

Old School Bodybuilding

By
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What is old school bodybuilding? I guess it all depends on how old you are and what period of time you consider to be old school. The statement old school has a different meaning to different people. For me it's the early and mid 1960's, that was the point in time for me that was "back in the day" as my grandson would say. It was also the "golden age" or "golden years" of bodybuilding but we didn't know it back then. I often think of what it would have been like had bodybuilding been recognized then as it is today. Back in those days more of us were called weightlifters than bodybuilders... in fact most of us referred to one another as weightlifters rather than bodybuilders. The term "bodybuilder or bodybuilding" had not yet caught on, even among those of us who were participants.

We were a group unto ourselves; misunderstood or better yet not understood at all. Mocked, poked fun of, and considered useless to society. Even other weight lifters, power lifters, Olympic lifters looked down on bodybuilding. I remember Larry Scott being the central point of more than one conversation related to the amount of weight he lifted in certain movements. Weight lifters, such as the predominant York group of Pennsylvania just could not understand us performing movements designed to sculpture the body instead of lifting for maximum strength. Bob Hoffman and the York crew didn't find value in what we were doing until later on. I personally felt Hoffman never really accepted bodybuilding, I feel he just tolerated it to a certain level.

It was a special time. The economy, business and, life in general was different than today. That's not saying much as each generation can say the same thing. Each generation carries its own unique claims and memories with it. Having been given the gift from God to have lived in several generations I can honestly say the 60's were special to me and a time I am thankful for experiencing. I guess I need to clarify one point here; the 60's were also a time when the "hippie" movement spread across the country. I was not a part of that movement, no pot smoking for me, no experimenting with drugs. I was just a young kid from rural East Tennessee who was consumed with my struggles of trying to add size and strength to my frame and emulate the big boys featured in the magazines. I was and still am most comfortable being an introvert. I am most content in training solely for the joy of training itself. I need nothing more or nothing less from my love of the iron.

Workouts were sessions that lasted hours. Each body part was worked to the limit three, not two and not one time but three times each week. Over training was something Vince Gironda talked about. Most of us who did not have immediate regular face to face time with Vince, read and heard about his over training concept (Overtonis is what Vince called it), and just brushed it off; more was better and we wanted more. As Larry Scott phrased it; "each rep is a set". All out intensity was the battle cry and determination and dedication were considered badges of honor.

East Tennessee is home and I'm thankful, love it and can't imagine calling any place else home but, it sure was not the place to be in the 60's for an aspiring bodybuilder. Around my home most coaches and even some doctors were against lifting weights, the fabled "muscle-bound" syndrome was alive and well. "You'll ruin your body", "your only get a hernia doing that", "what good is having all those muscles", "lifting weights will slow you down". My article "The Carport" (located in the Article Section of my website), is a factual account of my experiences and pretty much lays out how it was. Funny how in later years a

couple of doctors I knew, who talked against lifting weights when I was a youngster, became my friends and would seek my advice for proper methods and techniques for weightlifting, bodybuilding and, fitness.

Although I was isolated as far as having immediate access on a daily basis to the bodybuilding scene of the East or West Coast, I was fortunate to have developed a relationship with influential and helpful people. Joe Weider from his Union City office was more than accommodating to my every request. Meeting Joe for the first time remains embedded in my memory as if it took place this morning. From that first meeting a friendship of over forty years has been maintained. The late Ben Weider was another wonderful friendship I will always cherish. Neither Joe nor Ben ever denied a single request for help or assistance from me and I can assure you there have been many. Vince Gironda was a treasure. I value what he did for me. I didn't consider the impact of our relationship and his offerings until many years later. Rock Stonewall was of more help than he could have imagined and I enjoyed his energy and kind words as they were uplifting. There were many whose names are considered as sacred today and I've talked about them many times before. There are countless others who, although you would never find their names in a bodybuilding magazine had a direct and positive impact on me. One such person was my father, Angelo.

Dad helped me get started in bodybuilding. Mom was the more open vocal support one needs and dad was the reference source needed. Dad was born in Paterson New Jersey and in his younger years did his fair share of working out. Never a true bodybuilder or weightlifter but none the less he did his fair share of training. Dad followed the Charles Atlas system and worked out with several different people, perhaps the most famous was the great John Grimek. One of dad's cousins, trained with Grimek on a regular basis. In those days as today, friendships, relationships, and families all had their own little clusters. Tales of what they did and how they did it were resources for me. Dad was not a big talker. Most military people like to recount stories of their years in the service.

