

# Mind over Matter: Mind, the Most Powerful Tool

**T**HE BODY WILL never fully respond to your workouts until you understand how to train the mind as well. The mind is a dynamo, a source of vital energy. That energy can be negative and work against you, or you can harness it to give yourself unbelievable workouts and build a physique that lives up to your wildest expectations. Whenever you hear about anyone performing unbelievable physical feats—Tiger Woods in golf, Michael Jordan in basketball, Michael Johnson in track, Hermann Maier in skiing, and so many more athletes—it is because of the power of their minds, not just technical, mechanical skill. And you can be sure you will never perform at that level unless you can match their inner drive as well as their physical abilities.

People can walk on coals when they are sufficiently motivated. They can endure the rigors of Navy Seal training. They can cross vast deserts, dogsled across arctic wastes, climb Mount Everest, swim the English Channel, bicycle around the world, lift incredible amounts of weight. They perform in spite of terrible pain, despite being ill, no matter the odds or the obstacles.

There are a number of specific ways in which the power of the mind can be harnessed to help you achieve your goals:

1. *Vision.* As I alluded to in Chapter 5, the first step is to have a clear vision of where you want to go, what you want to achieve. “Where the

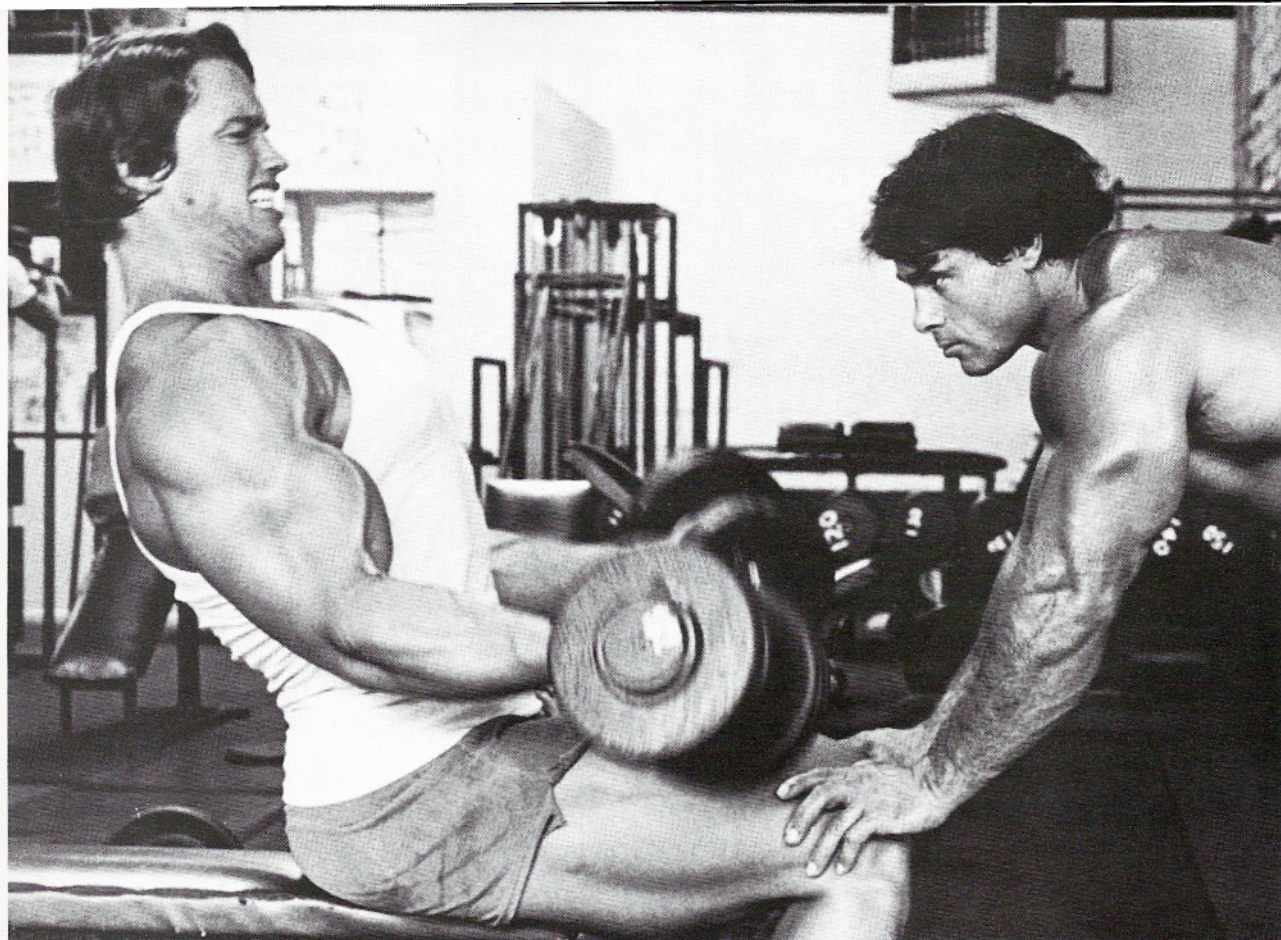
mind goes, the body will follow” is a saying I have always believed in. If you want to be Mr. America or Mr. Universe, you have to have a clear vision of yourself achieving these goals. When your vision is powerful enough, everything else falls into place: how you live your life, your workouts, what friends you choose to hang out with, how you eat, what you do for fun. Vision is purpose, and when your purpose is clear so are your life choices. Vision creates faith and faith creates willpower. With faith there is no anxiety, no doubt—just absolute confidence.

