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A Gala Evening: The 1996 Heidenstam Dinner

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Those who didn't attend the fifth annual Oscar Heidenstam Foundation Hall of Fame Awards dinner really missed an evening of first rate Las Vegas entertainment. Many who did attend said that they thought it was by far the most engaging of the annual events so far. Every time I fly to England on Virgin Atlantic to attend this great function I'm always very glad that I did. March 16, 1996 turned out to be even more entertaining than I could have anticipated.

Our main guest of honor proved himself to be a marvelously amusing stand-up comedian. It was an evening filled with hearty laughter. I'm sorry for those who missed it. It was indeed a gala to be remembered. David Prowse, who was the person in the Darth Vader outfit in the Star Wars movies, was present. When I competed in the 1965 NABBA Mr. Universe, Dave Prowse was referred to as the tallest bodybuilder in the world as well as the British super-heavyweight lifting champion. John Citrone was also with us and when he removed his suit jacket to get more comfortable his stunning muscular development was revealed. This guy is in fantastic shape for any age.

The dais in the Commonwealth Suite of the Hotel Marriott Heathrow/Slough was occupied by Heidenstam Trustees and Directors plus the main guest of honor, former Mr. America and Mr. Universe, George Eiferman. The ambiance at these Heidenstam functions is one of British and European cordiality and friendliness, which makes it a wonderful physical culture vacation experience. The evening program began with Malcolm Whyatt, who expressed his appreciation for the generosity of everyone in their support of the Oscar Heidenstam Foundation.

A special award was then presented to Mike MacDonald-Taylor, a talented gymnast and coach. Mike had a tragic motorcycle accident and after several operations he now coaches youngsters in gymnastics even though he's in a wheelchair. Colin Gilham was next to receive a special award. He developed polio at age nine and yet grew up to win many competitive bodybuilding awards.

Oscar Heidenstam President Ian MacQueen, MD. was then introduced to present an award to another laudable person in the world of physical culture. Ian said, "it is indeed a pleasure to speak about Don Dorans. Before I do so, I would like to apologize for those bloody

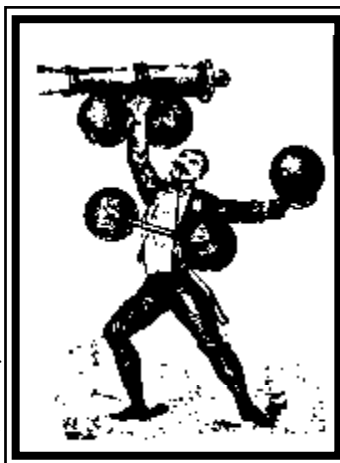
poor members of my profession who tell people like Colin Gilham that they are never going to walk again. They ought to have more sense." Ian continued in his fiery no nonsense style, "if some of them could come to these Oscar Heidenstam Foundation occasions they might have a different idea about the whole thing." Ian continued "Don Dorans, like a lot of the old time greats, started with a good foundation and interest in all kinds of sports. He was a racing cyclist

and broke a course record in Scotland and all that with one kidney. In 1942 he won Mr. Britain. In 1943 he came second in his height class for Mr. Universe at a time when John Grimek won the overall title. In 1950 he won his height class in the Mr. Universe. Don Dorans has also made many contributions to exercise techniques and he designed two pieces of apparatus which are commonplace today."

As we were preparing to start the introduction of the main bodybuilding Hall of Fame honoree I thought back through the decades and remembered how the classical standards of development were established by Mr. America and Mr. Universe winners and competitors from 1940 through 1962 or so. George Eiferman was part of that classical era—the pre-anabolic steroiders. It was an era when bodybuilders were interested in health as well as in strength. In the present era when steroid monsters are dropping dead in what should be their prime

years, we can look back to the pre-steroid years with great nostalgia.

Tom Temperley reminisced about the years immediately after World War II. *Health & Strength* and *Vigor* magazines in England as well as American publications *Strength & Health*, *Your Physique* and *Muscle Power* featured a bodybuilder with possibly the most incredible chest development we had seen. His name was George Eiferman. While Tom spoke, George, ever the comedian kept interjecting humorous quips invoking almost constant laughter from the audience. During World War II George joined the U.S. Navy where he was introduced to weight training. Later, when he won the Mr. Philadelphia contest, he was training in John Fritsche's gym. After the War he moved to California where he won the Mr. California contest and then the Mr. America title. In 1949 George placed fourth in the Mr. U.S.A. contest behind John Grimek, Clarence Ross, and Steve Reeves. In 1950 he placed second to Armand Tanny



for Mr. U.S.A. In 1962, at the age of 36 years, he became the IFBB Mr. Universe. During his successful career as a physical educator George Eiferman joined Armand Tanny, Lou Degni, Joe Gold and other bodybuilders as part of the Mae West Las Vegas show at the Sahara Hotel in 1954. Eiferman was well known for playing the trumpet while pressing a weight with his other arm. George is a talented musician and show business person. He has lectured on the benefits of healthful living in schools in an effort to steer youngsters down the right path. The audience applauded.

Now the real show was about to start as the microphone was passed to Mr. Personality from Scotland, Dave Webster, who is never at a loss for words and who makes sure that his every word is heard no matter where anybody sits. Dave, always magnificent in his kilts, delighted the audience with his whimsical recounting of George Eiferman's adventures and feats of strength in the United Kingdom following his Mr. Universe win. There were howls of laughter. Finally, he introduced George Eiferman as a great ambassador for bodybuilding and physical culture.

I think that we in the United States might tend to think of the English as being rather stoic and keeping a stiff upper lip and all

that stuff. Well, that was not the case this evening. Just try to imagine one great physical culture comedian introducing another. That is exactly what Dave Webster did and then George Eiferman, in a totally different style of comedy, almost had the audience falling out of their seats in unrestrained glee. It really appeared to me as though we would actually see people rolling around on the floor trying to keep from bursting with laughter. It was amazing. George Eiferman still looks physically impressive at age seventy and is a surprisingly good stand-up comic. He is still youthful which, in part, might be attributed to his great sense of humor and zest for life. There was no doubt that everyone who attended that evening was glad to be there. At the end of George's wonderful routine he sat for autographs and I have not seen so many people line up to converse with any previous honoree. George obviously enjoys people and people enjoy George Eiferman.

Afterwards, we finally gathered around the grand piano where, as usual, I lovingly caressed the keys playing requests from George for Ragtime tunes. Indeed, it was an evening of great merriment, good memories, and wonderful stories. I am sorry for those who missed it.