

Gerry Howard (1930 -)

I have set out below a small synopsis of the experience I have gained in the sport of weight training. Hopefully this will be of interest to those thinking about coming into the sport, and also to those already involved in the world of progressive weight training. Hopefully I can regularly contribute to this site.

I was born in 1930 which makes me 85yrs young, and I still retain a passion for weight training as I enter this my 86th year. I have been involved with a number of gyms since a very young man, and I have gained something from all of these, because they had some great instructors. It is from these early instructors that I aquired much of my technical knowledge. Even at the age of 85 years I still train regularly with weights, and derive great pleasure and benefits from this form of exercise. I still coach and offer advice to all ages who have an interest in weight training, both for performance, and wellbeing. This includes young evolving sportsmen with potential, who realise that weight training has something to offer, whatever their chosen sport. I enjoy this because every sport brings its different requirements and challenges. Sitting down with young athletes and working out training schedules to suit their requirements can be very rewarding. We have to remain ever mindful that these youngsters have to be kept mentally as well as physically fit, and healthy. You can damage young athletes psychologically with too much negativity, as this can undermine their self-confidence and self-esteem. Negative coaches should be sought out and expelled from the game (any game) in my view. In this regard I see myself as both instructor and mentor.



A coach should be your instructor and mentor - always there for you.

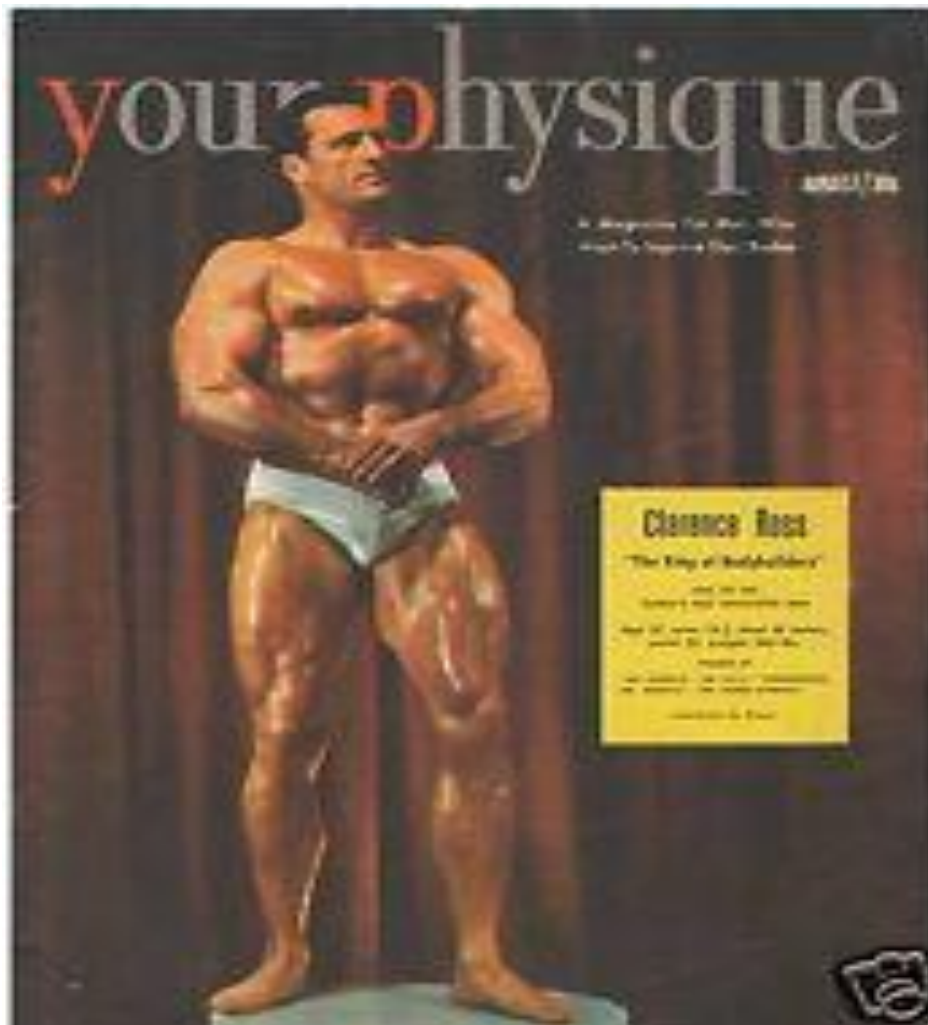
I came from a sporting family. My grandfather was a well known professional boxer and coach, and my father was also a very good boxer and fitness instructor. My uncle was a professional ballroom dancer,