**2. Visualization.** It is not enough to just want to “get big.” Bodybuilding is more than that. It is about mass and shape and symmetry and definition. It is a kind of sculpture. It is almost like an art form. You have to have a picture in your mind of the kind of physique you need to build in order to achieve your goals. When you look in the mirror, you have to see yourself as you are—and as you want to be as well. You have to see in your mind’s eye the masses of muscle you will be creating, the powerful physique that is in your future. Focusing on such images gives your mind and body a clear-cut task, a well-defined goal to strive for.

**3. Role models.** I talked in Chapter 5 about how I used to study photos of Reg Park because he had the kind of Herculean physique that I wanted someday to emulate. I remember as I traveled in the 1970s with Franco Columbu how many shorter bodybuilders used to come up to and thank him for inspiring them to train for competition. A medium-size, aesthetic type could choose Frank Zane or Shawn Ray. Really thick, slab-muscled competitors can turn to Dorian Yates or Nasser El Sonbaty for inspiration. When you find somebody who represents your ideal physique, study as many photos of him as you can, tear them out of magazines and put them up on the wall, tape them to the refrigerator—whatever it takes to help keep your mind focused on the task at hand.

**4. Motivation.** Motivation is the driving force that allows you to develop a single-mindedness of purpose that ultimately gives you the will to go into the gym for two to four hours a day and put yourself through the most punishing workouts possible. It makes the difference between just going through five sets of this and four sets of that and really pushing your body to the limit. Motivation creates discipline. Discipline comes from the joy of looking forward to achieving the goal you have learned to picture so clearly in your mind and consistently hammering away, rep by rep, set by set, workout by workout.

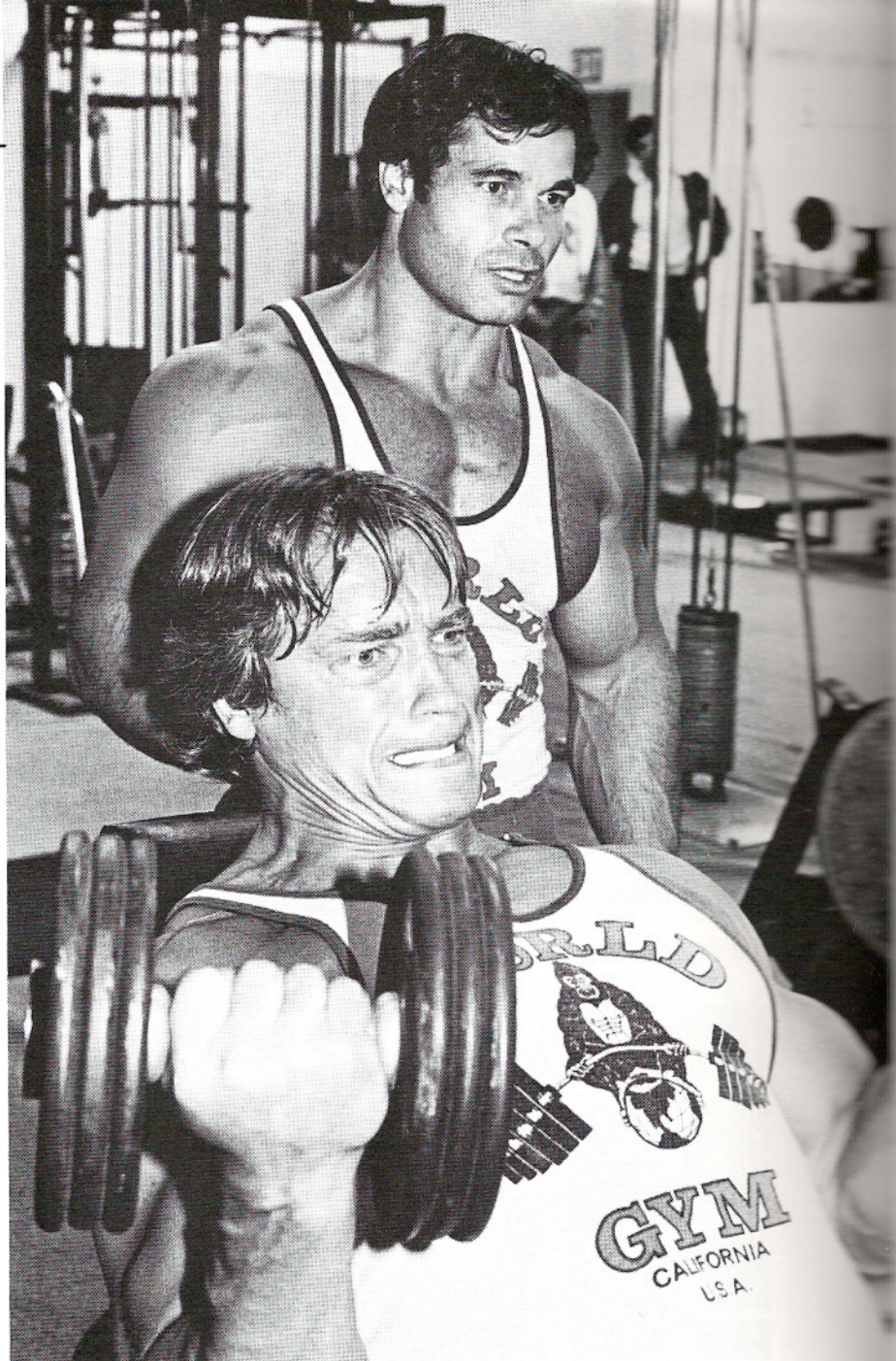
**5. Training strategy.** Beyond the act of visualizing the end product of your training, you should decide exactly what kind of development you need in each of the major muscle groups and what specific exercises and exercise techniques will achieve this. You’ve decided where you’re going, now you need to map out how to get there. This is the point where you learn to truly individualize your workouts, find out how your body responds to specific movements and Intensity Techniques, and decide exactly what strategy you are going to employ to create the kind of body you



