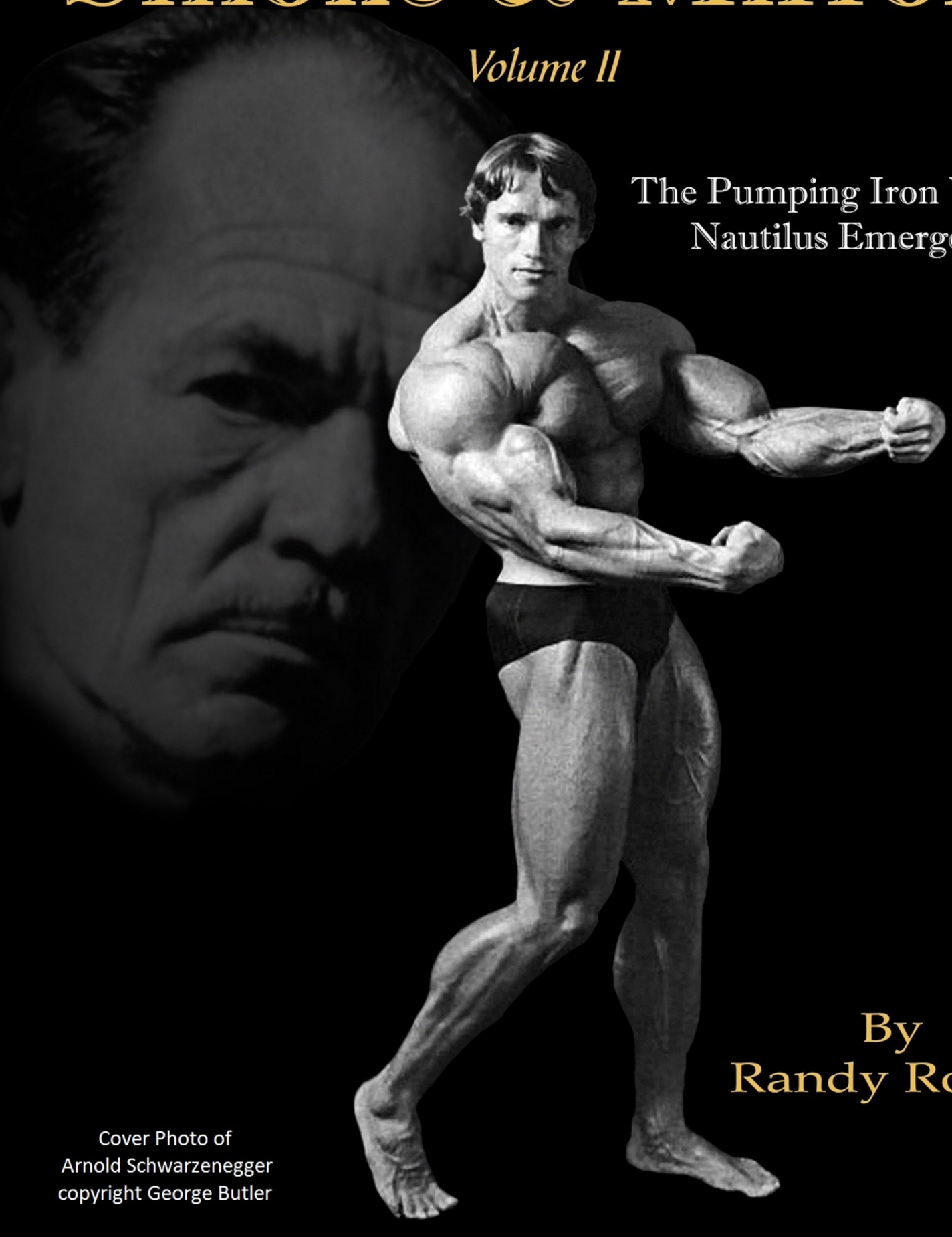
Muscle, Smoke & Mirrors

Volume II

The Pumping Iron Years...
Nautilus Emerges...



