

THE HISTORY OF THE "IRON GAME"

CHAPTER 50

Pullum Indicted—Vindicates Himself by Beating all Previous Records

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HISTORY, if it proves anything at all, definitely relegates mere man to his proper place of humility. "Man proposes but God disposes" is a truism so obvious that it needs no clarification.

Thus, in 1914, Pullum and the BAWLA had ambitious plans in mind for years to follow. Successes achieved since 1911 had aroused desires greater than human limitations and lack of control over circumstances would permit of fulfilment. The Great World War intervened on August 4, 1914, and Great Britain found itself at war with Germany—the land of strong men with ties traditional to this country as a kindred race.

Maxick, the muscular marvel of Bavaria, was expected to return to Germany to offer himself for military service. The fact that he did not do so immediately is not any indication of lack of physical courage but a tribute to his most innermost convictions expressed in his own words in a special contribution to *Health & Strength* of issue Nov. 7, 1914:—

"My ambition in life has always been to improve and beautify the wonderful human body and mind, and not to destroy, maim or disfigure what the Creator has made in his own image."

What happened to Maxick, despite his own wishes, is still history yet to be told. Others, too, in the "World of Weights" had ideas that differed only in application but all, I believe, actuated by desires to do their best for humanity and, understandably, particularly for their own race and country.

Weightlifting activities, as can also be understood, became severely restricted—not only because of difficulties of organisation with so many of its devotees serving in the armed forces, but also because of the attenuated size of *Health & Strength*, forced upon the proprietors by reason of war-time requirements and the German naval blockade. Consequently, many of such activities were never, in fact, chronicled within the pages of that magazine at the time of their occurrence—which, to say the least, imposes a severe handicap upon any weight-

lifting historian. The fact that I am enabled to overcome this handicap is a tribute not to mere literary ability but to my unique experience in being the only surviving amateur member of those days still actively serving the BAWLA.

Health & Strength served an extremely useful purpose in maintaining contact with serving members of the forces by publication of letters and the recording of the military activities of its pre-war readers. The Camberwell Club, too, became the rendezvous of all lifters who, passing through London during spells of leave, made it their business to pay that famous institution a short visit—always with beneficial results, as many have testified.

Pullum, in common with so many others anxious to do the best thing possible for all concerned, planned to restrict his normal weightlifting activity in favour of work for the military authorities. Soon after the commencement of hostilities the military authorities commissioned him to undertake remedial and curative work on behalf of service rejects. Those who benefited almost immediately were those who had been rejected because of insufficiency of inches around their chests; this deficiency being one most responsive to correctly applied physical exercises with weights.

Unfortunately for the plans of mice and men, Pullum, willy nilly, found himself impelled along the path of record breaking on a scale never previously anticipated at such a pace. This arose in a comparatively simple manner—thus illustrating the truism quoted at the heading of this chapter.

Aftermath of the "Inch v. Aston" wager

The fact that Aston won the "Inch v. Aston" wager and had pocketed the £40 staked on its result has already been recorded

in this history. The details regarding its actual concluding stages have yet to be recounted because of certain considerations previously detailed by me. Personally, whatever information may ultimately be made available by one of the principals concerned, I am, nevertheless, convinced that Aston, in those days, and on those two particular lifts, did actually defeat Thomas Inch on ability.

Disputes concerning types of appliances used, scales on which the bells were weighed, the type of platform, the actual venue, and the fact that the two lifters, instead of lifting together in actual physical combat on the same occasion, mutually elected to lift on separate occasions (although relevant to the issue of comparative merit), nevertheless were not factors sufficient, to my mind, to deprive Aston of the right of victory. I agree, however, that had Inch met Aston in a contest under, say, BAWLA laws with amateur officials, on the two lifts "One Hand Anyhow" and the "Two Hands Anyhow with Barbell and Ringweight", the differences between the two would not have been so marked as the final figures credited to Aston seemed to indicate. Yet, despite all these considerations, I assert confidently that Aston won by a margin sufficient to justify the retention by him of the proud title of "Britain's Strongest Man".

