

Starting Strength

The Tarheel Connection

by

Bill Starr

There were many factors that contributed to the resurgence of activity at the York Barbell Club in the mid-sixties. One that is often overlooked is the influence brought to the York Gym by lifters from other parts of the country. Olympic lifters in the various geographic regions seldom trained alike. The reason for this was rather simple: each locality was governed by a coach or lifter who had proven himself. Those who trained in that area usually followed the methods prescribed by that individual.

For example, in the Southwest, where I started competing, there were three competent coaches: Sid Henry in Dallas, Gerald Travis in Austin and later in Dallas, and Nat Heard in Houston. This meant that if you trained in North Texas, you trained like Sid and/or Gerald, who both followed basically the same philosophy, and if you resided in South Texas, Nat was your guru.

Lifters in New England turned to Joe Mills for guidance. In the New York area, Morris Weissbrot was considered the best coach. Chicago lifters were influenced by Clyde Emrich and Fred Schultz at the Irving Park Y. California lifters had Bob Hise Sr. in Los Angeles and Jim Schmitz in San Francisco. In Indiana, Dave Bjorass in South Bend provided help to Hoosier competitors. Next door in Ohio, Olympic lifters sought out the Barnholdt brothers, Larry and Claude, when they needed help. Norbert Schemansky was available for those living in the northern part of Michigan.

The South had a very diverse group influence the sport. Paul Anderson, as could be expected, headed the list. His ideas about heavy overload training was a big part of every southerner's routine. But Paul wasn't actively lifting during this period, other than when putting on exhibitions, so the real driving forces were others. Bob Crist in Virginia, Whitfield in Cairo, Georgia, Jack King in North Carolina, Stan Stanczyk in Florida, and Louis Reicke in Louisiana.

Of all of the coaches I have listed, Jack made the greatest impact on the lifters in the South, primarily because he was the only one that was closely connected to the YBC.

It has to be kept in mind that there were not any elaborate weight rooms available. For the most part, training was done at a YMCA and facilities typically consisted of a platform, squat rack, and possibly a power rack. Space was very limited so all the lifters did the exact same routine.

The York Barbell played a huge role in the training programs of Olympic lifters from one end of the country to the other, but this was always in the form of the written word. There was little or no contact with the York lifters themselves, except in the pages of *Strength & Health* magazine. Jack King changed this and in doing so he also changed the way the lifters in the South trained and performed in contests.

The Tarheel Connection

The King-YBC connection came through Kenny Moore. In the mid-60s, Kenny was the best middleweight in the South. Kenny was a high school teacher, and during the summer he made extra money driving truckloads of beans up north, mostly to the New England states. On one such trip, he and another lifter, Art Cole, detoured up I-83 to pay a visit to the York Barbell. That's when I met Kenny, and it proved to be a most fortuitous encounter. It set in motion a series of events that eventually brought the York training methods directly to the Carolinas, and vice versa, making the lifters at York well aware of how athletes trained down south. That interchange of information was mutually beneficial.

On the initial visit by Kenny, he informed me of a contest that was to be held in Boone, NC in mid-August. Bob Bednarski, Russ Knipp, and I had been wanting to lift in a meet to test out our training before taking part in the North Americans in the first week of September. But there just weren't any meets close to York that we could drive to. Boone was doable, and the three of us competed as extra lifters. It proved to be just what the doctor ordered for Barski and Russ. They both lifted brilliantly at the North Americans, which was the tryout meet for the World Championships. Russ defeated National Champion Tony Garcy and Barski finally beat his arch-rival Gary Gubner, and the two were the US's only representatives in East Berlin.

At the Boone meet, Barski and Knipp were mobbed by lifters who wanted to know the York secrets. Russ and Barski were both outgoing types and answered all the questions patiently. I was told later by Kenny that the lifters were very surprised at how friendly those two were, and it changed the minds of many in attendance that day who had formed a different impression. We also ran some photos of the meet and mentioned it several times in *S&H*, which also changed the opinions of the North Carolina lifters about the YBC. We made it a point to invite all of them to come to York and train with us. We would make certain they got to train if they made the trip.

Kenny took us up on the offer right away, making the long drive from his home in Lenoir three times that Fall. He usually brought at least one other lifter with him. Frank Saunders, a powerful middle-heavyweight with rough form, was his regular companion. They stayed with me and my family at my house on North George Street and were what Tommy Suggs called "easy keepers." All they required was a place to sleep and any kind of foot was just fine with them.

Then Kenny made a bold move, like many others from Grimek to Stanko to Garcy and Suggs had done. He moved to York, believing as had so many others in the past that if he could train with the top lifters at the YBC, he could reach his full potential. He got a teaching job at nearby Hanover right away. They needed a driver's training instructor and he fit the job perfectly. Kenny, like so many others from the Blue Ridge Mountains, was an exceptional driver. Having a job outside the Barbell was a big plus, since it meant he would not have to deal with Terpak or Dietz on an economic level.