*A little help from my friend—Franco Columbu was always my best training partner.*



*You and your training partner can feed off each other's energy, creating the kind of intensity that will push you beyond your limits.*



are striving for. In addition to this, you have to consider factors we have discussed, such as what gym to train in and what kind of workout partner will help you to succeed, as well as any other factors that can help you to have great workouts or can get in the way.

**6. Mind in the muscle.** The key to success in your workouts is to get the mind into the muscle, rather than thinking about the weight itself. When you think about the weight instead of the muscle, you can't really feel what the muscle is doing. You lose control. Instead of stretching and contracting the muscle with deep concentration, you are simply exerting brute strength. So you end up not working to the limits of your range of motion, not contracting and extending the muscle in a smooth, intense, controlled manner. For example, when I am doing Barbell Curls, I am visualizing my biceps as mountains—not just big, but huge. And because I

am thinking of the muscle, I can feel everything that is happening to it. I know whether or not I have fully stretched it at the bottom of the movement and whether I am getting a full, complete contraction on top.

## **BIG GOALS AND LITTLE GOALS**

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Along with the big goals you set for yourself—the kind of physique you hope ultimately to create, the competitions you want to win—you also have to learn to set smaller goals—day-to-day challenges, short-term achievements. Before you can develop 19-inch arms, you first have to build them up to 16 inches, 17 inches, and 18 inches. Before you can do a 400-pound bench press, you have to be able to press 250 pounds, 300 pounds, and 350 pounds.

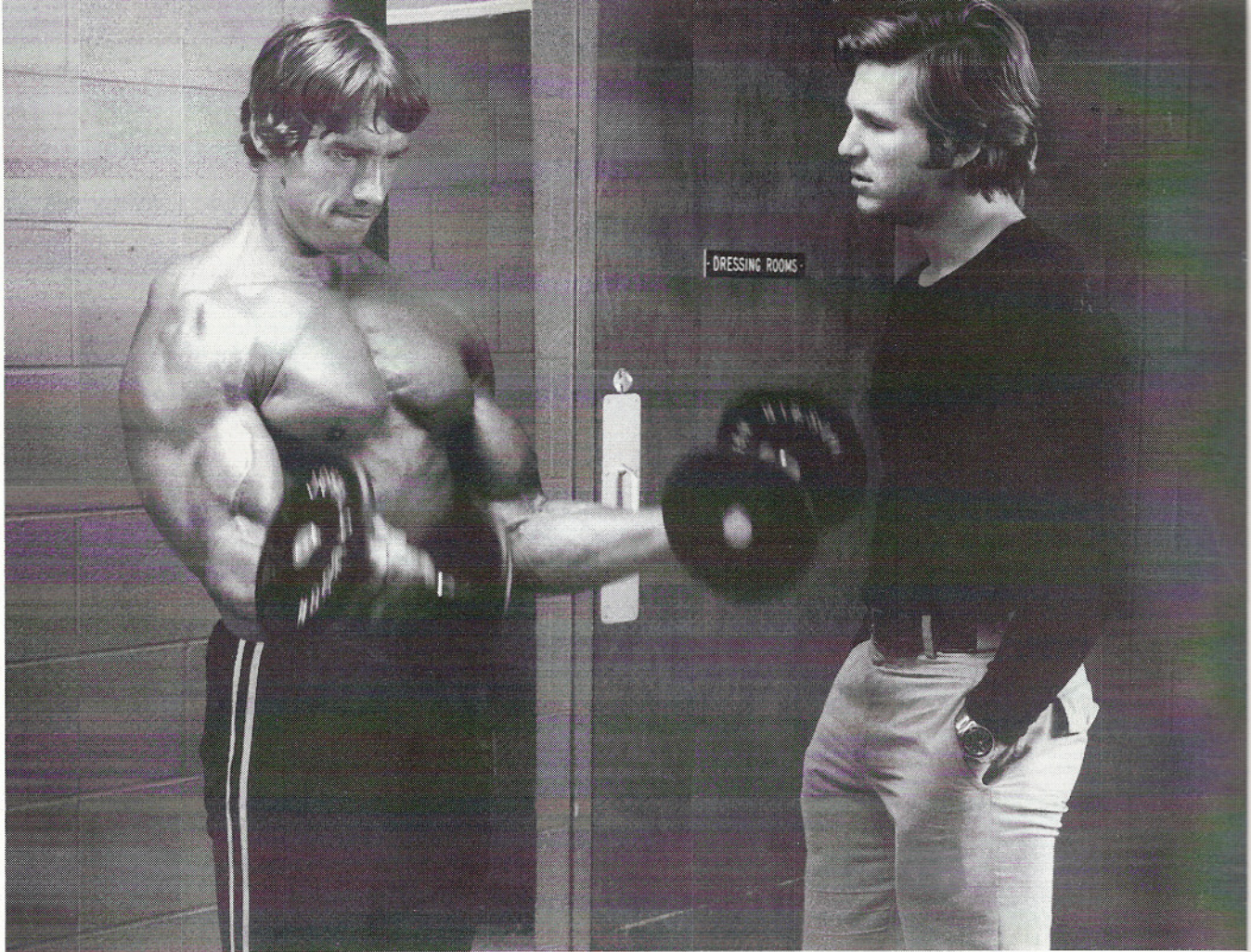
Sometimes focusing only on long-term goals can be discouraging. But as the old saying goes, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. I always had plans that covered different periods of time. My plan for the whole year dictated what I wanted to achieve in order to win another Mr. Olympia title. But I would also make plans that covered only a month at a time, and at the end of that period I would look back, evaluate my progress, and make whatever changes I felt were necessary for the next 30-day period. Maybe I wanted to pump up my triceps an inch or so, or take a little off my waist.

