

Joe WEIDER

THE POWER, PASSION AND VISION BEHIND THE FATHER OF MODERN BODYBUILDING

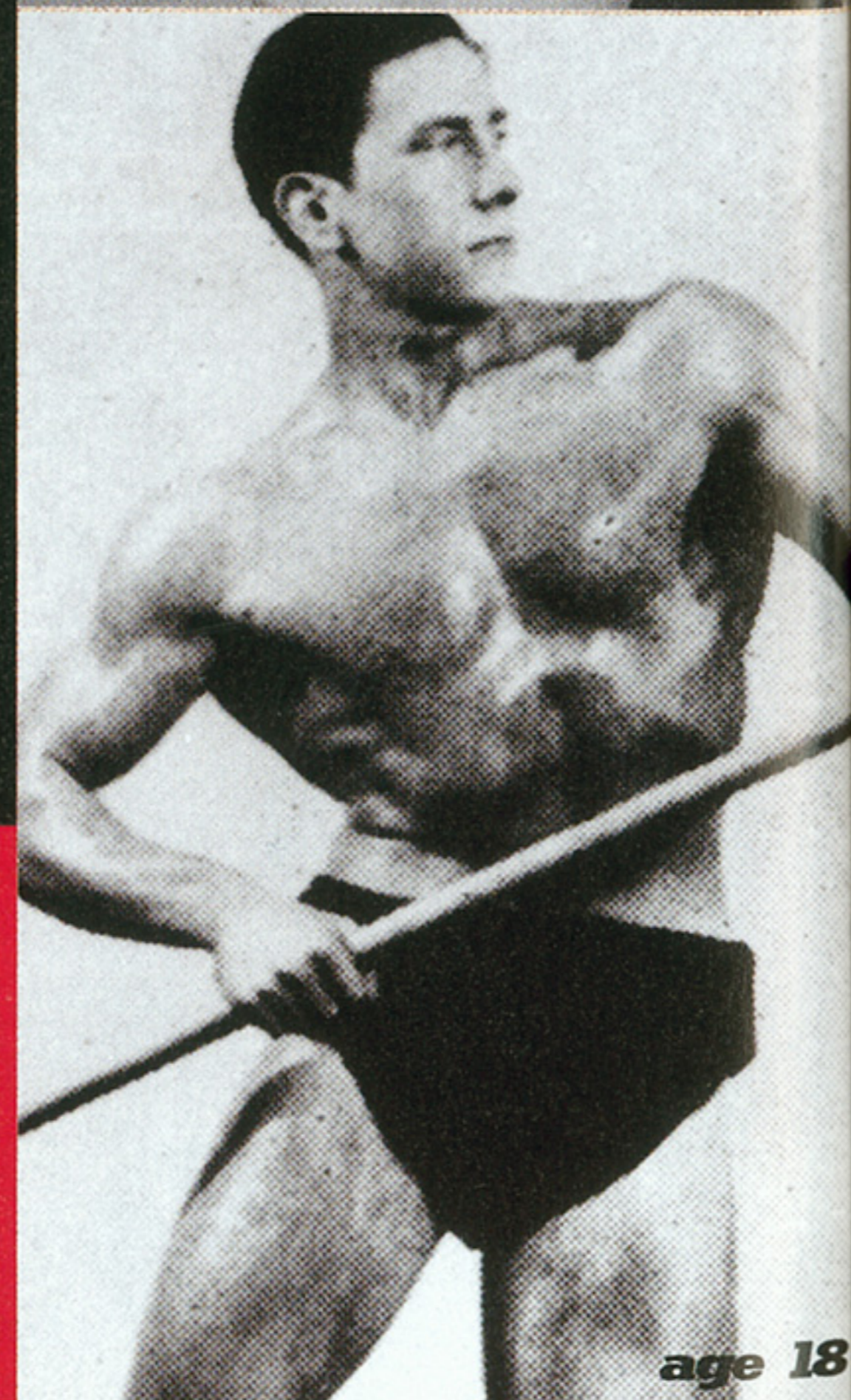
back in 1940, who would have believed that a 17-year-old kid with a rudimentary public-school education and \$7 in his pocket would forever change the way the world perceives the human body? By fulfilling his dream of bringing fitness to the masses, that teenager, Joseph Weider, would change people's image of their physical self, much as philosophers throughout history have altered views of the intellectual and spiritual self.

Of course, Joe Weider has preached his message with the religious zeal of a missionary from day one. Once received, the message would prompt athletes, coaches and sports scientists the world over to alter forever their approach to training, nutrition and recuperation in accordance with the guidelines established in his training principles. It would prompt medical doctors, once hostile and later merely skeptical toward resistance training, to embrace it as a vital weapon in the war against aging. It would prompt psychologists, who initially saw little connection between mind and body, to accept exercise as a vital contributor to mental health. It would prompt a new sport, bodybuilding, to emerge from the shadow of competitive weightlifting, and in turn to overshadow it. And it would spark a cultural revolution, one that has infused medicine, science and media alike with a new understanding of physical fitness.

