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CERTIFIED MAIL

Mr. Joe Roark
Musclesearch
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St. Joseph, IL 61873

Dear Mr. Roark:

Thank you so much for your nice letter and copy of your Musclesearch publication. Before I answer the questions in your letter, allow me to say I would really like to subscribe to your newsletter. If you will just send me a bill, I will be happy to mail you a check for a year's subscription. I do not want you to donate this, as others often offer to do, but would like to be a paying customer.

Your article on the Cyr bell was very good and informative even to me. I thought I knew a great deal about it, although I don't believe I have ever touched it. I did have a weight made by the measurements of the Cyr bell; however, when my local foundry sublet the contract to a firm in Alabama, they made the weights only 200 pounds apiece (I had two made). The handles were not as thick as the Cyr bell, and the weights were not as large in diameter because they were solid. I had them drilled and tapped out to place a bar on each end, in order that I could add weights and collars to allow me to handle more poundage. During the short time I was wrestling, I carried one of these weights on the road, and it was the only workout I could find time to do; consequently, I became quite strong in the movement. I realize many people will not believe this, but I was able to clean the weight with both hands and do over ten reps with 300 pounds using my right arm, and about eight reps with the left one. I probably could have done far more with my left arm, but we do not have adequate control with our left side unless we are left-handed. My left side has always been much stronger than the right, even though I am right-handed.

When I returned to Georgia in 1958 for some surgery, I left the weight with Ray Van Cleef in San Jose, California. We put it on

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a platform at his gym, and he took pictures of my lifting it. I do not remember whether the camera was a movie type or if the shots were still. I had an audience there in the gym and showed off a little, doing about nineteen repetitions with something like 275. Please forgive me for not being sure exactly what I had on the bar at that time, because it has been a very long time ago, and I constantly changed the weight. The secret to my lifting the weight so easily was because it was the only exercise I was doing, and not enough time had elapsed for me to begin losing strength in other parts of my body. Unfortunately, we lost Ray several years ago, but his wife could possibly have some pictures of my lifting the weight. I would think the family still lived in San Jose when he passed away, and his wife is probably there if she has not gone on to join Ray with the Lord. He had several children, but I believe they were all girls and have probably married; so it might be difficult to find them.

My best workout dumbbell presses, which were only done as an assistance exercise, were performed by holding onto an upright bar with one hand, while lifting with the other. This gives a tremendous amount of stability and allows the lifter to do a "stricter" press.

There was a 150-pound man in San Jose to whom Ray introduced me; Ray knew him quite well. This man was a hod carrier. He had become extremely strong for his size, because he had climbed ladders for many years holding the heavy box with one hand as he served mortar to the brick masons. He came by the motel one afternoon, and we took a dumbbell outside. He put about 220 on this dumbbell and pulled it to his shoulder in a type of continental style and then proceeded to do the scariest thing I believe I have ever seen. He bent pressed this weight with his head almost touching the ground on the side opposite the hand holding the dumbbell. It was the only bent press I remember ever seeing, and I figured he would probably drop the weight in the down position; but he stood up holding it straight at arm's length overhead and then put it back on the ground, as if he were placing it on a carton of eggs. The whole process probably took at least thirty to fifty seconds, which indicated he also had great endurance as well as brute strength.

Mr. Roark, you are correct in the fact that a legend will grow around a champion, and usually it is not his fault. Our problem in this has been minimal, because we have always tried to keep the record straight. We require each writer to give us a copy of his final script to proofread, but nevertheless there is usually a discrepancy here and there that we missed. When we include copies of such articles in our publicity package, those receiving them will repeat the error, although we enclose an accurate biographical sheet. Sometimes they even exaggerate a little

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because they want more people to come to their speaking engagement where I am appearing.

Allow me to say that 90% of all articles have been accurate, when I have given these interviews. I imagine the biggest mistake made is that a majority of those who remember me from my amateur days say I won the Olympic games in Russia. This is because I received so much publicity when I made my debut as an international lifter in Moscow. The Lord allowed me to break some world records and become a hero in the eyes of the Russian people, which was real news in that day and time.