I do the same thing today when I have a movie scheduled. “Oh, two months to go before filming, I’d better hit the gym a little harder, increase my cardio.” So I recommend, instead of always concentrating on the far horizon of your ambitions, try to take your long-term goals and break them down into smaller, incremental, and more manageable segments.

## **LEARNING FROM FAILURE**

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Anytime you undertake any difficult task, you have to face the possibility of short-term failure, obstacles that block your path and have to be overcome. Failure doesn’t have to discourage you. It can be a great training tool. It defines limits for you, it instructs you as to which parts of your program are working and which aren’t. It tells you what step of the staircase you are on and helps to motivate you to climb higher. Failure is not what hurts the aware; it is *fear of failure* that most often gets in the way. This prevents you from really trying hard, from releasing all of your energies, from summoning up total motivation. In fact, it often helps to seek out failure! Train as hard as possible, find out what your strength and endurance limitations really are. Push yourself until you run into a wall and can go no further. “You don’t know how much enough is until you know how much too much is” is a phrase I have often heard. Once you experi-



*Jeff Bridges and me in Stay Hungry*

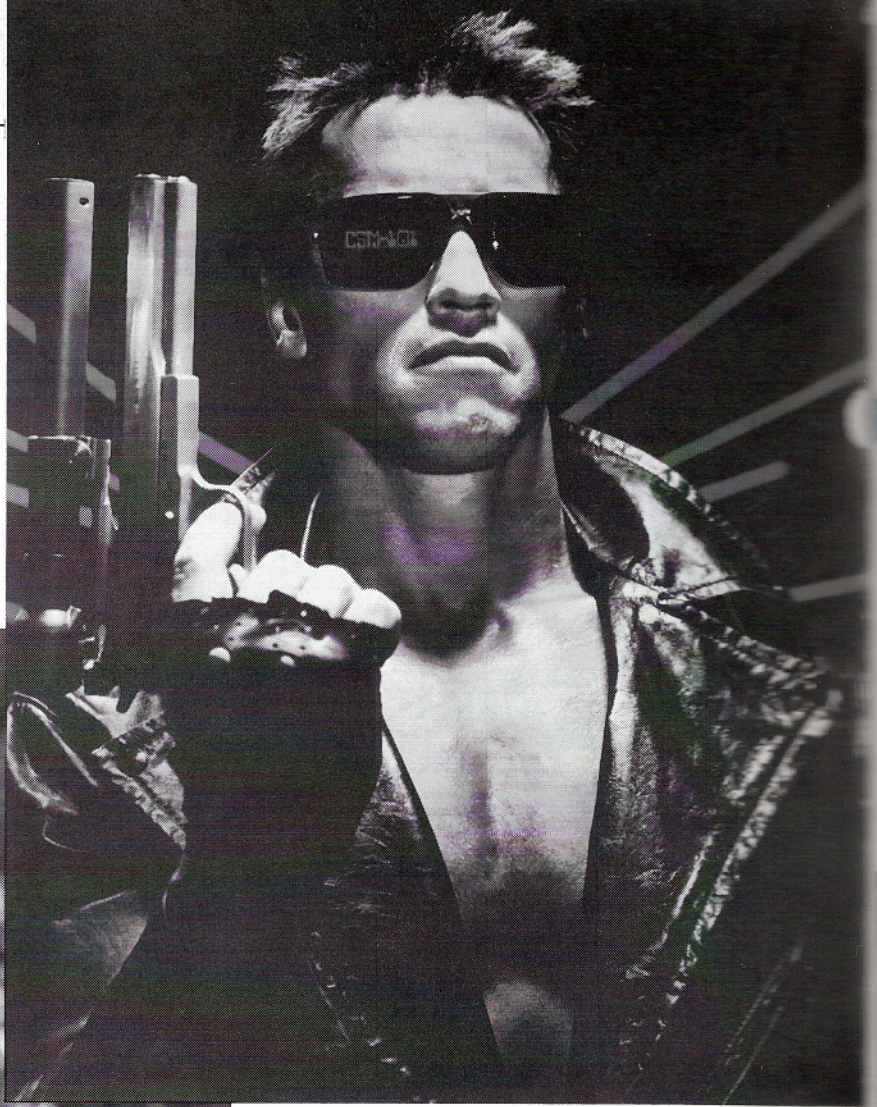
*Carl Weathers and I battle an alien in Predator.*