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Prologue I

Setting The Stage

On the weekend of September 19, 1970 at the Veterans Memorial Auditorium in Columbus, Ohio the cameras of ABC's Wide World of Sports captured for the first time an AAU sanctioned World Weightlifting competition. It was a landmark in the field of athletics as Vasily Alexeev of the Soviet Union became the first man to officially lift 500 lbs. from the ground overhead.

More pertinent to our story was that ABC also included coverage of an AAU Professional Mr. World bodybuilding contest. The event was peculiar in its sanctioning yet significant in its airing. With a physique totally contrasting that of the Russian lifter and a name even more difficult to pronounce, a young Austrian won the Mr. World title, pushing aside bodybuilding's two notable icons in the process.

This marked the beginning of a new era for bodybuilding: two decades that gave the sport its only years of any public glitter. The tools of the game that built the strength and muscle were finally welcomed by the general public and academia due in part to the appeal of the fitness explosion. Nevertheless, the bodybuilders themselves could not ride solely on the new found popularity of their equipment; they would need all the assistance they could gather in order to win any public favour.

At a time when physique competition was still struggling as to whether it was sport, pageant or circus, a journalist and a photographer from outside the inner workings of the Iron Game demonstrated guile when they took a daring step forward. Through book and film, these two men had the audacity to call bodybuilding both sport and art.

With this elevated media attention, curiosity brought many more peering eyes and this so-called sport of bodybuilding needed to change its political decorum, or at least give the appearance of doing so. Due to the estranged dynamics between the amateur and professional ranks and the often circus atmosphere surrounding the latter, it was an arduous task facing the promulgators of the awkward but evolving game. However, there was a new world and atmosphere shifting into the 1970s and opportunities would present themselves.

Acknowledging the breadth of variance concerning the many possible interpretations of the zany 1960s, it is reasonable to conclude that what transitioned out of this turbulent decade was definitely a more open and uninhibited society. What emerged from these liberating years was a new social fabric woven with many more seams of division. The

Fifth Dimension was singing of peace with the dawning of an Age of Aquarius, but the 1970s began as a divided, vocal and tempered era. Much of the music had become rebellious and hard and the politics vicious. Through an expanding media, the American public was desensitized to violence and exposed for the first time to the prospect of corruption within their own political system.

With the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers, followed shortly after by the resignations of Spiro Agnew and Richard Nixon, both the safety and the soundness of national leadership was in question. This social disruption wasn't confined within the borders of the United States. The world had been introduced to a different kind of warfare known as terrorism: an elusive foe designed to invoke fear into the public. Canada had its battles with the FLQ (a Marxist, separatist group out of Montreal) and the Middle East was a boiling hot bed of political and religious violence. This aggressive expression of cultural discontent would breach its usual barriers and contaminate the world of sports with the senseless killings of the Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games.

Compounding the global tension was the continued "Cold War" stand off between the political philosophies of Eastern communism and Western capitalists. Once again in 1972, the arena of sport was used as a political battleground as Canada's best in the world of hockey faced-off against the Russian Red Army in what became known as the Summit on Ice. Years later in a documentary bearing the same name, some of the players confessed that to many the event actually transcended mere athletic competition and into the realm of the superiority of political ideologies. We'll look more at what this series of the century had to offer our story of muscle, smoke and mirrors!

Cultural pride, expressed through the conquests of heroic athleticism, obviously helped elevate the status of the athlete within his/her social hierarchy. Even more powerful in manifesting this elevated public profile and transforming the entire landscape of professional athletics was the marriage of corporate America with the world of sports. This union was ministered by whom many consider our sport's first major agent and founder of the International Management Group (IMG).

The origins of IMG stemmed back to 1960 with the creative mind of a young Cleveland lawyer, Mark H. McCormack. Serving as an agent, he signed his first client golfer Arnold Palmer with the incentive that he could present athletes to the corporate world as highly lucrative marketing investments. The players were becoming financial objects and soon big business.

His initiatives synchronized with the launching of CBS's Sports Spectacular in 1960 and ABC's Wide World of Sports in 1961. The

sports enthusiast of that era was drawn from the kitchen table radio to his living room sofa where he could watch his athletic heroes come to life. A brand new target market was born… the couch potato!