Now let's talk about lifting the silver dollars. We got the idea because, if I am not mistaken, all silver dollars are minted in Carson City, Nevada. If you have ever been to Las Vegas or Reno, you will remember that your change is given to you in silver dollars. You hardly ever see a dollar bill unless it is brought from outside or actually requested at the change window. We thought that lifting silver dollars would attract a lot of attention, which it did. If my memory serves me correctly, a dollar made of solid silver, which was the only kind made in that day and time, weighed exactly one ounce. We first decided on using 15,000 silver dollars, feeling that the four-sided Plexiglas boxes would give us some extra weight, and the one and a quarter inch bar would bring us well over 1,100 pounds. After the boxes were made for the silver dollars, we found that they actually weighed hardly anything at all, and the bar probably weighed something like forty to fifty pounds. When we put 15,000 silver dollars in the boxes and placed them on the bar, it was quite evident that the boxes were not full. Through the transparent sides you could see that there was still space left; so we added more coins to fill the containers. After re-weighing everything, it came to something like 1,163 pounds.

I don't know the exact picture to which you are referring, when you say I was not in a very low position, but it was taken by a newspaper man. Naturally, not having a background in weightlifting, most news photographers would not know when to get a shot in the lowest position.

At this point, let me mention that the name of the lift was the \$15,000 CHALLENGE. This meant that if anyone could do the same thing I did with the weight, they would be awarded the entire load of coins; and in that particular time, \$15,000 was a huge amount of money. The only takers we had were fellows who thought they were strong enough to do the lift, after they saw me do it with ease. Naturally, there were a few fellows who had had a little bit too much alcohol, who tried to make the poundage. Many competition gambling houses tried to get Doug Hepburn to come down and try the lift, but he and I were good friends and

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had trained together; so he knew that he could not come near lifting this poundage. The challenge alone would make the lift authentic.

In closing my discussion about the silver dollar lift, I would like to state that it was the easiest really heavy poundage I have ever used. I first thought it was because I was psyched up by the audience, but night after night I would go down into a full squat, stay for two seconds, and then rise again. While analyzing the reason for the lift being easier than if I were using regular barbells, I came to this conclusion: the boxes with the silver dollars were hanging straight down from the bar, while regular plates would be extending not only down, but upward as well. With the weights hanging low, it kept my back perfectly straight, and I never had to fight to keep this position going down or coming up. For many people, this would not be an advantage, but I have always been able to squat with more if I could keep my back straight. My best squat is about 1230 pounds. I have usually rounded this off to 1200, because I have always believed that I could have worked up to 1500 or more, if I had ever had the opportunity to lift in competition.

Recently, my brother-in-law was showing me some old eight-millimeter film he took of me training in the squat with 900 pounds. I believe I did something like six or eight repetitions. Although I weighed nearly 400 pounds at the time, each one was at least parallel and some were a little lower. The reason I have been criticized about not going low enough at amateur meets is a legitimate one. I have gone to amateur meets to do exhibitions on numerous occasions and found that the Amateur Athletic Union would not let me participate while the amateurs were in the contest. I remember on at least two occasions it was after 2:00 in the morning when I went on, and I had been sitting there since 7:00 p.m. I found it quite difficult to warm up and even harder to get motivated to do any decent lifting. I did not go as low as I should have because of the lack of warming up.

The only other lead I could give you about Reno was that Ed Sullivan spent about \$20,000 to put a relay station on a mountain to transmit our program out of that mountainous country down to Los Angeles or possibly over to San Francisco. I did not get paid for this particular performance, because all the money was put into the relay station. This was the day before communication satellites, and the only way we could be on his show was in this manner. Back then they used the old kinescope, a cross between a film and the tape we use on television today. I do not know whether Ed Sullivan's old television shows were filed away at CBS, destroyed, or possibly lost. I think that they have built a new studio, and this is the reason I say they could have been misplaced.

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There were a couple of occasions when I lifted without receiving any real credit. I honestly recall that one time the weight was greater than my 6000+ pound backlift. Ed Sullivan came to California to do a program, and since I was living out there he asked me to be on the show. If you saw many of my television appearances, I imagine you remember the big round carousel that I used to do a hip lift. Ed Sullivan was exceptionally particular about the time required for each performance on his program, because he knew that there would be occasions when he wanted to extend an interview or have a person perform a little more. Because of this, we rehearsed my hip lift for the entire afternoon; I would say about three times. This was at the new CBS station in Hollywood, which is many, many years older now. In case you have not seen me lift it, I climbed the tower, which was about six feet tall, and then hooked the belt around my waist, which then lies over across the thighs to an adjustable hook. From that point I straighten my legs and lift the weight. I have done this countless times with various types of homemade poundages, and when you read my book, which will be out in the latter part of the summer, you will see a little funny story about this lift in the manuscript.