Conan the Barbarian

The Terminator



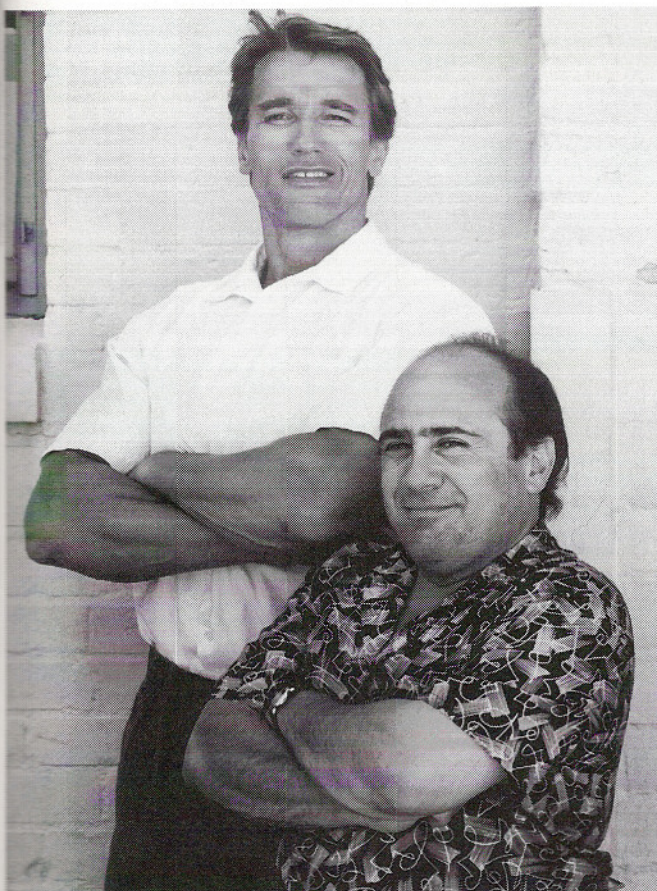
Commando



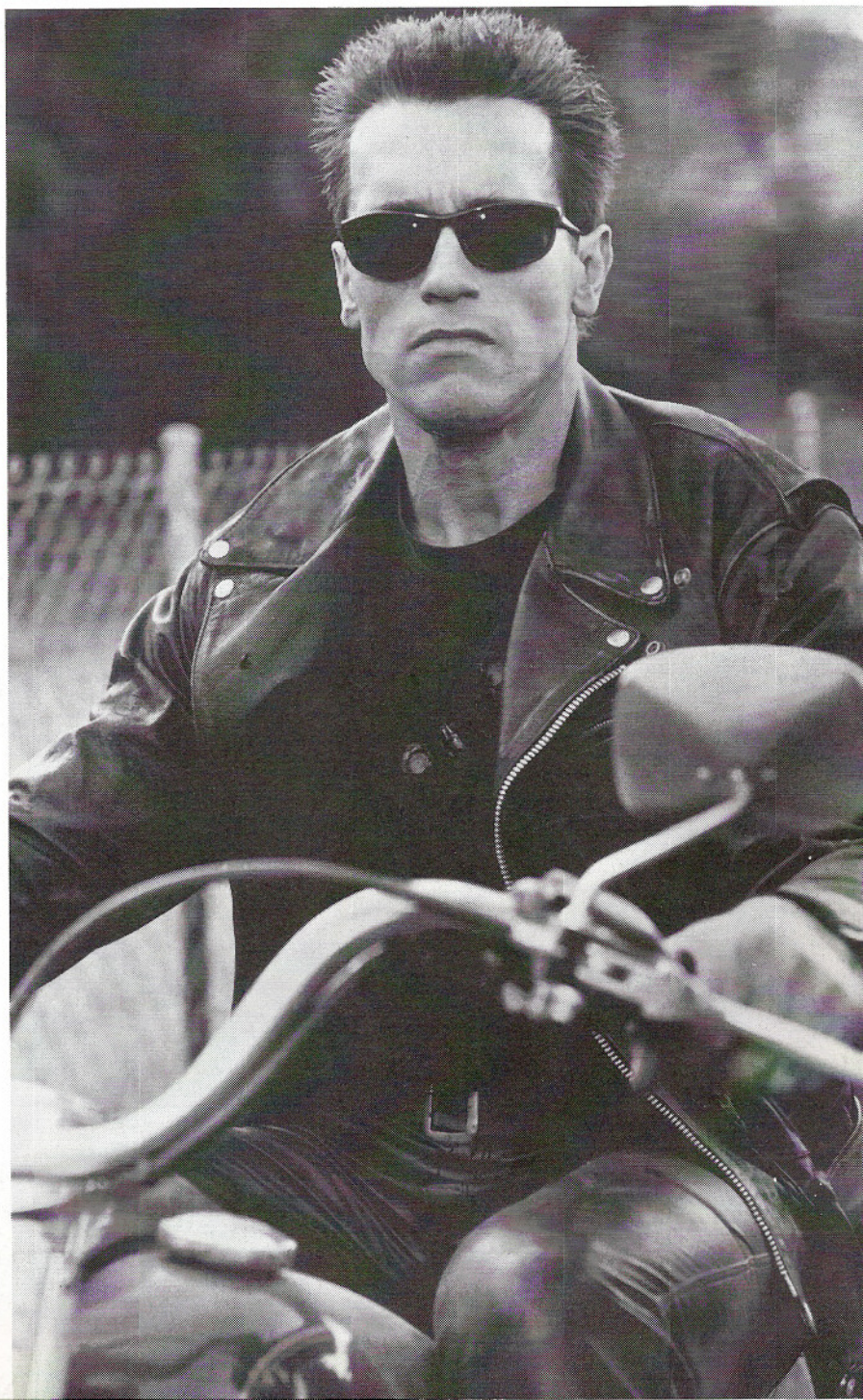


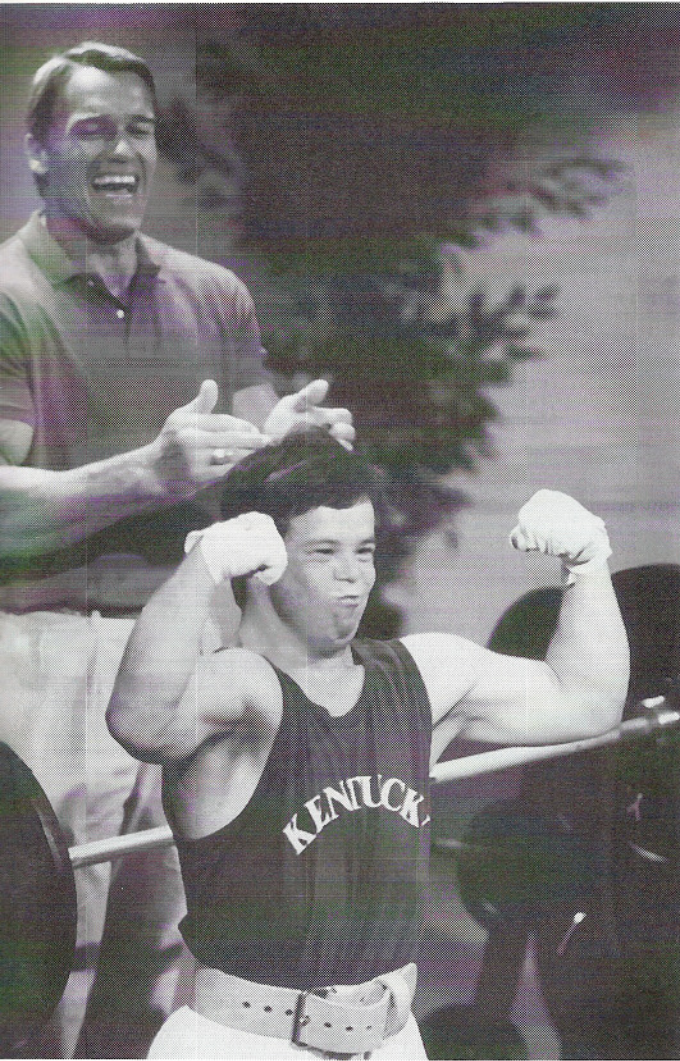
*James Belushi watches me pump iron in Red Heat.*

Terminator 2



*Danny DeVito and I played hardly identical twins in Twins.*