By John F. Tristany, PhD, with Jeff O'Connell, Staff Writer



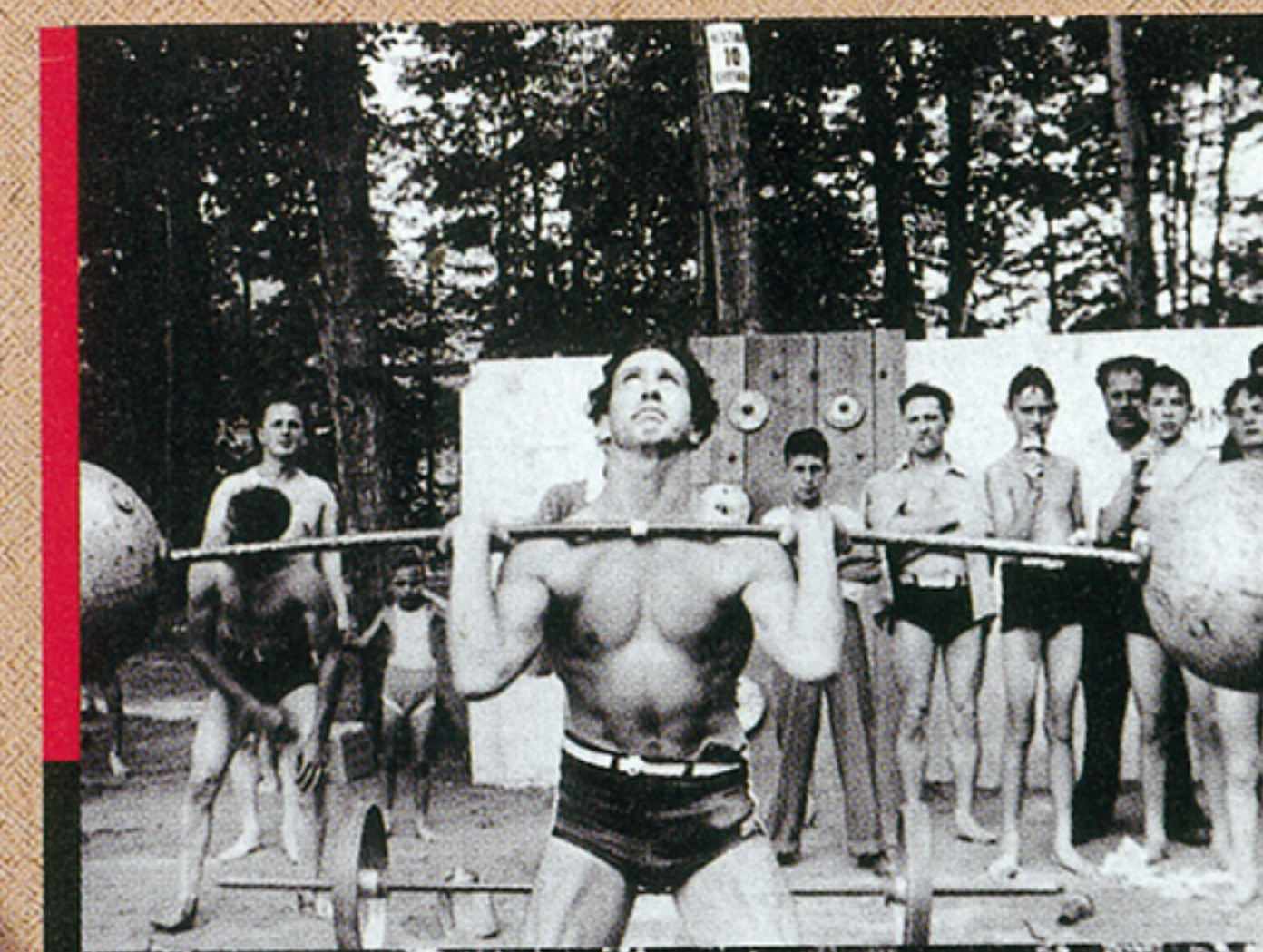
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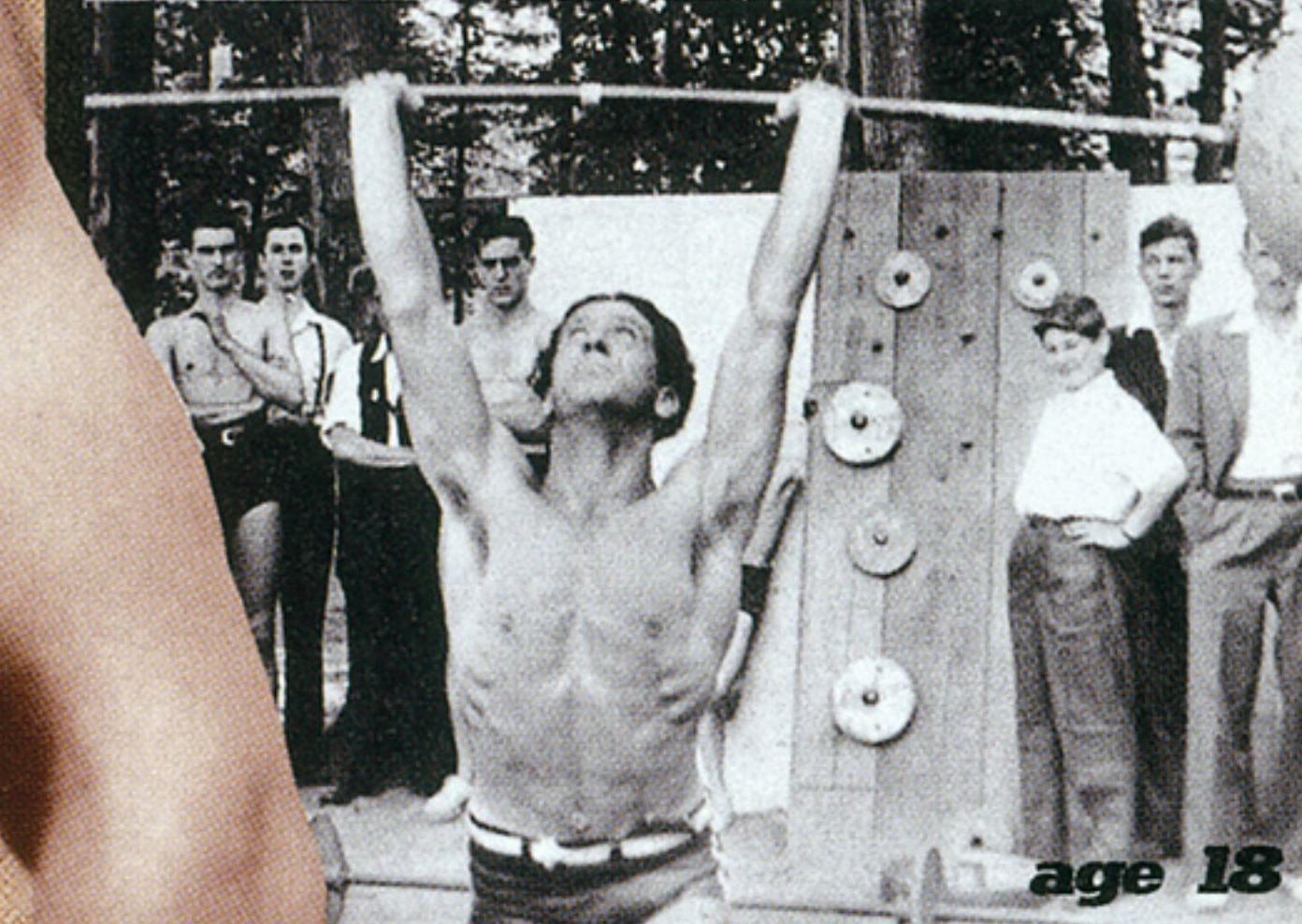
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Photos: Weider Archives