Honor and respect with deep thankfulness to each, I have always enjoyed listening to the history lessons these men would present. Dad fought in WWII in Patton's Third Army and you could pull teeth easier than you could get him to talk about it. Once in a great while I could get dad to open up about Grimek and those days, even then the information was not very forthcoming. That's dad!

I don't want to get too far off track recounting the story of how I got into bodybuilding as there are tons of others who walked down very similar if not the same paths as I did. Still I think recounting the roots of the process provides some insight as those times were different from today.

After my time with calisthenics and free hand movements – Dynamic Tension movements and mail order courses; the George Jowett Fulcrum Lever Bell Course, then promoted as the Ben Rebhuhn American Bodybuilding Club Course and the Joe Weider 7 Lesson Mr. America Course I moved on to actual weights; plate loaded barbells and dumbbells. This is when transformations became apparent. Nothing can compare with free weights. There is simply something about the sound, feel, and smell of the cold iron in ones hands. Granted, some don't like it, some tolerate it, and others turn from it completely. You can't be a true bodybuilder if you do not have a passion for the sound and feel of the iron. At some point in time machines should be included for some movements but nothing compares to the loose iron.

Old school for me is using a bench with racks, a barbell and dumbbells... cold hard iron; that's old school. I began like most did back then with a full body Monday, Wednesday, Friday routine. Hitting each movement for one set of ten reps working up to three sets of six to ten reps. Once that goal was achieved the conventional four day a week split routine was followed. Being skinny I then followed an extensive bulking/power routine for about six months before moving on to a six day per week split routine.

Six days a week, each body part worked three times a week. If overtraining was a reality my workouts proved it. Each session was one and a half hours to three hours in duration. Eventually I evolved into following a double split and even did a triple split a few times. I wasn't training for competition I was training for myself, self improvement and what that does to ones inner self. I can't really describe it – it is something one has to experience.

Vince Grionda was the first, and back then the only person, who talked about overtraining. Today, looking back and more knowledgeable of my limited genetic makeup, I realize I actually did more harm to my progress than good with all the training I did. Remember, I'm drug free, always have been and always will be. There was no way my recuperation system was capable of recovery while working each muscle group that often and that hard. No way! But I didn't know it early on or even later on for that matter. In New York at the famed Mid-City Gym, I saw Poole, Draper, and others featured in the magazines of the day training the same as I was. Why were they making progress and looking massive? We were training alike and our diets were similar? God given genetics, more than any other factor was the reason but I didn't realize it then. In fact if I had and if I had adjusted my training more to my genetic body type I would have made better progress. Today, looking back, I honestly believe in my heart it is a matter of genetics. Second is determination and consistency. Third is diet and nutrition and after that everything else just falls in place.

For a long time my sole source of information came basically from magazines, not from in personal face to face experience. Eventually that changed as friendships developed but even then, training consisted of hard and wild pushing each rep of each set to the limit each and every workout. Was this customary all over the country? Not sure, as some I came to know from the East Coast to California and many parts in between, were doing the same thing I was. Some were featured stars of the day. For a great many of us back then the "glory" was simply in working out and achieving personal goals in the gym,

maybe a write-up in the mags, it sure wasn't a title, at least for most of us. We had too many other things going on; work, school, and for some families. There was a lot of "hype" back then just as there is today. For some reason honest reports and stories of measurements, poundage used in exercises, actual routines, diet and supplements were and remain nearly impossible to get. That part of the sport remains the same. Truth in advertising and reporting is pretty close to being non existent when it comes to bodybuilding.

I was caught up with the feud between the Bob Hoffman (York Barbell) gang and the Joe Weider (Master Blaster) following... and oh yeah, Dan Lurie and his crew that came in later. I found it all interesting and enjoyed the jabs and punches thrown back and forth. I developed a fondness and relationship with Joe Weider and his operation. I knew of the Hoffman group because of my father and his connection with Grimek but, it was the modern, slick advertising of Weider that caught my attention. I not only liked but found the information modern and more up to date in Joe's magazines and advertising material. In addition to the modern magazine and courses, Weider supplements and products also appealed to me as they looked modern, clean, and "new age" compared to other like items from competitors. Looking back I have no regrets and I'm certainly thankful for all the things that Joe did for me and the treatment I received from him.

Training later developed into a constant succession of change. Heavy workouts followed by lighter ones. Power training, Olympic lifting, and hard core weightlifting were all sequenced in my routines. Sometimes it was once every month sometimes for a week or maybe two every three months changes came. The idea was to train without taking a break. Do what we felt needed to be done and don't look back. The constant change kept boredom far away. It also allowed for faster and more continual gains.