Pullum Implicated and Indicted

Unfortunately for Pullum, as it was to transpire, he had been intimately connected with Edward Aston by reason of the fact that the latter had rented rooms above the premises in which Pullum conducted his picture frame business which, in turn, was above the institution known as the "Camberwell Weightlifting Club". Thus, in the dispute which arose and which became the subject of special consideration by the Committee of the professional association, Pullum's name was bandied and used—accusatively and excusively.

Pullum, again unfortunately, was naive in certain respects, despite his unusual experiences which should have matured him earlier than most. He, in a letter written to one of the members of the professionals, gave unguarded opinions and, in addition, commented adversely on the adjudication on one of his own records, viz.: "Two Hands Continental Jerk with Barbell" 233½ lbs.

In those days, it was compulsory for lifters to bring their heels together at the conclusion of all overhead lifts prior to the counting of "one-two" by the referee. On the occasion of the record in question, so easily had Pullum jerked the weight, that the referee prematurely gave his count before Pullum had had time to bring his heels together—at least as closely as the rule demanded. Pullum pondered over this but forbore to argue because of the certainty in his own mind that the record would not stand at that figure very long—he



THE PULLUM DIAMOND MEDAL
One of W.A.P.'s proudest possessions, the magnificent diamond medal, presented by Harold B. Nunn, then Chairman of the BAWLA Central Council. The medal measures 1½" across, and today is worth about £50. This recent photograph shows the obverse and reverse sides of the medal.

proposed to place it beyond dispute later.

Some time passed, to witness the declension of the CWLC from the forces of one side. This evoked reprisal from that side. It brought Pullum's disclaimer to the notice of the Amateur Committee.

Harold M. Nunn, the Chairman of the BAWLA, was a man of unimpeachable integrity. Consequently, when the professional association made accusations which implicated an amateur, he convened a special meeting to which W.A.P. was summoned to appear. All motives behind the accusation may not be apparent but, in Pullum's own words written in his "Weightlifting as a Science" which appeared immediately following the war, he wrote:—

"Looking back one would have thought the European conflagration sufficient reason for unity of front at home—even among weightlifters. But no! What mattered the War—and the tale of Mons—when there still remained Pullum to be smushed."

Nunn, however, was not so easily deceived as others may have thought possible. Whilst still maintaining an impartial attitude, he, nevertheless, had the good name of the BAWLA to sustain. Consequently, and particularly in view of Pullum's own very indiscreet letter, he suggested to him—in view of his previous association with certain lifters connected with the dispute—that the best interests of the sport and of the amateur association could be served ONLY by Pullum duplicating certain of his records. The Examining Committee of that time laid no specific charges; they could not even enforce this ruling; they simply said "It is up to you now" and Pullum, to his everlasting credit, saw the wisdom of this plea.

Accordingly, Pullum started on the most difficult task of his whole career under even more exacting conditions—with war-time

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commitments placing an almost intolerable burden upon one alleged to be "an artificial strong man".

What was the result? Not only did he duplicate 34 of the 42 recognised BAWLA feats of strength (a feat which he was never actually called upon to do) but on all but one he added a substantial poundage above what had previously been accepted as "limit lifting" for a man of only 8st. 10lbs. Up went the "Two Hands Anyhow" to 272 lbs. (30 lbs. above double bodyweight); the "Two Hands Anyhow with 2 D/Bells" to 244 lbs. (precisely double bodyweight); the "Swings" to 130 lbs. (Right & Left), 8 lbs. over bodyweight in each case; the "Two Hands Slow Curl" to 122 lbs. (bodyweight again); the "Push" to 209½ lbs.; the "Left Hand Anyhow" to 185 lbs.; the "Right Hand Clean & Bent Press" to 196 lbs.; the "Bent Press—Right Hand" to 216 lbs.; whilst the colossal weight of 202 lbs. "Right Hand Clean & Bent Press" escaped him solely because he pulled this weight from sticky mud on the Nunhead Sports Ground and the bell fell because his foot slipped whilst attempting the bent press. This took place on 2nd April, 1915, and thus circumstances again lessened the poundage of one of his records.

