



IRON GAME HISTORY



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Love to the Outermost Farthing **AL LEROUX**

For all of his adult life, Al Leroux loved the weights. He trained hard for many years, he competed and he read everything he could locate about the game he found so fascinating. In time, he became a serious collector of books and magazines about weight training and over the years he amassed one of the best collections of magazines and films in the country. He loved the yearly gathering of Vic Boff's Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen Association in New York City, and he was happy in 1989 to allow Vic to show some of those films to all the other enthusiasts at the Association's annual dinner.

He looked forward to a long life of lifting, collecting and sharing information about the iron game, but in one of life's cruel ironies, this strong, physically active man was stricken with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. He began to notice a weakness in his legs—an unsteadiness—and he fought it as well as he could but no man is a match for ALS. Soon he was forced to go to the doctor, who diagnosed the disease and gave Al the grim news. We learned of his illness from Vic Boff, who told us Al was failing quickly and would not be able to come to the Association's 1990 dinner at the Downtown Athletic Club. We recalled our conversation with Al in 1989 and how much we had enjoyed talking to him about our plans to begin *Iron Game History* and to expand and refine our collection of physical culture materials here at the university. He was extremely supportive of both efforts and promised to help us in any way he could.

It was, therefore, not a complete surprise when Vic Boff told us several months after we learned about Al's illness that Al wanted us to call him and talk about his collection. Apparently, he was very

ambivalent about selling the collection and he continued to hold out hope that he could overcome his physical problems. But he said he wanted us to know that if something did happen to him suddenly, before he had had time to sell the collection to someone, he would like to know that it would have a home with us. We assured him that it would and we told him we hoped to see him in New York City. But as the date for the annual dinner approached, the news from New Bedford, Massachusetts—Al's hometown—grew steadily worse.



It seemed clear that he would be unable to attend the dinner; in fact, it was becoming so difficult for him to breathe that it seemed likely he would succumb to the inexorable march of the disease—which stopped baseball's ironman, Lou Gehrig—before the dinner occurred. But several weeks before the dinner, we got a call from Al's wife, Donna, who spoke to us for awhile, then passed the phone to Al, who whispered that he had found a way to come to New York City and that he wanted to meet with us and discuss the collection. We knew he would be in a wheelchair, of course, and that his disease was in the final stage, but we were unprepared to see how completely

debilitated Al was and what an effort he had to make to expel enough breath to be able to speak and be understood. Al was brought to the city in a special van with oxygen tanks and was accompanied by two attendants as well as his wife; no one who saw him doubted that he was in his final weeks of life.

The story of his valiant effort to attend the dinner honoring the game he loved so unreservedly had circulated throughout the room by the time Al arrived, and when he was wheeled into the dining room he was overcome with visitors who were, themselves,

overcome-some wept unashamedly—at the sight of this once-strong man spending his final measure of strength to be in the company of his comrades. Al had told Vic that he knew he was dying and that he might die on the trip to New York but that he wanted to be with his friends and colleagues one last time and to talk to us about the collection.

Thus it was that we found ourselves in Al's room, the morning after the dinner, hearing him tell us in his own faltering voice how much his collection had meant to him and how he had decided that rather than selling it in bits and pieces to other collectors, he wanted to give it to the Physical Culture Collection so it could remain intact and be useful to other lovers of the game. We accepted, of course, with deep gratitude, and Al seemed relieved to have the matter settled. He died less than 24 hours after leaving New York City to return home.

We have, of course, been given many other collections and parts of collections, but we know we will never receive anything in such remarkable, heartbreaking circumstances. We were humbled by his strength and generosity, we will do our best to honor his spirit, and we dedicate this issue to his memory.

—Terry and Jan Todd