One aspect of training, movement execution, was always stressed in magazines and courses; "strict – full extension and full contraction." Being a

novice, I followed those instructions to the letter. Only later, after observing and actually training with some of the stars of the day did I realize, most, not all but most, performed partial reps with great speed. Their movements were not full extensions and full contractions at all as reported in the magazines. They performed movements with a good amount of body swing and sway. Few that I know of did otherwise but there were the exceptions. I also came to discover a big difference in East Coast vs. West Coast bodybuilding, it was the workout tempo. West Coast bodybuilders trained faster with less rest between sets while those from the East Coast took longer rest between sets and exercises.

In those days there was no such thing as a computer or internet. No VHS or DVD's, and certainly no YouTube. All the information came first hand or through magazines. One example was watching Sergio Oliva train biceps. Performing barbell curls on a preacher bench Sergio never extended all the way down. His movements were very fast short curls. At best I would say the movements were only about 3/4. Arnold added a lot of "body-sway" to his movements although sometimes strict form was used the majority of the time he used body sway and jerking.

I eventually learned to experiment with all aspects of training. Due to my personal observations and training with far more experienced and publicized bodybuilders, I began to incorporate their more loose style of performing movements in my routines. Not on a regular basis but at different times. My workouts have always been a passion of regular sessions comprised of irregular movements, tempos, sets, reps, and poundage's. Basic lifts are priority and machines and cables are thrown in as I feel the need. Sometimes all out exertion is used while other times a more concentrated focus on the movement itself; lighter weights and higher reps fill my need. All in all it is totally old school training. I learned to concentrate and through concentration one can take a light poundage and make it feel heavy, working the muscle in a completely different manner.

Weekly I learned and experimented. I learned also to read between the lines of what I read and spent more time checking accuracy of reported facts. After one gets down the basic fundamentals of bodybuilding, understanding everything else is pretty much trial and error. Old school was learning the muscles – what they did and how they worked. The skeletal system – how many bones and how were they connected - the nervous system and the digestive system – nutrition and supplements. That’s old school and that’s what we did. It was our life style but not our total life. We had other things to do and obligations. The sport didn’t even provide enough money for bodybuilding’s cream of the crop boys to make a living.

Exercises were solid, basic compound movements. It was more of a “don’t miss a session” mentality than anything else. Diets were not exactly what the experts would have you eating today. We ate yogurt, cottage cheese, milk, eggs and meat. Knox Gelatin was one source for a protein supplement. Powdered milk was another as well as soy and powdered egg whites. A lot of us mixed our own. When I was fortunate enough to have some additional cash I would purchase supplements. Hoffman’s, Weider’s, Blair’s, Nature’s Best, Lurie’s, and various other brands, I tried almost everything that was around back then. Some of it was pure junk and some of it was pretty darn good.

Older, wish I could say wiser but looking at the mistakes I make I’m not sure I can say that, I’ve come to learn many things. Old school bodybuilding was a life changing journey for me, one which I am still on. I look back at the physiques of those days and see differences. You can blot out the faces and recognize who they are by their physique. I can no longer do that with today’s top bodybuilders, there is an almost universal likeness with today’s top contenders. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not criticizing today’s bodybuilders I’m just stating my feelings. I enjoy bodybuilding of the 60’s better than any other time in bodybuilding history. I miss it for many reasons not the least being it was a time of my youth. I miss the magazines of that era, the featured bodybuilders, the ads,

supplements, writers and photographers like the great Dick Tyler and Artie Zeller. It was a time full of fond memories. Generations that have since followed still show interest and seek to know about that special time.

The period prior to the 60's saw the Reeves, Ross, Delinger, Goldberg and others dominate bodybuilding. No matter what point in time you review bodybuilding, the 20's – 30's – 40's – 50's, makes no difference as each generation had something about it deserving of remembrance. Each has a point in history. Someday they will talk about the 1990's and the 2000's as a special time in bodybuilding history and there will be many who will seek to learn and know more of that time period as well. Life and time moves on and evolves.

Bodybuilding and bodybuilders are special no matter what period of time they come from and no matter which path in the bodybuilding journey they take. We will each have our own preference; for me, “back in the day”, “the golden age”, “the golden era” and, “old school” was the 1960's. It was a time of dreams and unrealistic visions that for most part could never be realized. Making a living while sunning on the beach all day and training when not sunning was a pipe dream unattainable. The ads in magazines promoted a life that was not reality but it was fun to dream it.

I'll sign off for now as I've talked myself into a 60's state of mind. Ah, the sun feels so warm. I'll soak it up and then hit the gym. Trance over! Didn't last long; bride just yelled at me to take the trash out... dreams are good things!

Keep well!

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