On each and every occasion the accuracy of the scales was determined before the lifting took place by the Chairman of the Examining Committee; whilst, in order to place the records beyond the remotest suspicion, Messrs. H. M. Nunn and A. B. Gunnell jointly accepted responsibility for having the scales retested—one of these gentlemen actually took the scales away after each series of records for retesting by a well known and reputable firm of scale makers.

The results of the findings of the Examining Committee were, I regret to state, never published in the columns of *Health & Strength*, although Mr. E. S. Smith, the then Editor, was kept fully informed throughout and, in addition, actually attended many of the record breaking displays, sometimes accompanied by T. W. Standwell.

During the months of Sept. 1914 to May 1915, Pullum broke 77 World's and British Records, 43 of which were increases on previous figures established during that period. At the conclusion of the period, he held no less than 38 of the 42 British Records in the 9 stone class, whilst many of his records extended into the Heavyweight division itself—notably the Anyhow's with D/Bells and Barbell and Ringweight.

Pullum vindicated by his deeds—not by wordy defence

Pullum, having vindicated himself in a manner possible only to a man of his calibre, relinquished his amateur status four days after his final amateur records performance,

viz.: May 24, 1915. There were no prospects of further amateur championships, the war seemed likely to continue, and his commitments had grown so much that continuance as an amateur would have proved too great an economic strain upon his resources. Additionally, he had a contract to fulfil.

The Central Council at that time, headed by Harold B. Nunn, had been so impressed with the astounding merit of his stupendous performances that the members, from their own pockets and without recourse to the BAWLA funds, presented W.A.P. with a DIAMOND MEDAL—a magnificent affair in the form of a Gold Maltese Cross, each of its four sections containing a diamond inset, with a much larger diamond in the very centre section. This medal measures 1½ inches diameter and its probable value today is £50.

This unique medal contains the engravings:—

Obverse: "Presented by the Central Committee of the British Amateur Weightlifters' Association".

Reverse: "To W. A. Pullum, who during 1911, 12, 13 & 14 won 10 British Championships; 4 Inter-Championship Competitions; 42 Gold Medals and broke over 100 Official World's & British Records".

The list of records created by this remarkable athlete is published here for note by the present generation; and, in addition, the illustrations of the Diamond Medal provide a public tribute to a man the like of whom we shall probably never see again in the "World of Weights" for reasons which will become even more apparent as further history is related.

BAWLA Records created by W. A. Pullum
RH Mil. Press—86 (bodywt. 8st. 10lb.); LH Mil. Press—85 (8-9); RH Swing—130 (8-10); LH Swing—130 (8-10); LH Clean and Jerk—146½ (8-9); RH Clean and Bent Press—196 (8-10); LH Clean and Bent Press—177 (8-9); RH Anyhow and BP—211 (8-10); LH Anyhow and BP—185 (8-9); RH Bent Press THTS—216 (8-10); LH Bent Press THTS—192 (8-9); RH Dead Lift—324 (8-10); LH Dead Lift—315 (8-10); Crucifix—120½ (8-8); Rectangular Fix—100 (8-9); Lateral Raise Stdg.—86 (8-8); Lateral Raise Ltg.—102 (8-9); Hold Out LFA—66 (8-10); Hold Out RFA—66 (8-10); Pull Over AAL—100 (8-8); Pull Over and Press—201 (8-8); Pull Over and Push—221 (8-8); TH Swing—150 (8-9); TH Clean and Press DB—162 (8-9); TH Clean and Push DB—172 (8-10); TH Clean and Jerk DB—190 (8-10); TH Cont. Jerk DB—200 (8-10); TH Anyhow DB—244 (8-10); TH Slow Curl—122 (8-10); TH Clean and Mil. Press—168½ (8-10); TH Clean and Push—209½ (8-9); TH Snatch—160½ (8-8); TH Clean and Press FBN—160½ (8-8); TH Clean and Jerk FBN—215 (8-10); TH Clean and Jerk—224½ (8-10); TH Cont. Jerk—238 (8-9); TH Anyhow BB and RW—272 (8-9); TH Dead Lift—432 (8-10).

Many of these records, created between 5/1/13 and 20/5/15, ran through from 9-stone to heavier classes, up to heavyweight in some instances, and many were classified as world's records at the time of performance.

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