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- 1 - Draper here... The Arnold Classic -- First Sign of Spring

All I know is Dexter beat Chris, and Ronnie and Jay didn't enter. So much for the latest on the Arnold competition. We, Laree and I, were more focused on the expo and its general madness. In the past four years we watched and participated in the action from the safe confines of a booth. The people did the work, expended the energy and bore the wounds of heavy contact in the rough while we stood smiling, shaking hands, posing for photographs and answering simple questions.

I think everyone will agree: though enthralling, any part of the Arnold is exhausting after three days. The force of the crowds, the power expelled by the strongmen and lifters, the adrenaline produced by the martial artists, the uncontrolled excitement bouncing off high school contenders dashing about the near 500-thousand-square-foot exhibition hall constitutes enough energy to operate a small country for a year. If only we could bridle the all-human power, oil prices would go down to fifty cents a barrel. We'd be rich.

It's hard not to have a good time, whether you experience the events in their entirety or just hang in the halls and watch the people go by. Losing your shirt as an expo exhibitor or event contestant might not be a lot of fun, but the memories, stimulation and courage to participate remain outstanding. Like the time we, being free to do whatever, decided to stroll through the vast area designated to martial art vendors, exhibitions and competitions. Stepping past an immense and towering curtain that separated muscle power from fighting prowess, we found ourselves in the slow current of an overpowering sea of astonished people advancing inexorably toward an unknown center of things. No one moved individually, all attempts were thwarted and looks of resigned desperation were exchanged in small furtive glances as the entire body progressed as an ooze. I could see above the pulsating masses and there was hope; Laree could not and still she hoped. I looked down and two teary eyes of a frightened little girl stared back at me from the dark, airless depths of knees, ankles and shuffling feet. I reached to rescue her from the hot unknown and she was pulled away by other forces.

Why the gravity, the black hole, the density, the magnetism, the critical force? Wesley Snipes was sitting on a stool in a small booth speaking in soft, tough tones into a microphone. I knew it was him 'cuz someone said so, there was a sign bearing his name over his head and I caught a glimpse of his entire right ear for a sec -- unmistakably Wes, my man. After that 100-yard battle of the bodies, we reached land-ho and safety and relief. The blood sugar was low and our energy stores empty. We leaned against each other like two saplings twisted and tangled by flood waters and counted our blessings. Let's find some friendly faces, rejoice and chow down at Max and Erma's.

I still see those tiny little-girl eyes peering at me from down below and my heart aches. Hold on, sweetheart!

She's tough. She was carrying a blue ribbon in Taekwondo.

Somewhere within every aisle we stopped for picture ops and friendly exchanges with followers from Sri Lanka to South Jersey. There are eager IronOnline and IronAge introductions, and conversations with enthusiastic merchants and muscle mag personnel. One could bulk up on the offerings of cubed protein bars, cups of energy drinks and samples of protein powder. One could also die of thirst if he didn't bring plenty of bottled water. You grow dry quickly as you travel slowly among the fields of bobble heads. Another thing: at any point you could be half a day from a bathroom. Hold on, stay tight, be strong. The muscles soon ache due to the ordeal of traveling and flying, time changes, the unfamiliar bed, general disorder, compromised eating, sacrificed workouts, vitality overload and indiscriminate walking, hurrying and carrying packages about an expo the size of Delaware. Just when you think you're going to submit, there's Lou or Frank or Larry, muscular sages from yesterday, or look at the size of the human redwood planted in front of the bodybuilding.com booth or check out the Ukrainian giant about to lift 1,000 pounds off the floor after his training partner seriously smashes his face with his open hand a few times for stimulation. Swell! I'm next.

Not much has changed, really. The Arnold Classic weekend is bigger than ever and you wonder if bigger is better. Too many vendors and they all seem to be selling new food supplements and protein powders. How many do we need and how much advancement is there? Too many visitors to the expo and you wonder if they stop to scrutinize the merchandise and make decisions to buy, or do they search for celebrities and space and relief as they keep on movin' down the line. Too much muscle in the contestants, and is that what we want, want to see, want to emulate, want for inspiration or is that what bodybuilding's come to? I heard a drone of fascination and appreciation, as well as discontent and disbelief among the bees hovering about the hive of the convention center.

Laree and I saw nothing, but we fought a good fight. This is what we overheard:

"I love this stuff, bodybuilding, but what do the competitions and top competitors do for me? They're exciting, I guess, but not inspirational."

"The competitors are unreal, amazing and monstrous, but we just came to be a part of the action for the weekend, see what's up and say that we've been here."

"I came for the expo, seeing old friends and wandering around. I'm not going to the contests."

"No more heroes, no one to identify with, no inspiration. It's just us gym rats hanging out with hopes of getting huge and ripped without screwing up our health and our heads."

"I just like to associate with like minds, and I find them crowding the expo and the hallways. I'll pass on the competition."

Laree and I walked and talked, worked and played, and carefully observed our surroundings. We were visitors and fans, as were the majority of attendees. I was also aware that I -- we, actually -- represent a solid part of the sport and the industry. Who were the attending people, both inside and outside the booths, and what they were doing here was important to us. Next year we, along with Odis and the Torque Athletic crew, plan to have ample space to display and demonstrate the Draper Dungeon and other related wares. Would we be an integral part of a sport exposition attracting curious and attentive consumers, or would we be a part of the backdrop to a rambunctious mob of celebrating weekenders with muscles?

We're not sure. It's costly in time, energy, spirit and dollars to be merely a stroke on the living canvas in the background, nodding to the hordes as they strain and struggle to reach a secure destination on the far side of the colossal hall. You know bodybuilders: focus, tunnel vision, mono-mindedness: The thing will become the getting there -- like the final reps of the last superset of the almighty workout -- not the going that's good.