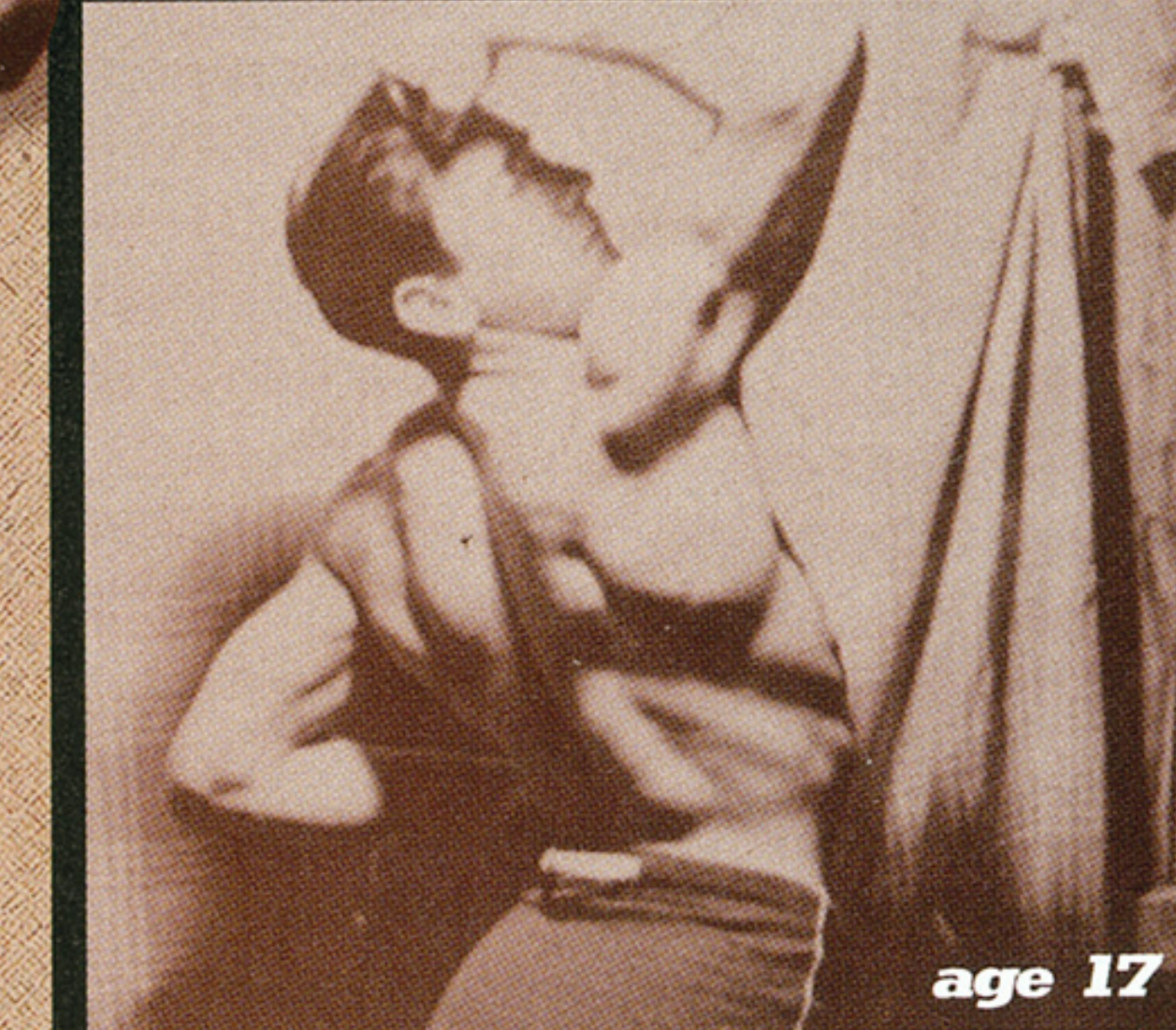
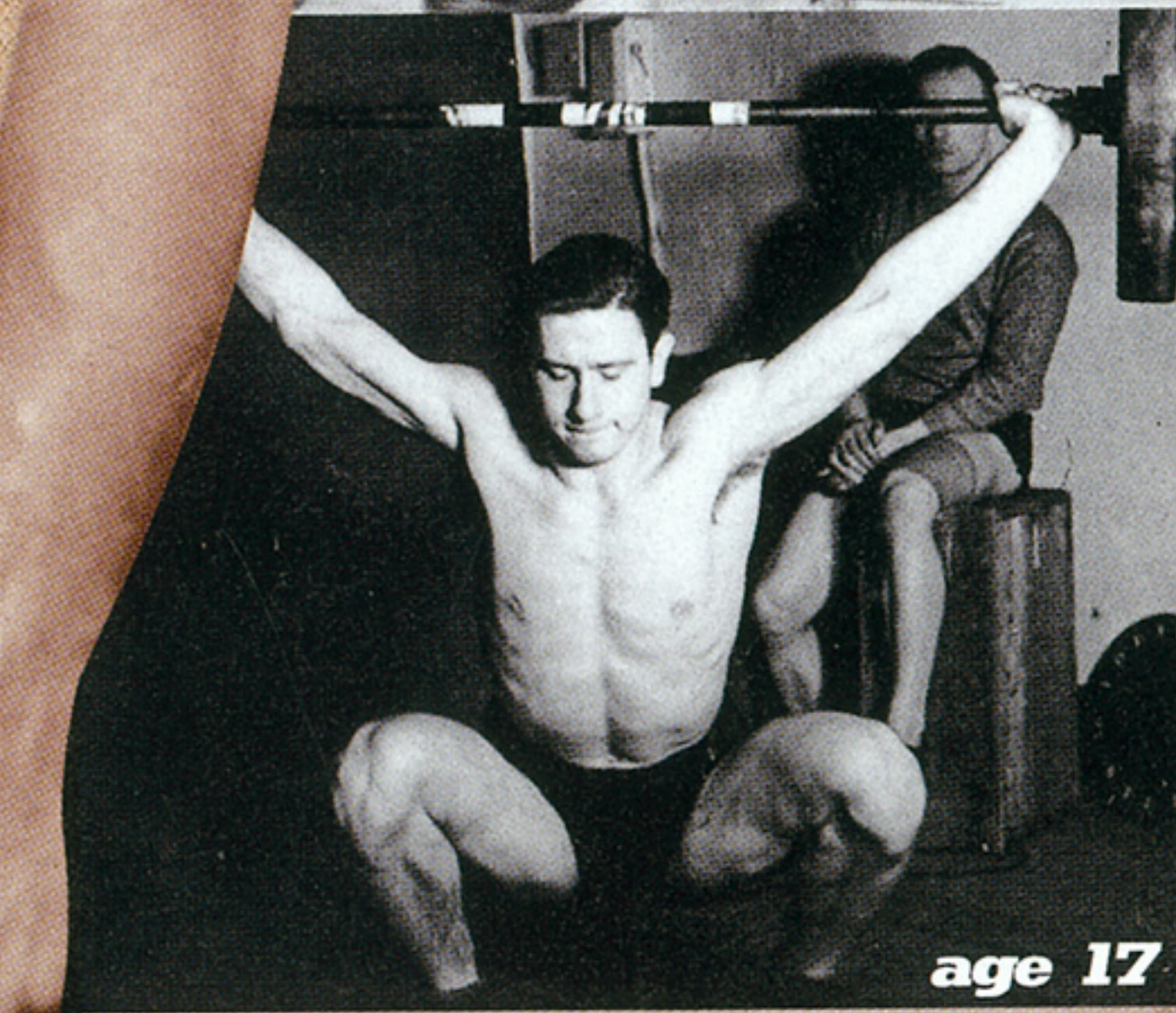
The Master Blaster's early interest in weightlifting quickly expanded to encompass the embryonic sport of bodybuilding as well. At far right (top to bottom), Joe engages in some outdoor weightlifting with friends in Montreal, demonstrates letter-perfect technique in the snatch, and hits an early pose that shows his growing interest in physique development and posing. As a 160-pound 18-year-old, his best lifts were 222 in both the press and snatch and 270 in the clean-and-jerk. He also jerked 300 pounds overhead.