and boxer, but finally had to choose between dancing and boxing. Billy de Ath was married to Dolly Howard, who was my aunt. She was a B.B.C. singer, and dancer. Billy D'Ath and Dolly Howard were known at that time as Britain's Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers (for those of you caught up in the generation gap, ask your granny who these two were, or google it). The family home in which I grew up, always seemed to be full of athletes and people from the entertainments industry.

One of the many famous figures who trained with weights was Victor Sylvester. He was a world class international dancing champion who took the world by storm, given his technical skill and athleticism. Victor Sylvester published books on the most popular dance routines of the time, and his orchestra was on the radio practically every day. This continued for many years from the 1920's until the 1960s.

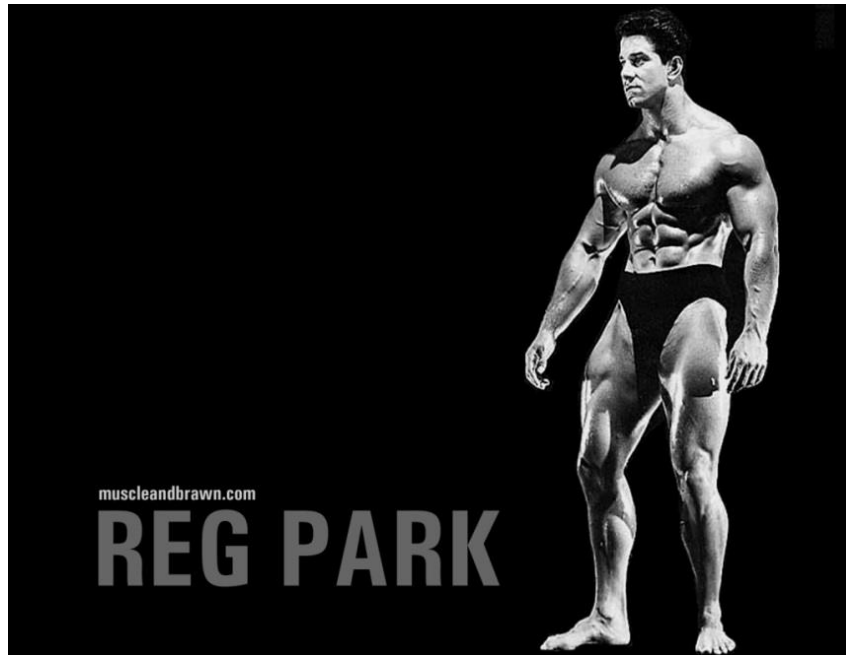
I have played many sports in my time, and have never forgotten the many pearls of wisdom passed onto me by some very knowledgeable coaches. Two of the most prominent things that I remember, are; **concentration, and self-belief.** This belief, and the ability to concentrate, have served me well throughout my life, and I am pleased to say, that these traits have been adopted and continue through my children, and my grandchildren .

There is often some unfair criticisms and myths regarding weight training. For example, the myth that you will become 'Muscle Bound in the sense of becoming over muscular. I've never seen anyone with this condition. However, what I have seen, is the shortening of muscles, created purely through poor coaching, resulting in the wrong or restricted muscle movements. I still train regularly with weights, and hopefully will continue to do so for some time to come. I have always enjoyed talking about the subject, and would encourage anyone with an interest to do the same. On the cover of the first book I ever bought on weight training was a full pose picture of Clancy Ross a well known American body builder who won the Mr Universe Title in 1945. This photo really impressed me at the time.