Back to the Ed Sullivan Show, Ed asked me how much poundage I was lifting on this carousel, and I told him about 2700 pounds. The people I lifted during rehearsal and the ones I thought that I would be lifting on the show were the June Taylor dancers. They were somewhat petite little girls and there must have been around eighteen or twenty. I cannot really tell you the number.

When I was called on to do the lift during Ed's program, which was live, the June Taylors came out and took their seats; then Ed called out the entire guest list to also squeeze onto the carousel. They were men like Jack Dempsey; George Raft; Harry James and his wife Betty Grable; and Jo Stafford, who had numerous hit records and was the wife of Paul Weston, who had a big band in the day of their popularity. I also remember there was George Sanders, a stand-up comedian who was a Clark Gable look-alike; a girl who stood on her hands while singing; and the magician who talked to the imaginary figure in the box. Let me say here without any disrespect that Betty Grable was not a small lady, even though she was built very well and still exceptionally pretty in 1957; and the beautiful Jo Stafford looked to be heavier than Grable. I cannot think of the others, but as you know, there would have been more on Ed Sullivan's show than I have named.

I had no choice but to hook up and lift the weight; I do believe it was heavier than the backlift that is in the Guinness Book of Records, but Ed Sullivan announced to the audience and world that I was going to lift 2700 pounds. I have no idea why he did not

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include the tremendous extra load that was added, but I guess the figure was already in his head. He was such a dear and honest man, he would have never deliberately done anything that would hurt someone.

This same thing had happened previously when I was in Reno. We started out the first week of our two-week stand there by lifting my dancers and the band. This was well within my capacity, because the stage was very small, and I don't think we had over six or so dancers. This also went for the band. Without my knowing it, the man who ran the hotel (which I understand has been abandoned and destroyed now), decided that we should have audience participation. The procedure then was for the girls to go out into the audience when I hooked up for the lift and each bring back a couple of men to sit on the large circle with her. This made the load a good bit heavier, but to my surprise, the band had not been told that they were not to sit on the carousel again; when everyone was seated, they came around and squeezed on also. There is a possibility that this was even a heavier load than on Ed Sullivan's program, because it actually pulled the flesh away from the bone on the top of my hip. I had to have two shoulder straps made and attached to my hip belt, to relieve some of the pressure from the injured portion of my anatomy. Fortunately, I have always been a fast healer; therefore, I had to wear the shoulder straps for only a couple of days.

Let's now go to the 6,270 pounds. This was rounded off, because it actually was a couple of hundred pounds more. The basic weight was a big manganese safe I bought at a junk yard when I lived in Tennessee. It weighed about 3500 pounds. Someone had tried to break into it, or perhaps lost the combination, for the back was cut out; so I filled it full of weights to bring it up to a greater poundage. The walls on it were very thick, and I was surprised at how few weights I could get into it. I then poured in concrete to stabilize the weights and add a little more poundage. My Dad had built the platform for me, and it weighed well over a thousand pounds, and the other poundages were made up of official weights.

I have always lifted with my muscles and have never been a tendon and joint lifter, like some of the old-timers who lifted a weight just high enough for a paper to be pulled out from under it. If I could lift it an inch, I could lift it four inches, and that's the way the 6,000+ pounds was moved. My brother-in-law was present and took some pictures, but we were in the yard, covered with two massive oak trees that cut out the light. He had a highly sophisticated camera which would usually take anything you could see with the naked eye, without using lights. The only thing he got was the platform and a darkness underneath. You cannot even see my outline.

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I did make one mistake when I did the lift. Back then I did all of my lifting in street shoes, except the deep knee bend which I did barefooted. I also did the backlift with the same type of foot attire when I should have had some kind of boot, or high lace-up shoe. I injured a small bone in my foot or the lower part of the ankle, which did not give me much trouble and healed easily, but I could have been badly injured.

Now I must do something that I dread, because it may sound like a cop-out; but you paid me such a compliment concerning my honesty and Christian commitment, I hope you will take what I am saying as the truth. It is only because of the circumstances that I have to pass this along. We had officials present. One was a man by the name of Foster, who lived in Oregon and represented the Guinness Book of Records at one time, or at least was a contributor. Another was Karo Whitfield and several of his friends from Atlanta, but I do not remember their names. Most of them were business and professional men and not lifters. Karo, as you have probably heard, had the first lifting gym in Atlanta, and he was the only one for many years. He probably brought the businessmen with him, because he never learned to drive a car and always had to depend on someone else for his transportation. When he went to a distant meet, if no one else was going, he would ride the bus or train. He had a certified official license for Olympic lifting; powerlifting was not yet established as a legitimate sport. A newspaper man was there, who came through our request, and as I have already said, my brother-in-law was also there. Unfortunately, he doesn't remember much about it, because he took hundreds of feet of film of my doing heavy lifts; that was just another day for him.