age 18

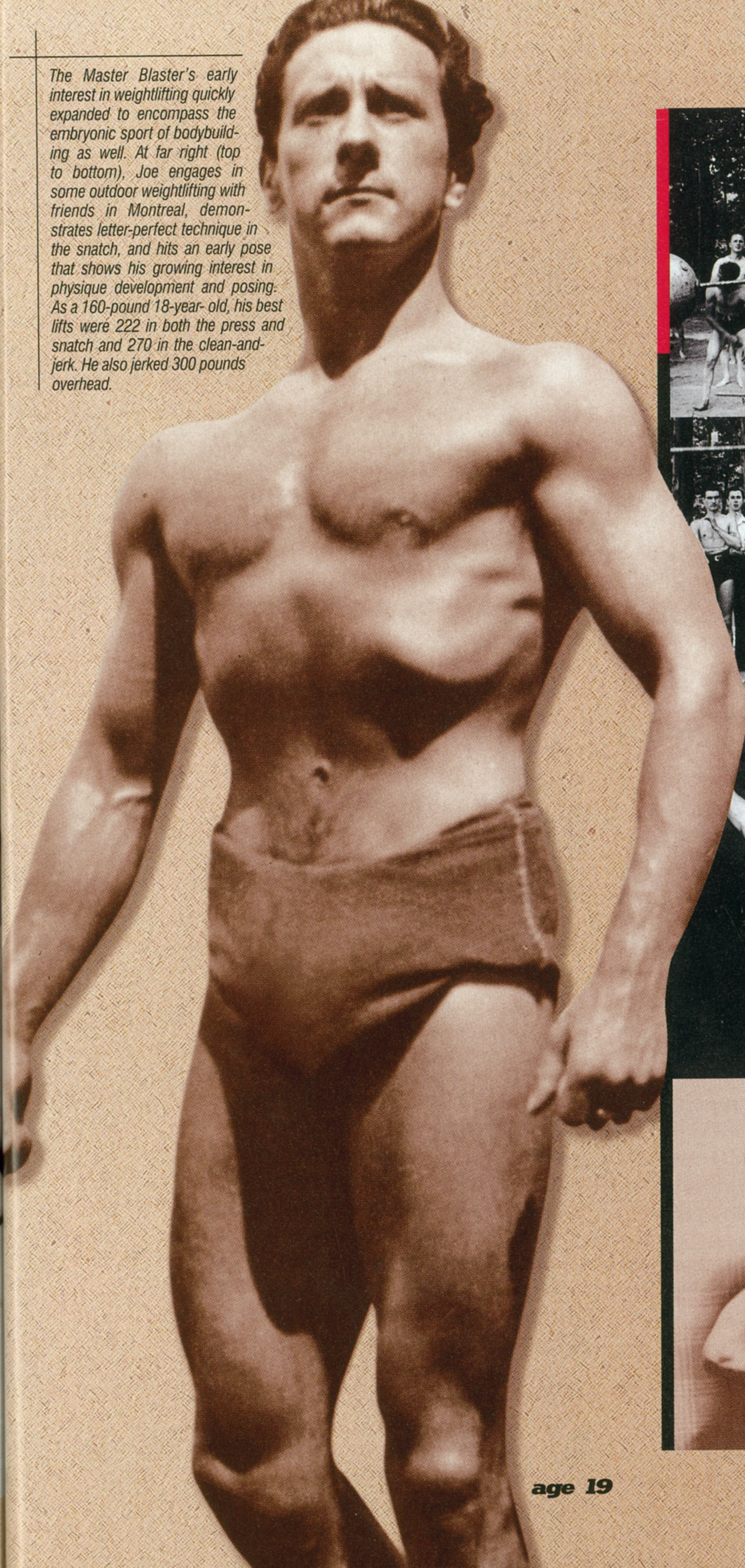


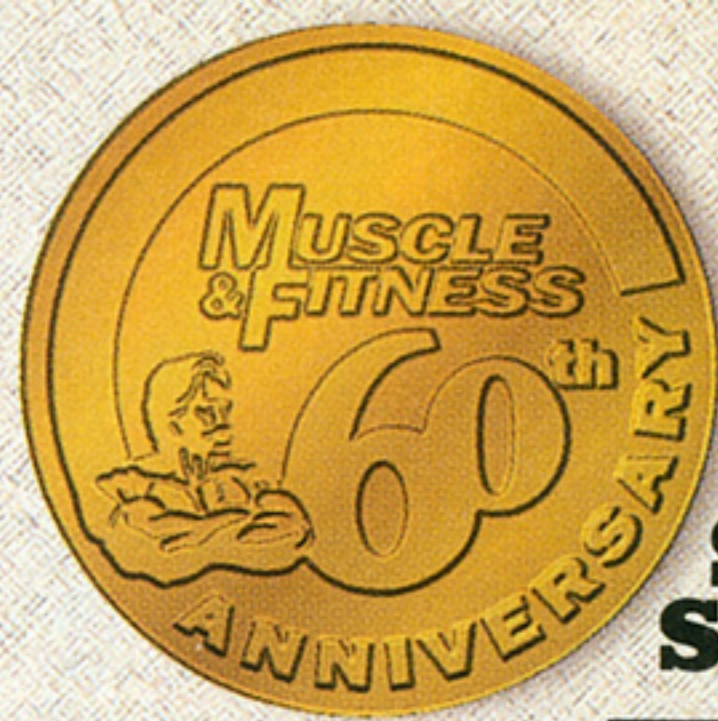
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ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE

What was it that gave this upstart youngster the guts to challenge the conventional wisdom of his time with regard to exercise and nutrition? Part of the answer surely lies somewhere in the back streets of Montreal, with Joe's hard-scramble upbringing during the Great



Passing the torch: Joe at 32 with friend, teacher and legendary strongman George F. Jowett.

Depression of the 1930s. Unemployment and financial devastation paralyzed the province of Quebec; food lines clogged city streets. When young Joe left public school at age 12 to pull a small wagon 10 hours a day delivering fruit and groceries for a market, it was an act of survival for both him and his family.

With food and money in short supply, strength was the currency of the day in Quebec, already renowned for strongmen such as Louis Cyr and Hector Decarie. Standing 5'5" and weighing a mere 115 pounds, Joe became easy prey for teenagers looking to score some quick change, which prompted him to head off to the Montreal YMCA and request a tryout with the wrestling team. The coach's response? "No, you're too weak; you'll get hurt," Joe recalls. Undaunted, he made his way to a local newsstand and purchased two used magazines for a penny, including a 1930 edition of the Milo Barbell Co.'s *Strength* magazine. The weightlifters and strongmen on display lit a torch that the wide-eyed youth would carry for the remainder of the century.

Joe had his epiphany; now he just

needed the tools necessary to act upon it. Montreal lacked both gyms and sporting-goods stores, so he scavenged through a local train yard for an old axle and two flywheels, which he cobbled into a makeshift barbell. He lifted, pumped and pressed this scrap metal endlessly, and his scrawny physique was rewarded with sprouting sinews of muscle. Desperate for actual weights, Joe wrote to legendary strongman and *Strength* editor George F. Jowett. "I'd seen an ad for a 110-pound barbell set, but it cost \$7," Joe remembers. "I was just a poor errand boy, so I asked Jowett if I could pay him in weekly installments of 50 cents."

Four months later, the weight set arrived at Joe's front door and quickly became his most trusted ally. By the time he turned 15, neighborhood bullies looking to steal from him encountered not a weakling but a force to be reckoned with. And they weren't the only ones who took note of Joe's physical transformation: His reputation for heavy lifting grew until a scout from Montreal's only weightlifting club, the Verdun Barbell Club, showed up at his house to investigate the rumors for himself. He was impressed enough to invite the youngster to join his club, an offer that Joe eagerly accepted.

At 17, the 165-pound weightlifter competed in his first amateur contest, the Montreal District Senior Meet, where he lifted 70 pounds more than competitors in his weight class. His total surpassed even those of the light-heavyweights and heavyweights and earned him a national ranking.

THE POWER OF OBSERVATION

By Joe's own admission, the secret to his early success was his astute power of observation, which has contributed repeatedly to his lifelong success. Back then, it meant carefully studying and copying the techniques of other weightlifters. Their methods were unproven — the sciences of training and exercise physiology were embryonic — but he soon grasped that success in the sport was based largely on power, speed and technique. That knowledge, combined with Joe's competitive success, made his passion for weight training all-consuming. The dream was interrupted, however, by Canada's entrance into World War II, which sent many of the country's top lifters into the army. Seemingly overnight, organized weightlifting contests dried up.

