take in the direction of improving the results produced by their training. One – if you have been using a so-called “easy curl” bar, and if you can use a normal, straight bar for curls, then use the straight bar; if you do use a straight bar instead of the bent bar, your results will be better – because the hand position provided by bent bars literally makes it impossible for your biceps to twist into the fully contracted position. Two – if you have been using a so-called “Scott curling bench,” chuck it out the nearest window; you will get FAR BETTER RESULTS with old-fashioned two-handed standing barbell curls – because the angle of these curling benches is totally wrong when they are being used with either barbells or dumbbells, rather than improving results, such benches actually REDUCE RESULTS.

And – before a few hundred people hasten to mention that the angle of the bench in a Nautilus Curling Machine is much like that in a Scott curling bench – I will point out the fact that Nautilus Curling Machines have omni-directional resistance, so it makes no slightest difference what the angle of the bench is, the bench surface could be flat, or vertical, or anything in between and it would not affect the exercise in any slightest way. But with a barbell or with dumbbells you DO NOT have omni-directional resistance – so the angle of the bench is very important, and Scott curling benches are angled in the wrong direction.