

Terry Todd
University of Texas at Austin

Bob Hoffman: A Personal Reminiscence

In the summer of 1978 I spent several days interviewing Robert (Bob) Hoffman, founder of the York Barbell Company, many times Olympic coach, and one of the most outspoken proponents of physical fitness in the United States. Bob was then nearly eighty years old but the drive and spirit that made him many times a millionaire were still evident as we revisited our shared past. As John Fair has just finished documenting in his new book, *Muscle town USA*, Hoffman was more than “The Father of American Weightlifting,” he was also one of the most significant figures in the American physical fitness movement of the twentieth century. He was, as well, a frequently outrageous character.

This paper attempts to provide some first person insights into the career and personal character of Bob Hoffman. I first met Hoffman in the summer of 1958, a few days after I’d competed in the national intercollegiate tennis championships. On the way home from the tournament, several of my teammates and I decided to stop in York, Pennsylvania, which was then known as the center of world weightlifting. Following that first meeting with Hoffman, his life and mine continued to intersect as I became more involved in weightlifting and rose to national prominence in the sport. In 1965, Bob invited me to work for him at York where for several years I was managing editor of his *Strength & Health* magazine, then the leader in the field. After I left York to pursue my academic career, Bob continued to be my friend and I saw him frequently.

This paper is drawn from interviews conducted in 1978, and my own recollections of our times together. It is an autobiographical history that should, I hope, prove particularly interesting in light of Fair’s forthcoming book.