Little guy -- "There's Draper..."

Big guy -- "Who? Push, once more, and push..."

Little guy -- "Wonder what he's doing here? I thought he was taller."

Big guy -- "Concentrate... almost there...deep breath, and push."

Little guy -- "Looks like he's displaying the Draper Dungeon. Far-out!"

Big guy -- "Focus... pull on three... One, two, three and pull."

Little guy -- "Ya wanna stop and take a look?"

Big guy -- "What? Are you nuts? In the middle of an almighty workout?"

Little guy -- "I'm thirsty."

Big guy -- "I'm going for the pump."

Little guy -- "I'm Starving."

Big guy -- "I'm burning, man."

Little guy -- "I'm beat."

Big guy -- "Two more reps."

I don't know about this, Laree. I'm beginning to have my doubts.

Do you realize you're reading the aimless ramblings of a World Gym Hall of Famer? No, not farmer. That's famer. I was inducted with Frank, Louie and Eddie, the first of a long list to receive the award from World Gym throughout the years to come. Has something to do with Joe Gold's desire to pay tribute to the originals in the maturing sport of bodybuilding and physical culture. Thanks, Joe. It is an honor and a privilege, and the ceremony during World Gym's annual dinner at the Arnold Classic was moving. After a five-minute professional video presentation of each of us, we were awarded marvelous trophies of glass and silver weighing a hefty 25 pounds, and beautiful black leather flight jackets... weighing about the same. Only weightlifters can receive such ponderous awards. Louie needed help carrying his stuff offstage and Eddie attempted to sell his to a World Gym owner from Japan, but was caught red-handed in the men's room. He promised not to do it again, as he escaped from a delirious mob by running up a down-escalator in the Hyatt's main lobby. Frank played the harmonica and sang a song as a procession of fans transported his treasures to his 12th-floor room overlooking the Columbus Capitol building. "I lift weights, I'm one of the greats, I'm in the Hall of Fame, Frank Zane is my

name, I do what I do and so do you." It brought the evening to a memorable end. Mike Uretz, World Gym chief, thanked Frank profusely. We all slept like babies.

I missed Arnold, but got to hug Frank, Sergio, Louie, Eddie, Larry Scott, Pavel, John Brookfield, Bill Pearl, Ed Corney, Bill Grant, Jeff Martone, Odd Haugen... Mits and Dot... Troy, Mark, Bill, Guy, Hugo, Tim and Colleen, Steve Wedan and Stephanie, Vince, Dan and Nick, Tony -- the bum who paid for our dinner -- Jim, Jeff, Shawn, Tamas and Greg... these are the first few that come to my mind.

Not bad for a brisk, occasionally snowy March weekend in O-high-O. Traveling was fun. Some of the aircraft were on time. Some weren't. We're home and in one piece each, Laree and me. Now to put them back together again.

Spread your wings and fly high, bombers. Waste no time. It's precious.

God's speed... Dave Draper

2 - Laree here, taking over with online news...

We spent some time with a few of our friends from the IronAge site over the Arnold Classic weekend, and I found out one of the guys is importing US fitness products into Canada for resale. So far, he's carrying Ron Kosloff's NSP Products, which are based on Vince Gironda's supplementation philosophy, plus Vince's books and reprints of his booklets and reports. Canadians can now order these products online and leave the freight, duty and exchange rate for someone else to worry about. That someone else is Tamas from ACS Fitness; here's the direct link.

<http://www.davedraper.com/go4x.mvc?ID=VinceInCanada>

Speaking of Vince, there's was a recent thread in the IOL forum about a curl movement called the drag curl that's inspiring some biceps growth, always a favorite outcome from curls. Alan Palmieri from palmieribodybuilding.com wrote up an extended description for us, which you'll find in the pdf link below. It takes a little practice, so print it out for future reference, then bop around Alan's site for more great training articles.

<http://www.davedraper.com/go4x.mvc?ID=DragCurl>

Nother of our friends spent a stressful but productive year writing a new training book for natural bodybuilders. Actually, two of them did -- this week I'll introduce you to IronMan Magazine contributor John Hansen's book, Natural Bodybuilding, and hopefully will have Hugo Rivera's new book, The Hardgainer's Handbook of Bodybuilding, in stock for next week's newsletter. I'm very impressed with both. Here's John's big accomplishment:

<http://www.davedraper.com/go4x.mvc?ID=NaturalBodybuilding>

I can't imagine you have time for any more reading the way we go on around here. Still, you might, so here's a link to the things I could remember well enough to describe from our Columbus weekend. All the links are live; if you want more details, there's enough here to hold you thru a snowed-in weekend should you happen to have one.

<http://www.davedraper.com/go4x.mvc?ID=Arnold2005>

It actually did snow on us in Ohio. Then we got home to mid-'70s. No kidding, it was 74 here today, projected to be 78 tomorrow. I'm thinking deck time. Which of course reminds me to bump up my training and slice out some calories because... it's almost summer around here!

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Quick links to support IronOnline

Dave's Top Squat
<http://www.davedraper.com/go4x.mvc?ID=TopSquat>

Dave's TriBlaster bar
<http://www.davedraper.com/go4x.mvc?ID=TriBlaster>

Dave's Bomber Blend whey protein powder
<http://www.davedraper.com/go4x.mv?ID=Bomber>

IronOnline bookstore
<http://www.davedraper.com/go4x.mv?ID=Books>

Super Spectrim, Anabol Naturals, NSP, NOW Foods, Ageless Growth, Udo's, Body Ammo
<http://www.davedraper.com/go4x.mv?ID=Supplements>

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