That was the impetus for Joe to begin exploring an obscure offshoot of weight-

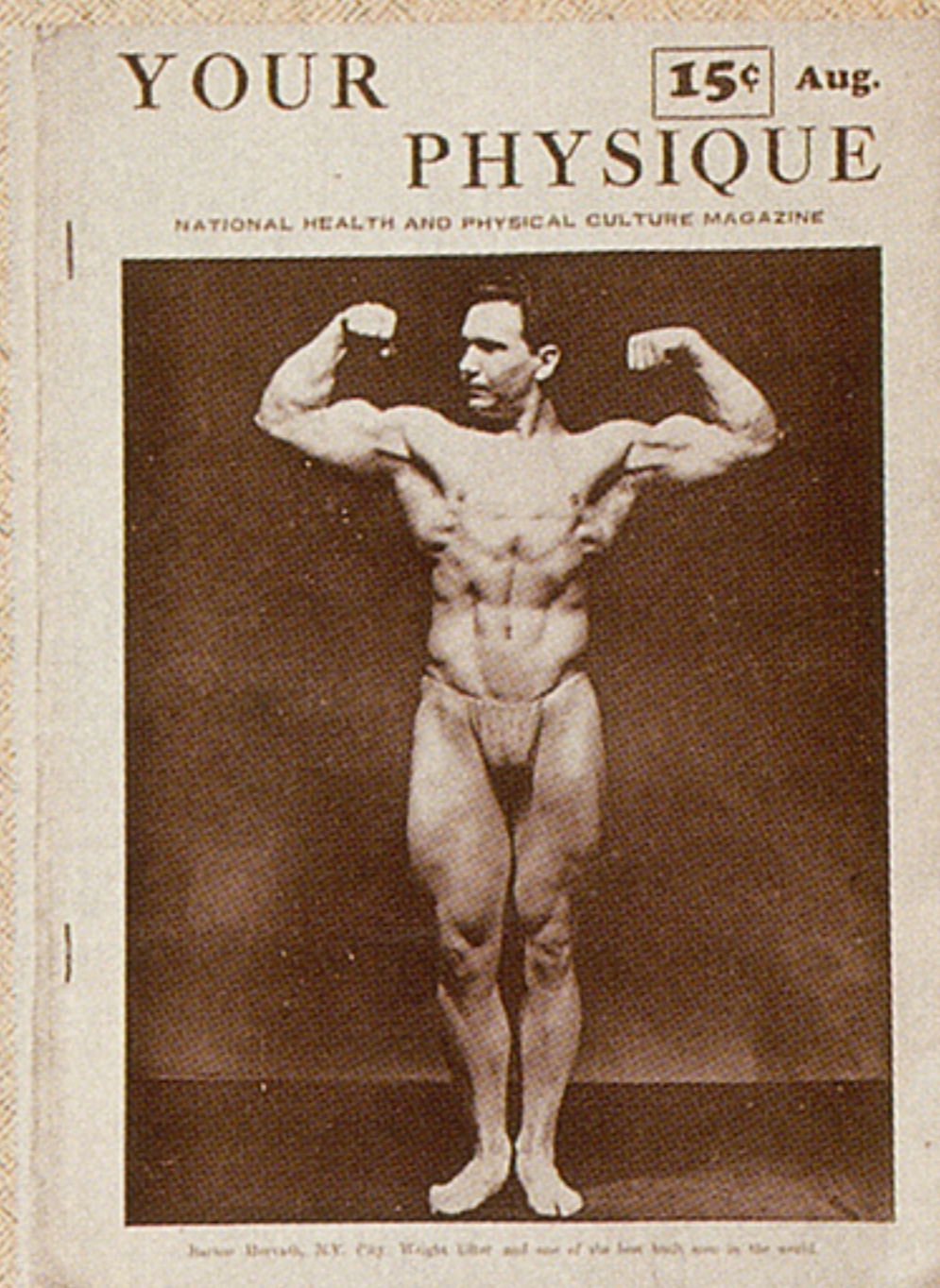
lifting called bodybuilding. Initially, he wasn't sure what to make of it; after all, weightlifters were into moving poundage, not sculpting the body. Nor did history offer much precedent. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, resistance training, nutrition and related matters were lumped together under the heading of *physical culture*, which encompassed everything from competitive Olympic lifting to vaudeville strongman acts. Even the great Eugen Sandow, whom Joe would later immortalize with the Mr. Olympia statue, earned a living by performing with the Ziegfeld Follies.

By the early 1930s, advertisements in magazines like Bob Hoffman's *Strength and Health* referred to "building your body" with weights, but *bodybuilding* still wasn't recognized as a separate discipline. Later that decade, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), which Hoffman also helped control, began to hold physique contests such as the Mr. America, but only as adjuncts to weightlifting contests. Organizers knew a way to sell tickets when they saw one, but bodybuilders were kept backstage — often past midnight — till fans had waded through hours of weightlifting competitors.

These were hardly sporting events on the level of today's Mr. Olympia contest. "They weren't bodybuilding contests at all, but akin to vaudeville and circus strongman acts," remembers Bob Delmonteque, who met Joe in New York City during the 1940s and has been involved in the fitness industry ever since. "Big bodies would lumber about the stage and sometimes bend bars with their teeth, or tear telephone books in half to entertain the audience." And while most of the physique competitors were Olympic lifters, the AAU didn't sanction bodybuilding as an official, independent sport. "They believed that bodybuilding couldn't exist as a sport by itself," Joe explains. "They believed it could exist only under the auspices of the AAU and weightlifting."

\$7 AND A DREAM

Joe's competitive success, coupled with his ongoing physical and psychological transformation, inspired him to enlighten others. That would be a challenge, because the late 1930s were indeed a dark age for the iron sport, with gyms tucked away in basements and back rooms, deliberately hidden and sequestered from mainstream society. Weightlifters communicated primarily through correspondence and magazines, which young Joe felt pub-



The first issue of Joe's first magazine: *YOUR PHYSIQUE*, published in August 1940.

lished incomplete and often erroneous information.

By 1939, Joe had been working full time for five years. He had traded in his wagon to bus tables and wash dishes at a local restaurant, which had quickly promoted him to sandwich maker and then to short-order cook. His dream, however, was to publish a magazine dedicated to Canadian weightlifting (which was given short shrift by *Strength and Health*, *Iron Man* and the handful of other publications) and committed to sharing accurate, complete training advice and routines with its readers.

When Joe's employer asked him to become night manager at a restaurant he was opening in Toronto, Joe had to make a decision. And when he chose his dream over the sure bet, his mother, for one, thought he was nuts. "How are you going to compete against publishers worth millions of dollars?" she asked. "You don't even know how to type! I think the best thing you can do tomorrow morning is get up with Dad and go to the factory and learn a trade. Otherwise, you'll end up a bum." Listening instead to his father, who told him that going to work in a factory was tantamount to death, young Joe kept his day job but took his life savings — \$7 — and began work on what would become the first issue of *YOUR PHYSIQUE*, to be published in August 1940. Orders poured in, and within 18 months Joe had made a \$10,000 profit — a small fortune at a time when a loaf of bread cost 4 cents and a gallon of gas 11 cents.

COUNTERATTACK

Sensing the emergence of a rival and contemptuous of bodybuilding, which Joe was beginning to embrace, Hoffman



Photo by Russ Warner

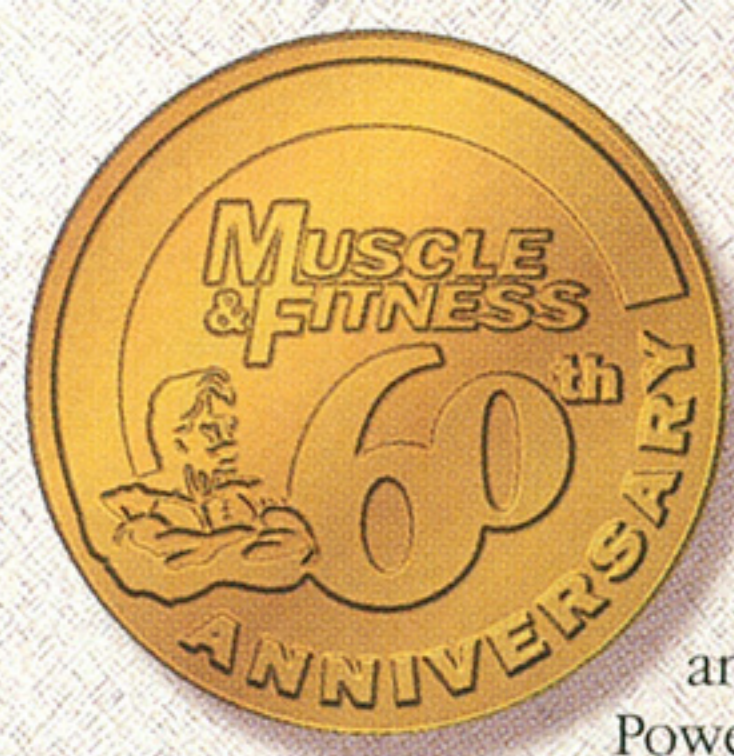


Top: Joe (second from left) and photographer Bob Delmonteque (far right) with strength legends Paul Anderson (far left) and Mac Batchelor. Above: Joe's magazines were quickly joined by an equipment-manufacturing business, which he sold in 1994.

counterattacked. One of his strategies was to create a character named Bosco — complete with broad shoulders, a tiny waist and bulging muscles — to be placed in articles and cartoons as a way of lampooning Joe's new physique ideal. "Because power comes from the hips and waist, they thought they'd ridicule us by portraying this guy with a tiny waist," Joe says, chuckling at the recol-

lection. "It was so stupid — that's what everyone wanted! They were doing my job for me."

A year after starting *YOUR PHYSIQUE*, Joe literally defined his sport as something distinct from competitive weightlifting. "It is a separate and independent sport from Olympic lifting," Joe wrote. "It involves the type of training that specifically utilizes compound



and isolation movements whose only purpose is to develop size, mass and balanced symmetry.