Clancy Ross Mr Universe 1945

I then saw Reg Parks a British all time great, and also that evening the great John Carl Grimek, an American whose posing was fantastic with muscle control that was mind blowing, he was also a member of the 1936 American weight lifting team.



Reg Parks 100% British Beef - Mr Universe 1950 and idol of Arnold Scharzenegger

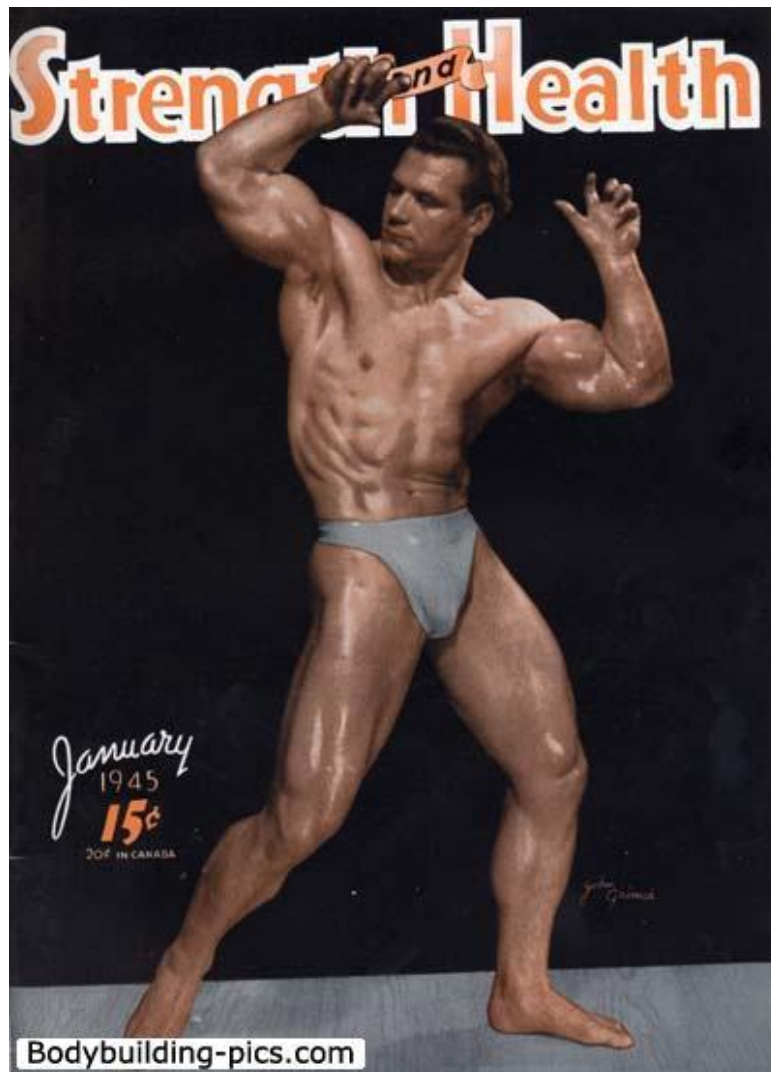


Quotes: from Arnold Schwarzenegger 1980

“Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength.”

“The worst thing I can be is the same as everybody else. I hate that.”

“The resistance that you fight physically in the gym and the resistance that you fight in life can only build a strong character.”



John Carl Grimek 1945

I was then completely convinced that this was my sport. It was very hard to get any information regarding body building, only through word of mouth or magazines that were scarce that were being handed around. This was in the 1940's, and things have improved considerably since then. Some of the names of those early years that I remember, are Oscar Heidenstam, I apologise if I have misspelt your name, but he was very well known at the time as was the great Rueben Martin who was a record breaking British Weight lifter a very good hand balancer who was bearer to Rusty Sellers and another great, Sammy Perkins a record breaking Strand Puller 'Springs'. They were very well known and performed as the TROIS De Mille .Rueben Martin trained and advised many well known celebrities.