With television at hand, McCormack had the foresight to see the athletes as worldwide commercial vehicles. Corporate sponsorship was on its way and the status of the gridiron, court, fairway, rink, track, field, and their occupants was to be totally redefined.

This was aptly demonstrated in the fall of 1970 when ABC unleashed a weekly dose of probably the most popular and controversial sportscaster Howard Cosell with the airing of Monday Night Football. Cosell's outspoken personality would also serve as an adjunct in elevating the stature of these athletic celebrities. Heroes such as Joe Namath, Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, and Kareem Abdul Jabbar all commanded a loyal following, along with growing commercial and political power. They would gain more and more influence over the young minds that idolized them.

As bigger money, recognition, and fame hyper-inflated the social and financial status of the athlete right out of a cultural context, not only did the face of the games change, but also their underlying essence. Many believed that the gentlemanly conduct and even the demeanour expressed in the amateur ideal was weakening and yielding too much to the greed of corporate allure within the professional ranks.

As IMG expanded, it rapidly realized that specific athletes not only had a potential for corporate sponsorship, they were also constantly exposed to the threat of injury. A career could be over in the blink of an eye, thereby jeopardizing revenue and profits. Thus, McCormack and company didn't restrict their representation to the mere athletic participant: they expanded to merchandise licensing and actual event promotion. All this would guarantee the rapidly growing mainstream networks and their coverage.

Finally, this promising sports horizon would open also to the small but burgeoning bodybuilding movement. Needless to say, it would still take until 1980 before physique competition made a footprint sufficient enough to draw the attention of Barry Frank of IMG. Although bodybuilding did in fact attract the cameras of ABC and CBS during the 1970s, the sport would spend that decade under a struggle for its control and a restructuring of its image.

Closing the 1960s, it was still an amateur sanctioning quagmire amongst the confusing alliances between the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF/FIHC), Joe and Ben Weider's International Federation of Body Builders (IFBB), Dan Lurie's World Bodybuilding Guild (WBBG), the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) influenced by Bob

Hoffman, the British Amateur Weightlifting Association, and Oscar Heidenstam's National Amateur Bodybuilders Association (NABBA).

Compounding the confusion was the growing question as to why weightlifting organizations were still involved in the governing of amateur bodybuilding. NABBA had a fairly solid grip on both the amateur and professional ranks in England with its Universe titles, probably the most sought after in the world at that time.

Most of the warring was taking place on the other side of the Atlantic where the AAU's National Weightlifting Committee reigned over amateur bodybuilding in the United States. The AAU had been running bodybuilding shows in America for 30 years and had built a large nationwide network of amateur athletes. Its crown jewel was the AAU Mr. America title.

Although the Weiders' IFBB situated in Canada and Dan Lurie's New York-based WBBG claimed to be international in scope, the nationally based AAU would not recognize either of them. The AAU affiliated only with the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF/FIHC) which also had a bodybuilding component. However, the warring was about to escalate and the whole atmosphere of American amateur and professional bodybuilding would change.

Beginning in the late 1960s and culminating in the early 1980s, Joe and Ben Weider and their International Federation of Body Builders (IFBB) finally ended the almost 40 year reign of Bob Hoffman, York, and the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) over amateur physique competition in the United States. With this acquisition along with their evolving professional component, the Weider brothers did, in fact, galvanize their control over bodybuilding in North America and soon worldwide.

Was the supplanting of one Bob Hoffman with two Weiders going to improve the atmosphere for amateur and professional bodybuilding? The Weiders were taking the baton into an era with financial stakes much higher than the industry had ever experienced. With Joe and Ben's International Federation of Body Builders (IFBB) recognized as the world's governing body of the sport, would they run the organization with ethics? Did the IFBB have independence or was it engulfed and manipulated through Weider industries? Was anyone watching this growing monopoly and massive conflict of interests?

Although Joe and Ben worked, pushed, and marketed hard in building their own "Weider World," they by no means accomplished this on their own. In order for AAU amateur bodybuilding to transition from Bob Hoffman's York to Weiders' IFBB through those 15 years, a

number of catalytic events came to bear and were capitalized upon by the tactical and often daring manoeuvering of specific key individuals.