*I've always been proud to be involved with The Special Olympics. They are what sports are really all about—not competing against the other guy, but competing against yourself, concentrating your energies on achieving the highest standard of excellence you are capable of.*



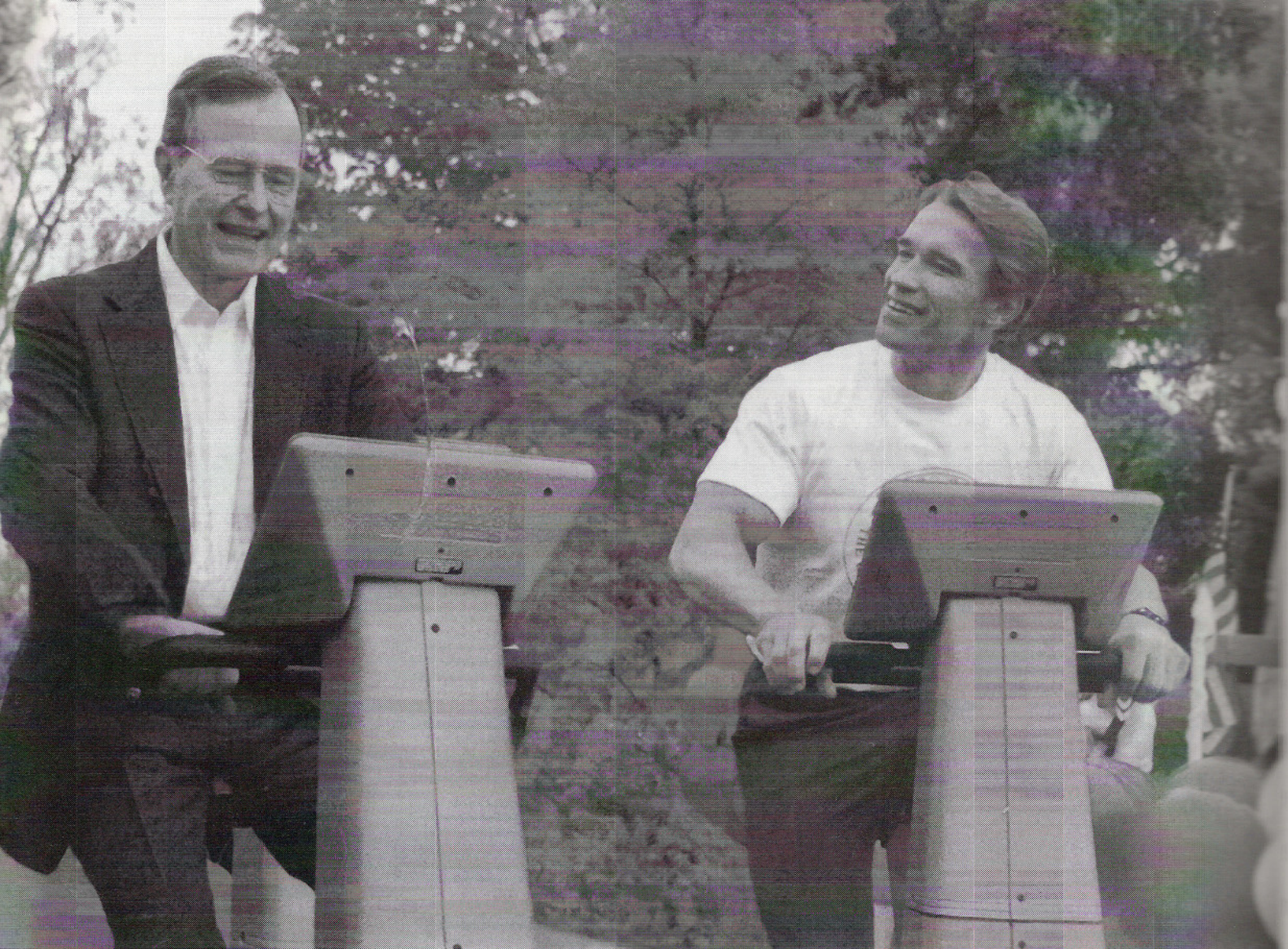
*President Reagan believed in weightlifting. He said, "This is real power."*