My Opinion of a Good Coach

Not all coaches are equal. You should shop around for a coach that suits your needs and personality. If you don't get on with them, move on, until you find one that suits you. Bad coaches and bad coaching has been the ruin of many athletes, both physically and psychologically, who, had they gone elsewhere, might have made it.

My priority has always been to make the gym a welcoming place of enjoyable punishment, and to encourage the members to enjoy what they are doing. Initially the key words are: *Simple and Fun*. Keeping in mind that any form of competitive exercise is likely to create a bit of pain, but done responsibly, it will hopefully bring the gains you are seeking (no pain, no gain). A coach is there to encourage, support and praise those for whom they are responsible (and coaching is a very responsible position), and ensure that these people achieve their goals and stay safe and well in the process. An insecure coach can have a negative effect on all those around them. Good coaches will give a lot of time to those for whom they are responsible, and teach them about the biomechanics of their bodies, the names and function of every group of muscles, and ensure that everyone gets the best out of training and the best out of their body, injury free. Unless an instructor has experienced the after effects of an intense workout, he will have difficulty in explaining these symptoms to his members.



Pole Dancers require tremendous strength and flexibility

He should show his students the differences between Weight lifting. Power lifting and Body building and to explain the differences of weight training needed for different sports, running, football, cricket, swimming and so on. There is a difference in coaching and instructing. An instructor should instruct his

members how to handle the weights and other equipment safely and correctly. A coach should then coach the members and encourage them to perform to the best of their ability. Many can do both, but not necessarily correctly.

Early Days of Diet for Body Builders 1950 - prior to this everything was on ration.

Diet and food values should also be discussed, according to the expectations that the student is striving for, and to explain about body types and what may be reasonably obtained from their body type. The following may be of interest to some persons who worry about the atmosphere in a gym. My experience has been that the gym is a great 'leveller', what I mean is that whether a new member is a 'rich' person and others who is not be quite as well off, when they are stripped off in the changing room, it is very difficult to find any differences. When they first enter the training area, if possible, try to put 3 persons of the same body type and the same aspirations together. After a few training sessions together they become friends at the gym, which creates a great atmosphere in the club.

Progressive Exercise. You will continue to improve your breathing and wellbeing. Just a small definition of this. If you like walking a certain distance, or have been advised to walk a certain distance, do so until you can achieve this distance in comfort regularly, it then becomes more of a habit. You then take note of the time it takes you to walk the distance, then you either increase the distance or you try to walk the distance in a faster time, this is now progressive exercise. This basic form can be applied to most forms of fitness procedures.

Physiological effect needed for training. I have written about 'not letting the weight control you' but you must control the weights and the effort needed to WIN. Good fitness is not enough, determination to win is needed. Look at some of the great athletes when they are competing. To name just a few: Ennis, Farah, Gunnell, Coe, Radford, Ali, Frazier, Marciano. I am sure that you recognise these names when next you see any film or newsreel showing a person achieving a win, take note of the focus involved regarding their final effort, which will often culminate in a win. One other person I would mention is that great world champion runner Linford Christie. When he came onto the track he was very focused, and rarely distracted. When you look at Christie it appears that he uses weights and trains the whole body using progressive weight training exercises. Another case of 'I WILL NOT BE BEATEN'.



Early Days of Diet for Body Builders 1956 - prior to this everything was on ration (later article).

Early days of dieting for the weight trainer. In my early days rationing was in force and you were issued with Ration books, one for adults and one for the children, whose dietary needs were different from adults. You presented these books where ever you chose to shop more possibly where they had the supplies you wanted, and clothes were on a different system , you had clothing coupons when they were gone you went without, this led to most children being taught how to 'make do and mend" . There was only cotton and wool used in those days the modern materials were introduced much later. Rationing did not end completely until about 1956. Back to food availability, we knew very little about vitamins or carbohydrates and proteins, but by asking, and reading everything we could find we soon started to find out.

