

BODYBUILDING

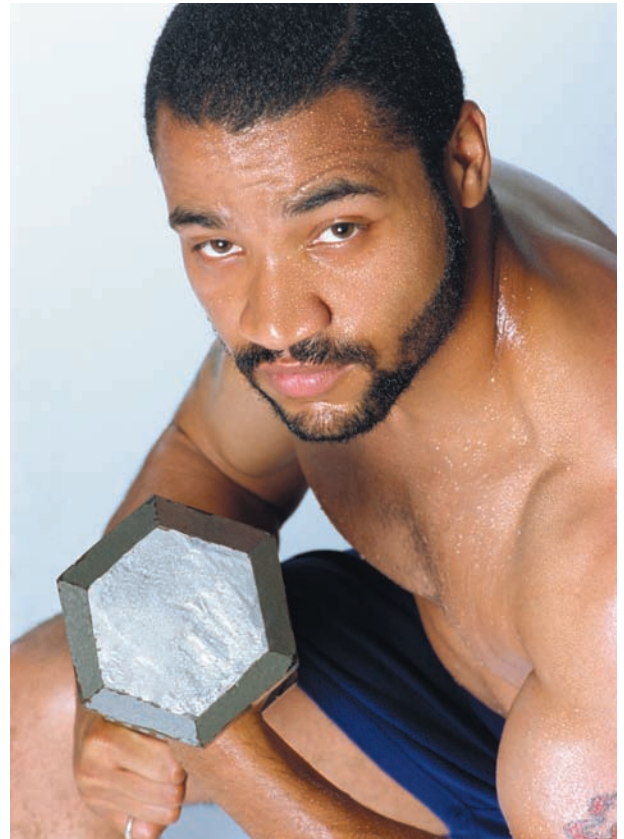
revisited

By Charles Peeples

It's an Advanced Sports Massage seminar, and the instructor, a wiry little runner who weighs perhaps 140 pounds soaking wet, is weighing in against bodybuilders: "Y'ever see doze guys?" he whines in cinematic Brooklynese, mimicking a hunched rigor mortis, "Talk about unhealthy...muscles so tight - no way dere's any circulation goin' on tru 'em." I wonder if he's directing this at me, though I'm not likely to be mistaken for a real bodybuilder; at 6'4" I'd need to be three inches wider and weigh at least another fifty pounds to have those proportions. I let it go. Awhile later he continues, "Dem bodybuilders, always hunched over (another grimacing mock-pose) 'cause all dey ever do is bench presses." OK, enough. I raise my hand and say, "Most of the ones I know train back in the same workout doing chin-ups, pull downs, and rows." "Yeah," he sneers, flexing his chest again. "But dey still think dey're building dis."

Nothing new here; bodybuilding bashing has been going on forever. There's always the insecure yo-yo, jock muttering, "Yeah, so what, but he can't fight, run fast, or play basketball." Such anger is easy to explain; in no other sport, are results so constantly visible. Most of the top athletes in the world - boxing, martial arts, baseball, gymnastics, skiing champs- look so ordinary when they're not doing their thing.

Some of us were never athletic from the start. The bodybuilding lifestyle sure beat hiding from that and doing nothing. Though my strength and speed were okay as a teen, I never made a varsity team (even in a tiny private school) because I lacked "athletic ability." Thus I began my first year at the University of Richmond despising the football jocks who held sway there with the same impunity depicted years later in "Revenge of the Nerds." However, I disliked even more the visible effects partying and institutional food were having on my fraternity brothers. I have to admit, as much as I disliked the football jock culture, there was something intriguing about seeing arms, twice the girth of mine, just hanging there, casually challenging and arrogant, needing no action or words to amplify them. No one had heard of Arnold at that time, and unless you were



a football player, the only available equipment was a pair of Universal machines. With those, some dumbbells I brought from home, and the endless sets of dips done each night between two dressers, I changed my appearance enough within two years to get noticed even by some of the footballers. I knew nothing about training or nutrition (and had most of it wrong!), but when you're starting out, anything you do produces results.

Fast-forward thirty years: I'm far stronger and more muscular than I was then. Most of my contemporaries are suffering the ravages of their "non-bodybuilding" lifestyles; some look old enough to be my dad! Many of the hardcore jocks have joint replacements with hinges bent in unnatural directions.

No discussion on bodybuilding would be complete without mentioning drugs - a convenient excuse for the lazy and resentful to justify their relatively unremarkable appearances. I cited an example in a past article of a woman who spat out the S-word after seeing photos of Tonie Norman, a stunningly beautiful natural bodybuilder friend of mine at an exhibition. "Definitely on steroids...look at those arms," railed this stringy poster-girl for the abolition of tofu diets, Spandex and marathon cardio sessions. "I've been training for years and I look nothing like that!"

"No, you don't," I said. "She was just up on stage squatting with 225 for twenty-five reps. Do you do that? Do you eat six eggs for breakfast? Do you have five similar meals a day? She's got two kids and is a fire department Lieutenant. Drugs don't fit that mix."

Of course there are drugs in competitive bodybuilding, baseball, and football, so if you subscribe to the "steroid-scaroids" you'd better yank your kids out of Little League and Pop Warner. While you're at it don't even think about watching the World Series and Superbowl, lest you send mixed messages, because many of those guys have been on the juice for decades. It's only recently that public scrutiny has pierced the veil maintained by the obscene amounts of money that the big leagues generate. If you really believe modern training methods and nutrition "evolved" players up fifty-plus pounds in the past two decades, I've got some oceanfront in Utah to sell you.

Most of us engage in a physical past time for enjoyment and health benefits, not to win championships. At the elite levels of any sport you'll find unhealthy practices, simply because there's so much at stake. This mentality has trickled down to high-schoolers (and parents) chasing scholarship dollars. As a result, the emergency wards are doing a brisk business in treating sports' injuries. Bodybuilders, at least the recreational ones, aren't about to do anything unhealthy or injurious, because true bodybuilders live for the process, as much as the result, and not being able to train is the ultimate downer. Arnold described the feeling of being in the gym and getting the "pump" in terms, which can't be repeated, in a family-oriented magazine. Most of us who get into pumping iron adapt it as a lifestyle and will do it well into old age. Unlike those involved in many other sports, we can because there are no surprises such as an oncoming ball or opponent. In bodybuilding, you control it all: resistance, speed, angles, and form. There are no surprises. You only get hurt when you get sloppy. Above all, bodybuilding's a lifestyle, which isn't left on the playing field. You carry it.

The latest attacks on bodybuilding come from those who preach "core" and "functional" training. While that's all great stuff, not all of us want to throw balls, evade tacklers, or engage in physical combat, especially as we get older. As a massage therapist in my fifties, I'm in injury-avoidance mode - can't even risk a casual basketball or volleyball game lest I jam a finger or over-extend a wrist. Furthermore, the building and preservation of muscle-mass and strength, i.e., "bodybuilding," can be negated by these other activities, which tend to tear down muscle tissue without rebuilding it.

Appearance over function? Do you really think all those people joining gyms, performing bodybuilding exercises in a bodybuilding set-reps regimen and adopting bodybuilding nutritional habits really come to be better athletes, to be more "fit?" Heck no... they want to look better in their clothes, and feel better about themselves.

The little instructor guy who runs marathons admits to chronic knee problems. I seek to soothe him: "I had that too, back when I was your age. I was in the military and had to run a bit. When I retired, I stopped running and just lift now. I squat four sets with 315 pounds, do heavy chains, and leg-presses with twenty plates. Knees are fine now. Give it a shot -squat til ya drop!" He probably won't.