*Even before I was involved with the President's Council on Physical Fitness, I spent time working with the armed forces. Here, I was working with the crew of a Navy carrier.*



*Governor Pete Wilson and I do push-ups during the Great California Workout.*



*President George Bush and I at the Great American Workout, an event held at the White House to help promote the health and fitness of all Americans.*

ence failure—failure to lift a weight, to get through a workout, to place well in a contest—you will know much more about yourself and can plan the next stage of your training more intelligently. Learn from it, benefit by it, but don't be intimidated and fail to dare. You may attempt a lift you are certain you cannot make, but make it anyway! The satisfaction and confidence that come from stepping over your supposed limit is enormous, but it never comes to those who fear to test their limits.

## **MUSCULAR INHIBITION**

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When you contract a muscle, the brain not only sends out signals that stimulate fiber contraction, but inhibitory signals that limit it as well. This protects you from overcontraction, which could cause injury, but limits the amount of muscle being stimulated. Whenever you experience a muscle spasm or cramp, you are getting a taste of what would happen if these inhibitory signals did not exist.

Training progress happens in part because you are making your muscle fibers bigger and stronger, and in part because you gradually reeducate your nervous system so that it will decrease the inhibitory signals involved and allow for a stronger contraction. It takes energy to overcome this inhibition, to overwhelm the protective mechanisms. The more intense the imagery you use, the harder you concentrate and focus the mind into the muscle, the more you break through these inhibitory limitations your brain is creating and the more rapid your progress.

## MAXIMIZING YOUR MOTIVATION

All of us have certain body parts that feel good to train and respond easily, and others that we have to force ourselves to train and that respond reluctantly. In my case, training biceps has always been a piece of cake, while I never had the same great feel doing triceps movements. But a bodybuilder with competition ambitions can't afford to let this situation stand.

*Joe Weider and I present Flex Wheeler with a trophy at the Arnold Classic.*



He has to concentrate on putting the mind into the muscle and establishing precise control of every muscle of every body part.

But there is only so much mental energy we can summon up on our own. Good bodybuilders have to be intelligent, but training is not an intellectual exercise. The training movements are sensual, and the deep motivation that excites you and keeps you going is *emotional*. You can't just sit down and feel those things any more than you can deliberately feel that you are in love. In both cases, something outside yourself has to inspire you.

I remember working out with Ed Corney before the 1975 Mr. Olympia and on one particular day I just couldn't get myself into training my back. Ed saw this and said to me, "Remember, you are going to be going up against Lou Ferrigno in South Africa, and his lats are so huge that if you stand behind him onstage the audience won't even be able to see you!"

Needless to say, when I started to think about competing against Lou, and how good his back was, I couldn't wait to do my Chins, Bent-Over Rows, and the rest of my back exercises. Corney's remark had inspired me, given me an energy I couldn't create all by myself.

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## BREAKING BARRIERS

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When the going gets tough, it is always the mind that fails first, not the body. The best example of this I can think of occurred one day when Franco and I were doing Squats in the old Gold's Gym. Franco got under 500 pounds, squatted down, and couldn't get back up. We grabbed the bar and helped him get it back on the rack. Five hundred pounds for even one rep was apparently just too much for him that day.

Just then four or five Italian-American kids from New York came in. "Wow," they said, "there's Franco! Hey, Franco!" They were great fans, and were looking forward to watching him work out—only Franco had just failed in a lift and it seemed probable that he would miss it again on the next try.

I took Franco aside and told him, "Franco, these guys think you're the king. You can't get under five hundred pounds again and fail." All of a sudden his face changed. He looked at me with big eyes, realizing he was on the spot. Then he went out onto the street and spent a while psyching himself up, taking deep breaths and concentrating on the lift.

He stalked back into the gym, grabbed the bar, and, instead of the six reps he was supposed to do with 500 pounds, he did eight! Then he walked away coolly, as if it were nothing.

Obviously Franco's muscles didn't get any stronger in those few minutes between sets, his tendons didn't get bigger; what did change was his

mind, his drive and motivation, his desire for the goal. It was impossible to overlook how important the mind was in making the body do what he wanted.