Power is important to the extent that it aids in the development of the physique." By then Joe was not just enamored of muscle and publishing but consumed by them. "All of my friends were dating and spending money on frivolous things," he recalls. "Instead, I did research for my articles and plowed every cent I earned back into my magazine."

Remembering his own difficulties in tracking down equipment, Joe started the mail-order Weider Barbell Co. in 1942. His magazine now offered weight sets and other equipment as well as some rudimentary vitamin and mineral supplements. Joe's second bull's-eye placed him squarely in the cross hairs of Hoffman, who also owned the York Barbell Co.

The so-called William Randolph Hearst of health-and-fitness publishing, Bernarr Macfadden, also took note of



The IFBB, founded by Joe and Ben Weider in 1946, now has 169 member nations. The federation received provisional recognition from the IOC in January 1998.

Joe's success. Joe recalls picking up the phone one day and hearing Macfadden's gruff voice coming through the receiver: "Weider, I'll expect you at the New York City Athletic Center at 12 sharp tomorrow," he said. Click.

The following day, Joe fidgeted nervously in the glare of the stone-faced monarch of physical culture. Finally, Macfadden broke the silence with laughter. "Kid, you're a pretty sharp cookie," Joe recalls him saying. "Your magazine has good articles, and you've turned it into a catalog for your barbells. I should have thought of that."

Whereas Joe's relationship with



Inaugurated in 1965, the Mr. Olympia's prize money would increase from \$1,000 to the \$300,000 distributed at the 1998 contest in New York City, shown here.

Macfadden evolved from distrust into mutual respect, his relationship with Hoffman started off with animosity and then deteriorated. By 1946, Hoffman had already butted heads with Joe in magazine publishing and equipment manufacturing and sales; now he would wage all-out war against both Joe and his brother Ben in the realm of contest promotion.

Joe and Ben had rented Montreal's Monument National Theater to host the first Mr. Canada contest in October 1946. The AAU had sanctioned the contest a month earlier, but the night of the event, as the audience filed in and competitors prepared backstage, AAU representative Harvey Hill walked up to the Weiders and pulled their sanction. The letter he produced, signed by AAU official Dietrich Workman, mentioned discussions with Hoffman, a major sponsor of the Mr. America physique contests.

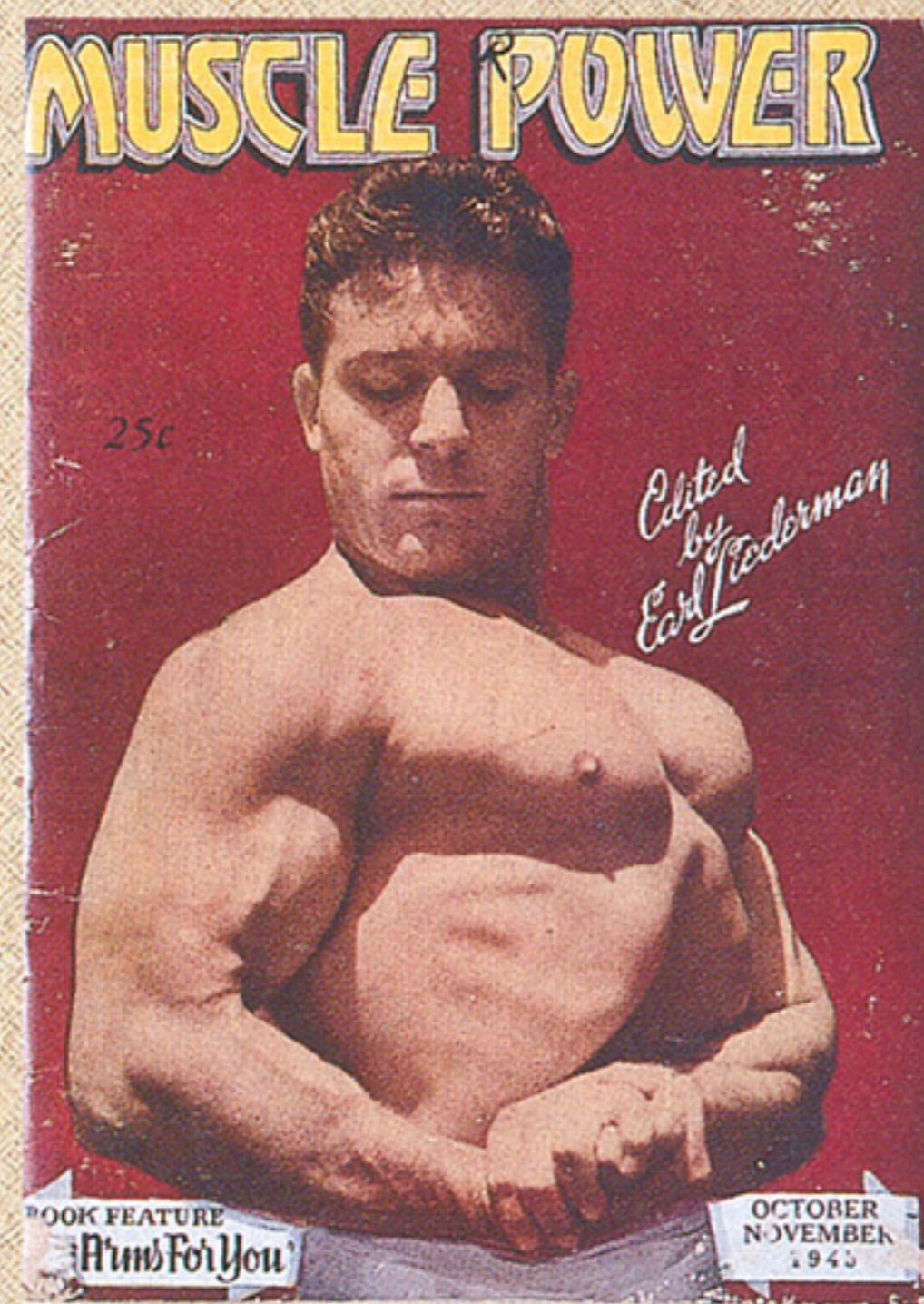
On the spot, the Weiders formed the International Federation of Bodybuilders (IFBB), the first official organization that sanctioned bodybuilding as an independent and international sport. They proceeded with the contest, and despite the threat of penalties from the AAU, not a single bodybuilder left. "Hoffman was doing us another favor," says Joe. "Ben and I knew that the sport couldn't survive as a circus sideshow, so we sponsored the contest ourselves in a professional manner, and it was a tremendous hit."