Kenny picked up information at every session from Barski, March, and Garcy in particular, and at the same time, those who trained regularly at the YBC were learning from him. Kenny brought a great deal of raw energy to the gym. His approach to training was very similar to Russ Knipp's. He trained hard and heavy at every workout with the emphasis on gaining pure strength. There was no such thing as a light session in his program. And he had the innate ability to recover quickly and come back for more. What he lacked was technique, so slowly he began to incorporate more and more drilling on the three lifts.

Like Knipp, Kenny was an exceptional squatter. He would often step in behind Tommy and me after we finished our squat workout and knock out ten reps with a weight we had struggled with for five, without the benefit of any warm-ups.

The Tarheel Connection

Kenny could have easily been one of the top powerlifters in his class, but he disliked the sport with a vengeance, same as Knipp, Homer Brannum, and many other lifters did. They believed powerlifting was a sport for those not athletic enough to do the Olympic lifts. Ernie Pickett and I didn't agree with that notion, yet we could never talk Kenny into going to a power meet with us. His intensity in the YBC, and especially his ability to squat heavy poundages, spurred the other members of the York team to raise our expectations and work our squats harder.

But the role that Kenny played in elevating the quality of lifting in his home state wasn't so much what he did in the York Gym – it was bringing Jack King into the equation. At the '67 Seniors in Columbus, Ohio, Kenny introduced me to Jack. We hit it off instantly, and it was Jack's contribution that turned things around dramatically in the Tarheel State.

While Kenny was basically an introvert, Jack was extremely outgoing. He was an insurance salesman who had the ability to win over people readily, and was a staunch promoter of Olympic lifting. He lived and breathed the sport, putting on meets at the Winston-Salem YMCA and training anyone who wanted to learn the three lifts. Jack had the type of personality that drew people to him. He was friendly, anxious to help any lifter that needed his advice, and, surprisingly, an extremely funny guy. Beneath his seemingly staid, proper, polyester exterior lurked a natural comedian. He was a keen observer of people, particularly lifters. He could watch a lifter that he was especially interested in, and be able to do an exact imitation of their more idiosyncratic motions.

Bill March was his hero, and Jack could mimic him perfectly, from the time he chalked up to the completion of the lift, departing wave and all. He had Ernie Pickett down pat as well, but his rendition of Tommy was my favorite: he did a perfect impression of Tommy taking a drink from a fountain during a contest. Tommy was very aware that everyone in attendance was observing him and too great pains to pretend he wasn't. It was hilarious. And I wasn't spared just because we were close friends. He went through my clean and jerks like a mirror image – easy clean followed by a spasmodic jerk that had everyone in attendance in stitches, with me laughing harder than anyone. It was a bit eerie how he could copy everyone's moves.

After the Columbus Nationals, Jack began writing to me for training information, and then we talked regularly over the phone. He was eager to learn all he could, not just for himself but for all those he was helping throughout the state. When I kept encouraging him to drive to York and work out with the team, he finally relented and was immediately accepted by every York lifter due to his friendly nature. He would train with us while constantly picking the brains of everyone, even if they were not in the higher rankings.

He would carry what he learned back home and pass it along to all those who came to him for training advice. Which, it seemed, was just about every lifter in North Carolina and in the South.

One of the meets he hosted was in the middle of summer and a number of us at York took advantage of this opportunity to check out our training. There were no other meets within driving distance from York, so his contests drew large crowds and plenty of competitors. Tommy thought as highly of Jack as I did, and we always made the trip to his summer contests. After the first one, a gaggle of lifters jammed into our hotel room. They wanted information, and what resulted was an impromptu clinic that lasted to the wee hours of the next morning.

In contrast to Kenny, the majority of these young lifters lacked leg strength. Tommy outlined a couple of programs for them to do, and taught them as best he could how to use the power rack for isotonic-isometric holds to increase their leg strength. The next time we came to Winston-Salem, those same lifters came up to us, and in excited voices declared how many pounds they had put on their front and back squats. They were elated and desired more training advice.

The Tarheel Connection

So we began holding a clinic prior to the meets, with Tommy, Jack, and me answering the questions from the gathering of lifters. We in turn asked them about their current training methods and that helped us gain valuable information as well. It was very productive.

Jack put to use the knowledge he had gained and began making noticeable progress. He, like nearly every southern lifter, based his training on the philosophy of Paul Anderson – gain overall strength and spend some time honing form on the three lifts. But as he gathered more and more information from his trips to York and talking with the York lifters, observing their workouts, reading everything on the subject he could get his hands on, and finally adapting the various theories about strength training to his own specific needs, he began to make significant progress. Jack was 33 years old and had been around the sport for some time. Most assumed that he had stagnated since his best total had remained in the mid-700s as a light-heavy for some time. He gained weight, moved into the middle-heavy class, and his total climbed to 900. This raised a lot of eyebrows, as did the meteoric rise of his star pupil, Jimmy Bishop, a student at Wake Forest.

Under Jack's guidance Jimmy's total went from 720 as a middleweight to 910 as a light-heavyweight one year later. Word spread, and when a lifter needed advice he turned to Jack, who was always willing to help a fellow lifter.

The level of excellence began to climb in North Carolina. Johnny Roten became one of the best light heavies in the country, totaling 900, when there were only a half a dozen others doing more. Johnny's brother, Jack, also started running his numbers up, and lightweight Larry Ford made a big leap forward and was ranked in the top ten in his class.