## **HOW BODYBUILDING AFFECTS THE MIND**

We have been talking about the effect the mind has on the body. But the effect that bodybuilding has on the mind is also significant. Hard training causes the body to release endorphins (naturally occurring morphine-like substances), which lead to a mood elevation. There are many beneficial effects from the highly oxygenated blood that is pumped through your system. But bodybuilding can also have a profound effect on personality, lifestyle, and success in dealing with the demands of the modern environment.

Discipline is all-important to success in bodybuilding. So is the ability to concentrate, to set yourself a goal and not let anything stand in your way. But as much as bodybuilding demands, it gives back a great deal more.

I have worked with thousands of youngsters who wanted to become bodybuilders. I have taught weight training to Special Olympics kids and to prison inmates, and discussed the role of weight training with physical therapists, medical scientists, and the experts at NASA. And in all my experience I have never seen a case in which an individual made progress in bodybuilding without experiencing an accompanying boost in self-esteem, self-confidence, and enjoyment of life.

I had the same thing in mind when I helped form the Inner-City Games Foundation in Los Angeles in 1995. The mission of the Inner-City Games is to provide opportunities for inner-city youths to participate in sports, educational, cultural, and community enrichment programs; to build confidence and self-esteem; to encourage youths to say no to gangs, drugs, and violence and yes to hope, learning, and life.

Programs like the Special Olympics and the Inner-City Games work so well because a sense of self-worth should be based as much as possible on *reality*; you shouldn't just "believe" in yourself, but be able to point to real achievement. For these youngsters, and for everyone else as well, educating your mind, sharpening your talents, and creating a physically superior body are all ways of realistically enhancing your self-esteem. When you have a superior body, it is not egotism to take pride in it; egotism is when you attempt to take credit for qualities you don't really have.

Bodybuilding changes you. It makes you feel better about yourself, and it changes the way people treat you. It is an avenue open to anybody. Man, woman, or child, you can improve your body through proper training and your self-confidence along with it. Bob Wieland, for example, is a

Vietnam veteran who lost both legs in combat. Rather than treat himself as a cripple, he began training seriously in a gym and has since entered numerous powerlifting contests, breaking the world record for Bench Press in his weight class. Bob does not have to think of himself as handicapped; thanks to the benefits of training, he can rightfully claim the accolade of champion.

It has always seemed to me that bodybuilding is a good way to get in touch with reality. When you're working out, there is the reality of that cold iron in your hands . . . you can lift it, or you can't. That's reality. And then there is the progress you make. If you train correctly, you get results. Train incorrectly, or don't put enough intensity into your efforts, and you get little or nothing. You can't fake it. You have to face the facts.

The human body was never designed for a sedentary lifestyle. It was created to hunt saber-toothed tigers and walk forty miles a day. When we have no physical outlet, tensions build up within us. The body reacts to minor frustrations, such as somebody cutting us off in traffic, as life-and-death situations. The "fight or flight" mechanism is tripped, adrenaline floods our system, our blood pressure skyrockets. Exercise in general and bodybuilding in particular give us an outlet for these tensions and satisfy the body's need for strenuous activity.

If this is true for most of us, it is particularly evident when you are dealing with people in extreme circumstances—for example, prisoners serving time in penitentiaries, the Special Olympians, or kids forced to walk the streets of gang- and drug-ridden inner-city neighborhoods.

In my work teaching bodybuilding to prisoners around the country I have been struck by what an effective system of rehabilitation training with weights can be. Many men in prison suffer from a poor self-image, have found themselves ignored and overlooked in life, and felt trapped behind the bars of economic and social exclusion long before they found themselves behind real bars.

Many of these men have spent their lives blaming others for their own mistakes, rationalizing the behavior that has continually gotten them in trouble, failing to take responsibility for their own actions. All of this can change when they begin seriously pumping iron. The eventual achievement of getting through the set, building up the strength of the muscles, and learning the discipline necessary to continue making progress has its effect on the mind and spirit of the individual. Whereas many of these men had sought attention through antisocial means, now they attract admiring attention from people who respect their achievements. With this attention come pride and self-confidence, and this is one reason weight training has become so popular in prisons around the country. With the Special Olympians, the benefits are even more obvious. I remember working with some kids in Washington, D.C. One youngster was lying on a bench ready to do a bench press, while a line of others waited their turn. I handed him just the bar with no plates on it, and he freaked out—this



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kind of effort was more than he was used to or mentally prepared for. I didn't pressure him, but let him move off while I worked with the other boys. After a few minutes I saw him edging nearer, watching the others closely. Finally, he indicated he wanted to try, and I helped him press the bar three or four times, but he was still afraid and quickly got off the bench. But it wasn't long before he was back, this time with more confidence, and now he managed to do ten repetitions with very little help.

From that moment on, he was hooked. Not only did he join in the line of those waiting to try the exercise, he tried to push others out of the way so that he could have his turn sooner. In a world that contained so many frustrations and disappointments for him, this boy had found something to test his strength against, a physical barrier that could be approached and overcome, giving him a self-confidence usually denied him.

We are all a little bit like that youngster, only we possess enough ability and competence so our needs are not always so obvious. But they are there. All of us run into limitations, have to deal with frustrations and disappointments, and most of us realize that few individuals ever really live up to the physical potential that evolution has built into the human body. But mind and body are interconnected, two facets of the same thing. As the body's health improves, so do the health and strength of the mind, and bodybuilding is the ideal vehicle for achieving this necessary balance.