THE WEIDER PRINCIPLES

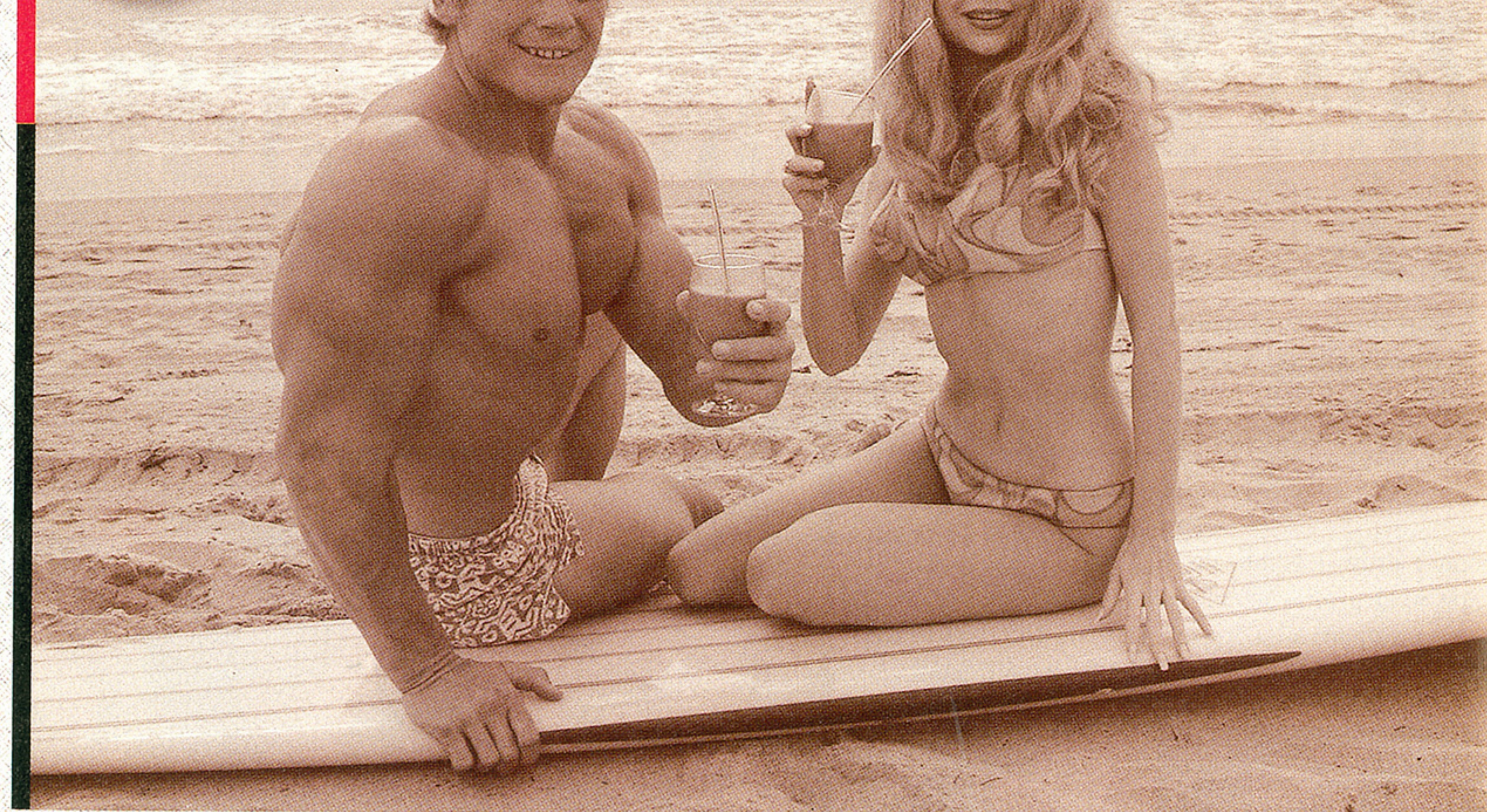
Although the Weiders had established themselves and the IFBB as a force in physique-contest promotion, the battle was just heating up between Joe's magazines — YOUR PHYSIQUE had been joined

in 1945 by a second Weider magazine, MUSCLE POWER — and competing publications from Hoffman and Macfadden. Joe distanced his publications from theirs by systematically laying out his new training science. The existing bodybuilding methodology marketed by York involved performing nine reps of one set of one exercise for each bodypart in succession. A week later, the same exercises would be performed for 10 reps; the week after that, for 11. At 12 reps, 2½–5 pounds would be added and the same sequence repeated.

That approach ran contrary to what Joe saw successful bodybuilders doing in the gym, as well as to his own training experience. He would spend countless hours in various gyms studying and cataloging the movements and techniques that were effective for bodybuilders, weightlifters and powerlifters alike. By 1950, he had compiled 12 years' worth



Joe featured fellow fitness legend Jack LaLanne on the first cover of MUSCLE POWER.



The "Blond Bomber," Dave Draper (so nicknamed by Joe), and a blonde bombshell, Betty Weider, market an early Weider supplement drink.

of such observations, and he christened them the Weider Training Principles — 32 theories and techniques that forever changed the means by which someone could build a strong, muscular body.

Ben remembers Joe's experimentation: "He was always restless and dissatisfied with the current state of bodybuilding. As an idea was accepted, Joe considered it outdated." Joe's hunger for knowledge gradually forged a new direction for health and fitness. At 27, he would commit to ink 10 predictions that opposed the prevailing notion of medical science, but which would eventually enjoy near-total acceptance. (See "I Predict," page 242.)

Joe scoffs at the notion, usually put forth by competitors, that in compiling his training principles he merely attached fancy names to existing techniques. "I started corresponding with gym owners, picking their brains about the effectiveness of various training techniques, asking them to have customers try them out," Joe recalls. "As frequently as I could, I'd visit the gyms myself. I was constantly studying weightlifters to arrive at my own conclusions. That was my education.

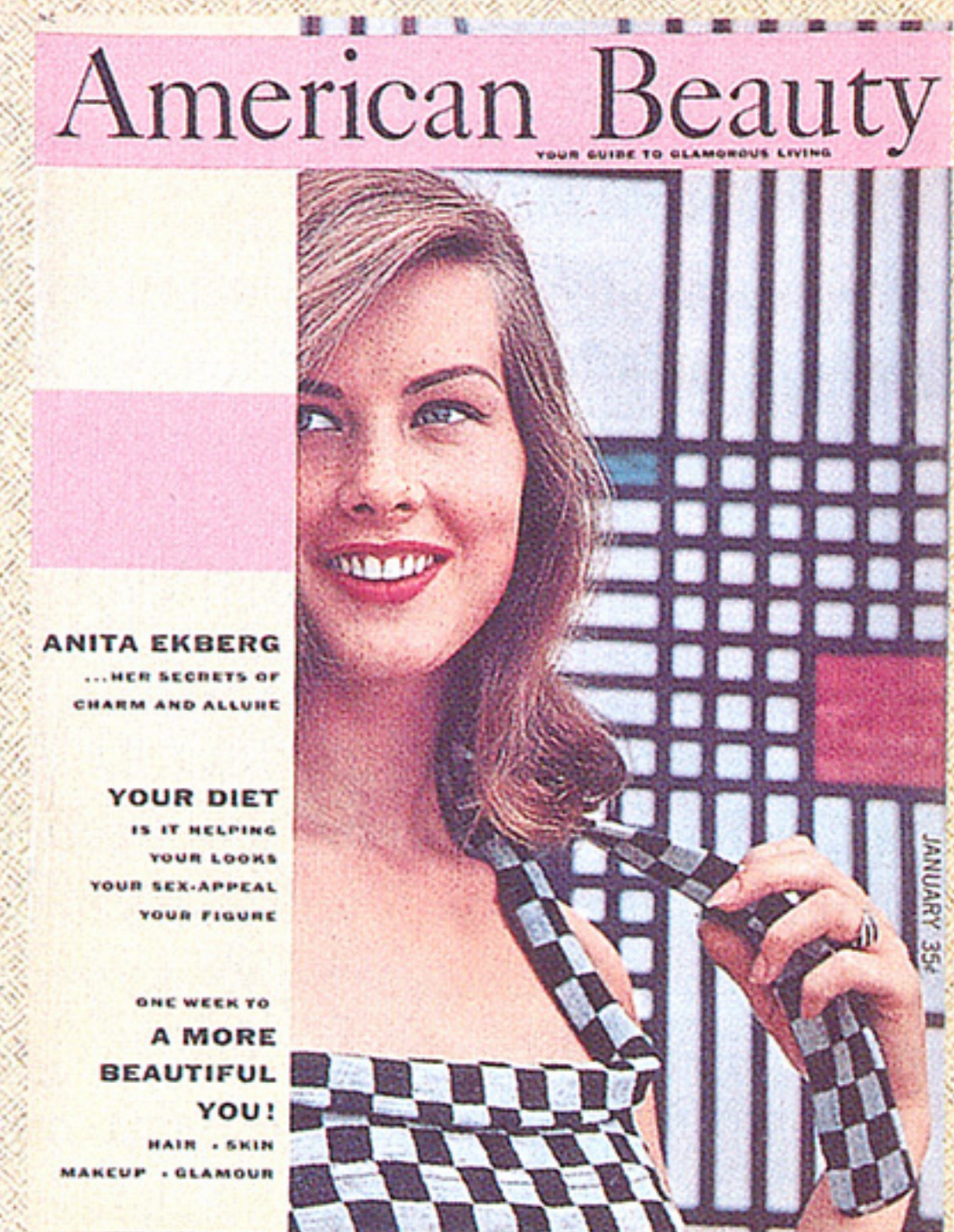
"To say that I didn't invent these principles is like saying Newton didn't invent gravity. Sure, everyone alive knew that if

you threw something, it would fall to the ground. But he was able to take what he observed and turn it into a science."