You will learn just who these men were, what they did, when, and why. Much of the material surrounding some of the events and the often outrageous actions of the characters who executed them will be revealed for the first time. Obviously, this information had to come directly from the sources who perpetrated the events. This will certainly draw criticism due to the controversy surrounding these men coupled by personal and political biases of those interpreting this material.

The magazines of the 1970s could not be drawn upon for such information. They did in fact record much of their events, but the bulk of their content was confined to an almost cartoon approach. Journalistic integrity for the most part was not a priority. Their primary emphasis was in merchandising the industry's wares to a young and naïve target market, as even the sport's number one star would point out in 1974. Nevertheless, the publications did have their importance, including the verification and correlation of dates and timelines with data compiled from the interview process which transpired over a number of years. Some of the magazines would in fact improve their profiles in the 1980s.

Regardless, it was determined that the credibility of these men was sound. Are their stories without error or embellishment? This cannot be guaranteed, but it was to the best of their recollection combined with the peripheral research. There was no evident egotistical pride in what they did. They believed their actions were warranted due to timing and circumstances. These men were the "mechanics" working under the hood of both amateur and professional bodybuilding, who without their intervention, the Weiders would perhaps not have gained hegemony in the sport and its growing marketing avenues.

These economic peripherals of the sport such as the publishing, supplement, and equipment productions had already financially expanded the commerce of the Iron Game since the 1950s, but with the rise of the fitness craze sweeping the Western nations and Hollywood beginning to give their stamp of muscular approval, these industries would literally ignite in the 1980s. Nonetheless, it was the catalytic 1970s that would bring these tenets of bodybuilding to bear.

America may have been getting primed for a more muscular look, but it was arguably a side effect of the massive growth in the country's health and fitness conscience. The release of the 1968 best seller, "Aerobics" began the running boom of the 1970s. The tremendous growth in heart attacks over the previous decades had a fear-stricken America believing they could ward off the assault by exercising the heart through jogging, swimming, biking, rowing and skiing. Would these

activities really remedy the problem? The fitness equipment industry certainly wanted you to believe so since machines to simulate just about any form of aerobic exercise would soar in sales. Promoted to strengthen the cardiovascular system, this slow, aerobic (with oxygen), steady-state style of exercise became known simply as "cardio."

Just when the barbell and conditioning protocol were making their cultural ascent, a middle-aged renegade outsider to it all would step in and revolutionize the resistance equipment industry, insult the entire Iron Game, challenge the effectiveness of cardio methodology, muscle his way into the world of rehabilitation and affront the burgeoning strength coaching modalities espousing to increase the performance of athletes. Whether mercenary, entrepreneur, genius, son-of-a-bitch, or all of the above, Arthur Jones exceeded even Vince Gironda in notoriety and didn't bulldoze his way through the industry in order to make friends. You will learn more of this very enigmatic character who placed far more emphasis on exercise over nutrition than Gironda would ever consider.

With Jones came the emergence of Nautilus and virtually the rise of the machines. Although Arthur Jones operated under Nautilus Sports/Medical Industries, the name Nautilus would come to signify an exercise equipment technology wrapped in its own training ideology. The Jonestown package would not be confined to the forging of the fitness boom, but also muscled its way into the burgeoning and conceptually polarized field of strength coaching in the world of professional sports.

The Iron Game would never be the same; its long-defined boundaries had been breeched. The barbell and the evolving equipment line, supplements, aerobic exercise, and everything else associated with strength and health was about to experience the epitome of the 20th century: big business! An enormous new commercial industry was birthing and it would fly under the banner of "fitness."

With Dr. Ken Cooper searing health through aerobics on the American psyche and the Weider brothers driving hard to monopolize bodybuilding and its related markets, Arthur Jones was going to be a natural for throwing a wrench into everyone's gears. However, before unleashing the likes of Jones upon the reader, it is beneficial at this point to refresh the cast of characters in which Arthur would engage throughout the 1970s…the "Pumping Iron" years of bodybuilding!

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