Incidentally, someone called my brother-in-law not long ago and asked who was the stage manager at the hotel where I lifted while performing at Reno. I don't know whether this was you or not, but I wanted to mention this before it slipped my mind. The first night I arrived at the hotel I asked to see the stage manager. I wanted to make sure we could put adequate cover on the floor, etc., but they said they really didn't have a stage manager.

Every person that I have mentioned, and there were many more that I cannot remember, are scattered to the winds. There was another gentleman besides Karo Whitfield, who said he had an official's license, and he was from North Carolina. I do not know the city he was from and never caught his name. I hate to have to say it, but all those I have mentioned, besides my brother-in-law, are now dead. The man in Oregon lost his wife, and I actually believe grieved himself to death. The newspaper man took his own life, and Karo Whitfield passed away in the mid-seventies; I understand the diagnosis was a heart attack.

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I knew the McWhirter brothers, who were identical twins, quite well. I did a program in New York which was attended by the surviving twin, whose name as I recall is Ross. I may be wrong about the first name; I never could tell them apart. He saw me do a heavy backlift there without using my hands, except on my knees, and said that there was not a doubt in his mind that I could still lift well over 6,000.

You may wonder why I did not have more of the news media present, but only invited a few to authenticate the 6,000+ pound lift. It was simply because at that time it didn't seem so very important. I did the lift for two reasons. One was that people would approach me with one of the books of superlatives and ask me if I was the world's strongest man, why did it list Louis Cyr as lifting more weight than anyone else in the history of the world? The other reason was that a fellow named Jack Walch, who claimed to have broken Cyr's record, challenged me to a lifting contest on the old Steve Allen program. At that time I had never done a backlift and felt that the competition lifts were the ones that I should strive to escalate. In turn, I did the Olympic lifts and the power lifts to build up my strength for the overhead movements. I did not know exactly what to do when I was challenged on national television. I knew I had to respond in some manner; therefore, I sent a wire to the Tonight Show, accepting the challenge and giving a list of weights that any opponent would have to do before I would actually meet him in a contest. I specified that these lifts would have to be performed before certified judges, because I knew that a great deal of ignorance would prevail among those on a talk show, as far as weightlifting was concerned. They could have mistaken a quarter squat for a full squat and done the same in all of the movements. I remember one of the preliminary lifts for qualification was a 1,000 pound squat.

I really didn't know how much I could backlift, but I soon found out that I was well-fitted for the movement. My family and I then lived in our original home in Toccoa, Georgia, which we still own. It is a solid rock building; consequently, any additions such as large screened-in porches are rather hard to make. At that time we had a large porch attached to the stone house, and I decided to try to lift it. I got under the porch, placing my hands on an old tool box which fit perfectly. My legs were bent just right, and my hands were stable on the big tool chest, so I pushed. To my surprise I lifted the entire porch, steps and all. I was able to do this, because it was not well-anchored to the house. I have no idea what it weighed, but I knew that I would have no problem in breaking Cyr's record or lifting more than the few pounds claimed by Jack Walch over the French Canadian's original lift.

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As you probably know, the Guinness Book of World Records was started in a barroom in England. The patrons were constantly getting into arguments about who had done what, or what was the biggest or smallest of everything. The Guinness Brewery Company sponsored the beginning of the book, which is where it gets its name. Of course, we have several other books such as The Book of Lists, The Book of Superlatives, and many more. They all give my heaviest lift.

At this point I want to make something as clear as possible: I do not claim any record in any powerlift. When I began doing powerlifts, I used them only to strengthen my body for the Olympic lifts. At that time the only "official" records were in an old English professional record book, and Herman Gorner was the top heavyweight listed. Please excuse me if I have misspelled his last name. I saw that his lifts were so low that I could easily break them and started doing exhibitions in all three of these lifts after I had done my complete Olympic triathlon. I am sure that someone will immediately say that Gorner did a tremendous dead lift, which is partially true. Those who have seen a picture of this lift know that he was lifting a fairly heavy barbell with men standing on the bar, with their weight leaning over on his shoulders. It can also be said that they were doing this just to hold their balance, but I do feel that the people's position greatly enhanced Gorner's performance. The old record book, which Bob Peoples in Johnson City, Tennessee, showed me, gave Gorner credit for a 600-pound dead lift, a 350-pound bench press, and I do not remember what it credited him with doing in the squat. In defense of this old-time strong man, let me say that bench pressing was not very popular in that day and time.

