

WHY SOME BODYBUILDERS RISK DEFORMITY AND EVEN DEATH

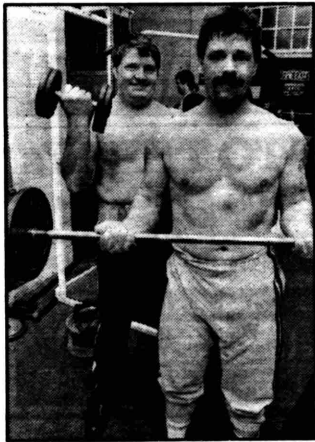
The frightening price of the body beautiful

WOULD SHAKESPEARE have written those oft quoted words . . . "woman, thy name is vanity" . . . if he knew what the modern day sport of bodybuilding held in store.

In sweaty little gyms all over the world grown men spend hour after hour in front of full length mirrors posing, preening, flexing muscles, bunching biceps.

If the name of woman is indeed vanity, to what name does the bodybuilder answer?

To find out you don't have to travel too far, because Ireland, and Dublin in particular, now reflects the growing interest in a sport that's destined for the Olympic Games. All over the capital bodybuilding clubs, with names that conjure up images of great warriors, proliferate . . . The Hercules, The Atlas, Pumping Iron!



WEIGHTLIFTERS: Richard Shakespeare and George Williams in action.

We're not talking your pristine gym, with the handpicked, slightly overweight clientele, that's fully equipped with hot shower and jacuzzi. Nah. Real bodybuilders wouldn't be caught dead in a place like that.

Real bodybuilders prefer little basements in back streets, where the sweat hangs in the air and the paint is peeling off the wall, a wall on which hangs discoloured posters of Schwarzenegger and the Incredible Hulk.

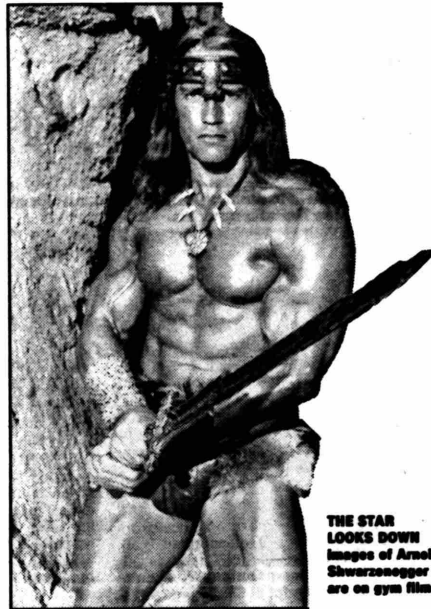
Real bodybuilders prefer dust to rise when giant weights crash on to the floor . . . not carpets and weighing scales and calorie-controlled diets! Some of them also prefer to take steroids.

Security

John is 25 years old. He took up bodybuilding when he was 16. He trains in a Dublin club where, he says, steroids are "passed around like sweets."

John trains six days and nights a week and has little or no social life. Bodybuilding means everything to him.

"If I could get a good sponsor," says John, "I'd quit work and spend all my time lifting."



THE STAR LOOKS DOWN Images of Arnold Schwarzenegger are on gym films

By RORY NAFFORD

His take home pay is £110, £100 of which goes on food and supplements. He makes some extra money on the side by bouncing for night clubs or doing security at concerts. But he makes most of his extra cash by dealing steroids.

"I get the gear from a guy in London. I charge a little over the price and pocket the difference."

Hooked

"I train and diet as hard as the next guy but I will never get on in the sport unless I take tablets. Everyone on the continent takes them."

Eight weeks before a competition John injects himself with steroids "just to give the system time to clear out in case of drug tests." He says: "A lot of bodybuilders get hooked on steroids and feel they can't lift without them. Generally, you feel okay physically, but mentally you're wrecked."

But does he not think the use of steroids will kill the sport?

"No one will sponsor us," says John. "It's not about sport anymore. It's about winning and money and getting to the top whatever the cost."



How the body suffers

WHEN Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson tested positive for anabolic steroids at the Seoul Olympic Games, it merely confirmed that steroid abuse is rampant in sport. Prolonged abuse of steroids can lead to kidney failure and heart attacks. It promotes the growth of cancer cells and seriously affects reproduction.

If men abuse steroids they begin to develop female characteristics, some grow breasts.

Bodybuilders use steroids because it helps them retain protein and thus develop muscle. But someone who bodybuilds seriously could use up to 20 times the recommended dosage of steroids which can lead to gross deformities and even death.

Drug squad detectives say steroids are a grey area when it comes to drug abuse. They say if someone is prescribed steroids there's nothing they can do, even if they're caught selling them there's little they can do.

Truce

The drug squad says if there were traces of a substance on the controlled drugs list, then they could make arrests. But as far as they know steroids do not contain any controlled substances.

But, according to Dr. Allene Scott of the National Drugs Advisory Board, steroids do contain trace elements of banned or controlled substances.

She says: "If a steroid or drug is not prescribed it may have excessive doses of an impure substance."

"Steroids should not be so free and easily available as there's always a back street manufacturer out to make a quick buck, usually at someone else's expense. They could put anything into their so-called steroids and there's no way of checking."

Blood, lie detector tests

TERRY FERRIS is the bodybuilding instructor in the Tony Quinn gym on Eccles Street, Dublin.

He finished second in the recent drug-free championships in England.

His is just one in a growing number of voices that maintain you don't need drugs to succeed in bodybuilding.

"Bodybuilding is harming itself with drugs," says Terry.

"There are few sponsors because companies won't associate themselves with a drug sport, it's bad for their image."

Just last year an Irish Association of Natural Bodybuilding was formed in an effort to clean up the sport.

The Association uses blood and lie detector tests to make sure bodybuilders get their muscles the hard way.

The association seems to be pointing the way forward for the sport, not only in this country, but all over the world.

Down in Lurgan Street in the heart of Dublin, The Hercules bodybuilding and power lifting club lies sandwiched

between a block of flats and a motorbike factory.

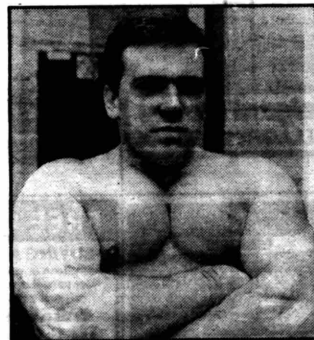
Inside, the atmosphere is warm, the camaraderie evident.

The club has produced some great weight lifters over the years who have represented Ireland.

Bill Stewart is the chairman.

"Everyone knows drugs are abused in the sport," says Bill, "but we have a policy. If someone is caught taking drugs they're barred for two years. If they're caught again, they're barred for life."

"So far," says Bill, "no one has ever been barred!"



■ JIM LYONS, left, from Monkstown has trained at the club for the past four years. He pumps iron six days a week and follows a stringent diet.

■ JIM SAYS: "This club has produced some great champions who achieved success the hard way, without popping pills, without cheating."

■ JIM has one overriding ambition . . . to get to the top in bodybuilding without taking drugs.