THE MASTER BLASTER'S MASTER PLAN

Asked whether he operates according to a master plan, Joe laughs. "Well, I created magazines that became a voice for the sport of bodybuilding. Then I wrote articles on training and nutrition, and manufactured equipment on which people could train."

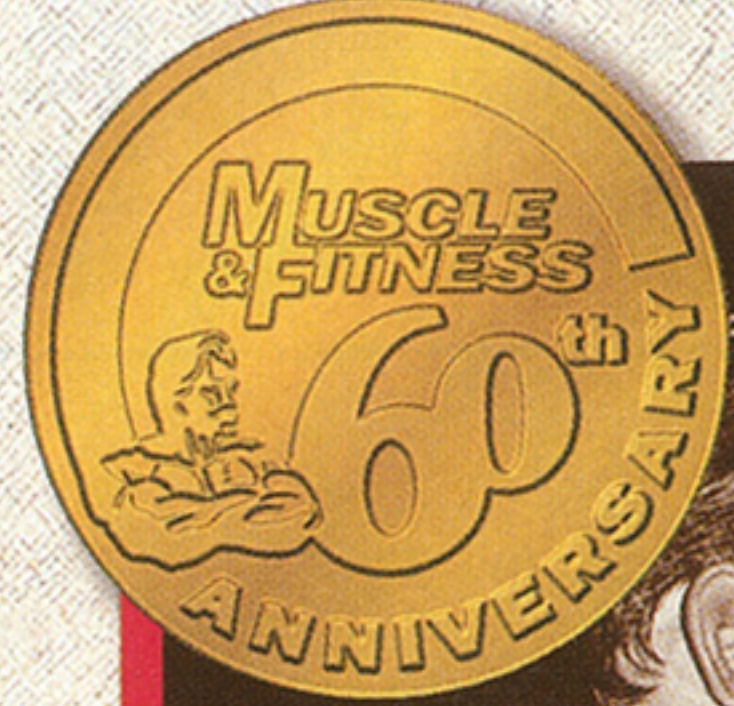
During the 1960s, Joe added another piece to the puzzle when he undertook large-scale manufacturing of nutritional supplements such as protein powders, health-food bars and electrolyte-replacement drinks. As always, his timing was right: Nobel Prize-winning research by Linus Pauling, PhD, had recently made the case for vitamin supplements as a nutritional requirement for athletes. Joe went a step further, arguing that supplements could also elevate the health and performance of ordinary people. The public responded immediately, and the sports-nutrition industry was born. Today, Weider Nutrition International, shares of which



Seldom mentioned is the role Joe has played in promoting gender equality. Decades before fitness was recognized as even appropriate for women, he launched AMERICAN BEAUTY in 1956.

are traded on the New York Stock Exchange, sells about 1,400 products and generates annual worldwide revenues of approximately \$350 million.

To provide both a showcase for the product of bodybuilders' efforts and a means by which they could earn a living, Joe also proceeded to develop professional bodybuilding contests, such as the



Clockwise from top left: In 1965, Joe literally crowns the first Mr. Olympia, Larry Scott, at the New York Academy of Music. Female physique pioneers like Vera Ann Schultz, 1965 Miss Americana, paved the way for Rachel McLish, who won the first Ms. Olympia contest in 1980. At right are Arnold Schwarzenegger and Frank Zane; on the left, Franco Columbu, Bill Drake and Joe.

(Continued on page 241)

Mr. Olympia, which made its debut in 1965. He would add the Ms. Olympia competition in 1980, and the Fitness Olympia event in 1995.

Seldom mentioned is the role Joe has played in promoting gender equality. Back in 1956, nearly a decade before the rise of feminists like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, Joe introduced AMERICAN BEAUTY, a fitness magazine specifically for women. "I believed then, as I do now, that women are the complete equal of men," says Joe. Encouraging women to train with weights back in the 1950s was an unpopular endeavor, particularly since critics insisted that such training would make them masculine, bulky and unattractive. "This was the type of folklore that created social prejudice against women," Joe recalls. "It kept them from working out and competing in sports."

In 1981, Joe launched SHAPE, also dedicated to women's fitness. To create a splash for one of its early issues, he hired actress Joan Collins to appear on the cover. When Joe asked her to pose holding a pair of dumbbells, Collins was shocked and insulted. "I don't want to look like Arnold Schwarzenegger!" she said. Although Collins did the cover shoot, her initial reaction reflected the persistent bias against women training with weights. Over the next decade, SHAPE would help redefine society's attitude toward such matters.

"FOR THE 21ST CENTURY, I PREDICT"

Over the course of breakfast, Joe outlines what he sees as the new mandate of bodybuilding and fitness: to save an increasingly technological society from its increasingly sedentary lifestyle. "As automation replaces human labor, beware of false claims that pills can keep you healthy, or that passive muscle stimulators can keep you fit," warns the Master Blaster. "Life is movement. There will never be a substitute for vigorous exercise, natural foods and peace of mind. Resistance training will always be essential in fighting disease and maintaining good health."

Having finished a meal that bears witness to his belief in the power of healthy eating — a bowl of shredded wheat topped with chopped fruit, followed by a handful of supplements — Joe leans back and gazes into the distance. "It was like a budding religion," he says moments later, returning to his earlier discussion of bodybuilding's roots. "Everybody who was into bodybuilding was an apostle, because everybody else was against it. You love something that



At the Mr. Universe, Miss America and Mr. America contests in 1964, IFBB President Ben Weider (second from right) congratulates winners Harold Poole (far left), Jo Ann Aker and Larry Scott.

other people don't even like, so you push. We were all one group. Me, Ben, Larry Scott . . . all of us."

Asked about the criticism that he and his brother exert too much influence over the sport, Joe shakes his head and smiles. "People concoct these stories because they don't study history," he says in his oft-imitated French-Canadian accent, sounding neither bitter nor cocky but matter-of-fact. "Back then, no one even liked bodybuilding. Who was

going to spend all that time, all that money — their entire life — doing that? Tell me, who? This is the way it ended because that's the only way it would have started."

It's a testament to Joe's foresight that the end, in fact, appears to be only the beginning, as the popularity of weight training continues to gain momentum year after year. As for Joe, his present resembles nothing so much as his past. He still works 12-hour days, still trains



One of Joe's early supplement lines. Today, Weider Nutrition International sells approximately 1,400 products and generates worldwide revenues of more than \$400 million.

going to run a bodybuilding contest and lose money other than missionary guys like us? Who? [Iron Man founder] Peary Rader never ran a show. Sig Klein never ran a show. Bob Hoffman never ran a show. Alan Calvert never ran a show. To run a show, you had to be willing to spend money, and you had to be willing to lose money that maybe you didn't have. You had to be a fanatic.

"So my brother and I set out to build up the sport, to form a federation. I was busy with my magazines, and Ben traveled the world putting together the IFBB, country by country. Who else was

three times a week, and still tinkers with a training science that by his own reckoning will be his greatest and most enduring legacy. "My work is never done," says Joe as he heads off for his morning workout, and the title of the manuscript left behind on the table — "For the 21st Century, I Predict" — suggests that, indeed, it is not.

John Tristany, PhD, a clinical and sports psychologist who practices in the Los Angeles area, has published articles on sports, clinical and entertainment psychology. His specialty is helping professional athletes to achieve peak mental and physical performance.