

Perfect Form

January 31, 2007

By Keva Silversmith

Over the last week, I've been pondering ways to increase the readership of [my blog](#). Today, as I stared into a grocery store's magazine rack, the idea hit me. If established fitness periodicals can use this gimmick to boost circulation, so can I. Flex magazine put on its cover a young Arnold Schwarzenegger.

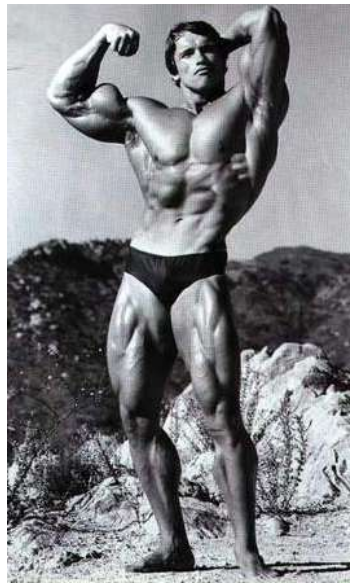
I've often thought about why Arnold continues to inspire fitness enthusiasts nearly three decades after his retirement from professional bodybuilding. He hasn't even appeared shirtless in a movie in any significant way since the early 1990's.

Arnold's main appeal can't be his size in his prime. Professional bodybuilders these days run thicker with better definition. Mr. Olympia 2006 stands 5'9" at 275 lbs, compared to Schwarzenegger's championship reign at 6'1", 245 lbs. Incidentally, this is no dig at Arnold. Today's gym equipment is better, the science of fitness is more advanced, and the, err, performance enhancers probably give you more bang for the buck.

In my opinion, the continued fascination with Arnold results from the classic, sweeping artistry of his physique. Many of Arnold's aesthetic gifts can, of course, be attributed to his good fortune with genetics. Take a look at his biceps. The typical bicep muscle terminates about an inch ahead of the forearm, while Arnold's bicep fills the entire space between his front shoulder and elbow. The same principle applies to Arnold's back. My lat muscle ties in around the middle of my rib cage.



Arnold's wings taper off virtually at his waist.



But there's a second factor at work: Arnold was a perfectionist when it came to proper lifting form. Beyond genes, Arnold's long, graceful lines are the result of muscles worked in a controlled fashion through a full range of motion. His superior lifting technique lengthened his muscles and engaged the largest possible number of muscle fibers.

Walk into a gym today, however, and you'll find people

performing all manner of abbreviated lifts: pull-ups that reach neither peak contraction at the top nor full extension at the bottom; overloaded squats that result in no serious bend in the knees; bicep preacher curls that stop a good 20 degrees short of straight arms. Excessive weight, laziness and all around bad habits have turned core lifts into a real live exercise in futility.

What was true in Arnold's day remains true today. Progress is not determined by how much weight you can move, but how much weight you can move with perfect form.