Many give me credit for being the father of powerlifting, but when I was doing these lifts, they were not recorded by any organization. The Amateur Athletic Union had not accepted them at that time. Everyone can rest assured that whatever records they set, if they hear that I have done much better, they do not have to fear a rebuttal from me. Of course, it is no secret what I have done in the power lifts, but this still does not make any of them official.

In regard to my kidney transplant, the first thing everyone thinks of when hearing about this is that I ate too much protein or used steroids. As you know, steroids did not appear on the scene until after my day. The kidney damage was actually caused by acute nephritis, or Bright's disease, which I had as a four-year-old. The doctor said I would not live through my teens, because in those days there were no kidney machines, and they were predicting kidney failure. The good Lord allowed me to live

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until I was almost fifty before my kidneys failed and made necessary the transplant from my loving sister.

Mr. Roark, I would like to make a stipulation here that I know you will honor. I ask that you not take any statement out of context from this letter. If you see something that you would like to use, please copy it down and mail it to me in a certified letter. I will let you know how I feel about it in the same manner.

It has been such a pleasure corresponding with you; I do not want to leave you with any type of misunderstanding, and certainly I do not want you to be offended by what I am going to say. If you use anything except my full letter without my permission, I will immediately send a copy of this correspondence to all of the other magazines. I ask you to forgive me if this sounds like a threat, because it is not. I only want to keep the records and slates clean.

During my active years, weightlifting was something like a fraternity, with mutual respect projected from one lifter to another. I pray this will be the future for our sport. Allow me to qualify the above by saying that weightlifting, like all other sports, has those who have never participated in organized contests, but are prone to make ridiculous statements regarding their abilities. Thank God these have been very few and far between. I have never personally doubted reports given by any legitimate strength athlete concerning what he has lifted or done in any recognized sport.

I have never openly attacked anyone in a strength publication and can recall having only one short-lived misunderstanding with another strength athlete, when someone else wrote an article mentioning his claims to various lifts in comparison to mine. Unfortunately, my name was also on the article, even though I never had a chance to see it before it was mailed to the magazine. I later apologized to this man personally, when he, his wife, and I had a really nice visit in Texas back in 1976. I was extremely glad to get this cleared up, because I think that if a man has proven himself on the lifting platform to the extent of breaking world records, it is quite feasible that he has lifted even more in training, or in exhibitions. In my opinion an athlete has about two good days a week, two bad days, and three mediocre days. If he happens to go to a meet on one of his bad days, he can "bomb out" and not even approach what he had lifted in the gym.

A few sentences back I said something about weightlifting being a fraternity, and I certainly do hope that we can return to a mutual respect for each other. I am not speaking of those we all

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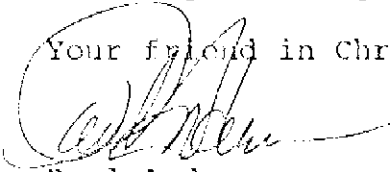
know are doing stunts that have little to do with strength. We have always just taken them with a grain of salt and said if they were as strong as they pretended to be, why did they not enter active competition?

When I started, I did not mean to write a book, but I did want this on paper in order that you could refer to it or later write me for more answers. If you do, please forgive me if it is a long time before I respond. I have had nine major operations in the last nine years, including the kidney transplant and corrective surgery on my hips which were injured in a car wreck in 1954. I have always experienced a great amount of pain with them, and you must also remember this was before I entered any major weightlifting meets. During my convalescence from the more recent of these health problems, I have had days when I do not feel like doing dictation.

I hope I have helped you in some way. I can understand some of your doubts, because there have been conflicting stories, and also there are those who would like to discredit me. I am never fearful of anyone who tries to harm me in any way, because first I belong to the Lord; and next I must say that I have knocked at death's door at least five times in the last nine years and actually died twice on an ambulance jet taking me to the University Hospital in Minnesota, when I was in a coma. When all of these things happen to you, you lose any fear of what man can do to you.

Thank you again for your extreme interest and all you are doing for weightlifting.

Your friend in Christ,



Paul Anderson

PA/vw

P.S. I thought I knew where every place in the United States was, but I don't recall St. Joseph, Illinois. Is it near Chicago? I am really sorry about the misunderstanding in the address. I think I just unconsciously said "St. Louis" as I dictated the letter. It's a good thing that we have zip codes.