I found that certain butchers were Horse Meat Butchers; also they displayed and sold many types of offal. Some of these items I still eat, not only are they very tasty, 'but by golly' they did you good. What is essential is a good Mum or a good Nan who know how to cook and present this type of food. The butchers always displayed this food very well, always cleaned and some times cooked certain items. Horse meat, the same cuts were the same cuts as came from cows, steak, rump, fillet, etc., were available, Ox cheek, Ox Tongue, Ox tail. All types of Liver, Hearts , Tripe, Pigs tails, Trotters,, Pigs cheek, Tongue, Pigs head, Sheep's head sometimes cooked, Brawn, Lambs Tongues, Sweetbreads' also the dried egg powder. I have eaten all of these , including the Sweetbreads which were cooked for me by Errol Flynn's chef, and I still eat them all, although not all at once.

An advantage of getting elderly and mature is, that there is less of a future to worry about, plus we have already heard and seen the continuing worthless promises made by politicians, that are meaningless. Has anything really changed? People like me can look back over the years and remember these times with great affection. We remember when electricity started to become available in all our houses, when we could throw away our crystal sets and go to a radio set and take the accumulators to the electrical shop, to get them charged for a few pence. Look forward to leaving school and going to work at 14 years of age for 48 hrs per week, to be able to bring home a few shilling to mum, we left school on the Friday and started work on the following Monday, this was the norm in the majority of cases unless you had

won a place at a higher school or college, university cases were very rare'. You know that very little is different from today, look at old photos or film, men's clothes have hardly changed, what can you do to a suit except look at them and then see that they would not look too out of place in today's fashions, this also goes for the woman's hair styles and clothes . Stilettos, woman was wearing them 60 years ago and they caused a furore in that day, because they were destroying the floors of the dance halls '. Dancing was very popular in those days, so nothing is really new other than what I have already stated.

I have always enjoyed talking about weight training, and by sharing my experiences with others it enables me to pass on knowledge and information that would otherwise fade into oblivion. I know that most of us wished we had spoken more to our relatives that are sadly no longer with us regarding their past, taking us albeit briefly into a bye-gone era, that will never be repeated. To young people I would say, listen, ask questions and learn, remembering that, with good health, and luck, which we all need at times, you will hopefully reach a very good age and be able to hold a conversation and pass on your experiences to others. Times are changing so rapidly that the past is being forgotten all too quickly. We older men were given the Union Jack to wave and cheer in our younger days when we were known as GREAT BRITAIN, and food banks were practically unknown in our days - what's happening? One more concern of mine is, the vast increase in gyms and personal trainers !!! - where have they all come from? I have now been informed that you can, on the Internet, for a small fee, receive tuition, which takes about three days to acquire, if so, "are you getting a small fee instructor and coach, or one with serious experience?". Another concern is the popularity of giving advice to the elderly including descriptive photos. These photos usually show a person standing upright holding a small dumbbell and being told do so many repetitions and then changing hands, their posture shows them sometimes with a small stoop which is sometimes normal in older people. What should be done, before any form of exercise is given, is to ask the carer or attendant if the patient has any type of illness, stiffness , breathing difficulties, standing and balance issues, any stiffness in hand or wrists, and what medicines they take . Of all of the features I have seen showing elderly people, I have not seen these items discussed. When people commence an exercise their balance is of vital importance therefore their feet must be in the correct position. When given any form of weight to hold in their hand when standing , if they have any forward stoop , it must be seen that the weight transfers pressure onto their lower back and can create problems. Finally have the publishers found out about who these writers are, have they actually had any real experience in weight training. There are other forms of resistance exercises that do not need equipment and can be done in the seated position. These are my views and opinions.



I would like to submit future articles to this site, both for general interest and in the hope that I may offer a pearl of wisdom to those who are seeking knowledge, and information.

You should never embark upon any form of training unless you are under the direction of a competent instructor – COMPETENT = experienced, knowledgeable and qualified.

You should always ensure that you have no health issues whereby you should not partake in physical exercise, and you should always exercise within your own capabilities. Always talk to your GP before taking up any form of exercise.

* The content of this article has been submitted, and are the views and opinions of the author.
These are not necessarily those of The Shen Clinic or Sporting-Lives.