But Tommy and I discovered that the lifters in the South seemed to have difficulty with actually entering the big meets. I made a long list of those who qualified for the Juniors and National Collegiates, and not a single one of them showed up. It was as if they had a collective inferiority complex.

I had seen the same thing in Texas, and so had Tommy. The lifters would not enter a contest because they weren't ready. They would wait until they made more improvement, then they would enter the bigger meets. Of course, what happened was they never made those much sought-after gains because they shunned competition. Competition is the spark that pushes lifters to extend themselves and make personal records at every level. Competition also helps a lifter raise his standards, to set higher goals and build confidence. These are things that cannot be learned in a gym – they must be achieved on the contest platform, and the more often a lifter can test himself in tight competition, the better.

When I talked to some of the fast-rising young athletes in North Carolina, they expressed the worry that they would perform badly. I told them, "Maybe you will, but you'll never know unless you step up and get your feet wet. And even if you do have a piss-poor outing, you'll learn a great deal. In fact," I added, "I think I learn more about myself and my training when I have a sub-par meet than when everything clicks just right."

So Tommy and I encouraged the lifters we came in contact with in Winston-Salem to enter any contest within a day's drive and, if possible, find one where there would be ranked lifters in their class. "That," we informed them, "will raise your expectations, because when you watch a top-level lifter do the lifts, it makes you realize that he's not that much better than you. He's only trained longer and harder. And if he can do it, then so can you."

Kenny had already caught their attention with his bold move to York, where he began lifting in all the meets that the York team competed in every year: Camden Open, Philly Open, Delaware Open, Middle Atlantics, and a couple of others, usually in New Jersey, New York, and Washington, DC.

The Tarheel Connection

But it was Jack's courage in this regard that really made them look at entering higher level meets differently. He started going to contests where he was certain to end up at the low end of the standings. And slowly but steadily he began making marked improvement and moving up the strength ladder. This made the lifters think, "If that old man can do it, then so can I." This was his intent, to show them, not with words but with action.

He also made it very clear to his now long list of pupils that he would only train them if they agreed to go to all the contests in the area, meaning Virginia, DC, and Georgia. There was nothing going on in South Carolina at the time, and Florida was a bit too far away for most of the North Carolina athletes.

What made Jack rather special was that he always wanted to expand his knowledge on all facets of strength training, and he wasn't shy about seeking advice. He called me regularly to ask how to deal with some problem he had encountered, or one of his trainee's, programs. I would tell him what I thought best to do and he would follow my suggestions. What he didn't know was that I was just grabbing an idea off the top of my head. I had no idea whether what I had told him would actually work – what I was actually doing was using him to test my training theories. I even told him this, and he replied that he didn't care because the information I gave him always seemed to work.

I recall one occasion where he said his squats were stuck and had been for the last few months, and he wanted to try something different. I thought about his problem for a few short minutes, then gave him a routine that I believed would help him break through his sticking point. He said he would start on that routine the following week and I forgot all about it.

A month later, Jack called me again and he was in high spirits. He had added twenty pounds to his back squat using that routine. I was happy for him, but a bit surprised. I had no idea what I had told him to do, and since my own back squat had stagnated I asked him to write down what he had done and send it to me. I confessed that I had just thought up that program and couldn't recall what I had said to him a month ago. He got a huge laugh out of that. When I got the program from him I put it to use right away and it did help move my squat upward again.

This shows that progress has a great deal to do with having faith in the person who is training you – such as I had with Sid Henry in Dallas. That was another attribute that made Jack an excellent coach. He exuded confidence in himself and his training methods, and the more people he trained, the more proficient he became in dealing with all levels of strength athletes.

And Jack didn't mind in the least being a guinea pig to test some of my ideas about training. In fact, he welcomed them. Over time, Jack was able to modify the various training methods used by others to fit his individual needs. This is something that few are able to do successfully. Most want the information handed to them and are unable to make subtle changes for themselves and those they are training. Learning how to adapt is a vital aspect of getting stronger and helping others improve their strength.

Jack started coming to York more and more frequently. He would drive up on Friday night after he got off work, spend the night at my house, train with the York team on Saturday, stay over, then drive home on Sunday. The entire time, other than when he was on the road alone, he sought information on training. We would talk far into the night Friday and Saturday and he would corner lifters at the Saturday sessions and bombard them with questions. He simply couldn't get enough input on the subject of strength training. He won Hoffman over easily. All he had to do was butter up Daddy, and he was good at that – it's the number-one skill of any good salesman. Hoffman was so impressed with the "young man from North Carolina" that he gave him a special invitation to attend his next birthday

The Tarheel Connection

celebration on November 9th. Jack was the only person that was not part of the inner circle of Hoffman's cronies to receive such an invitation, which raised his stock in the weightlifting community even more.

Because of the mention of the Winston-Salem meet in *S&H*, it went from being an average contest to one that drew a large number of athletes from as far away as Florida. For many of us at York, it was a greatly anticipated show in the summer, an ideal time to test our lifts and get in the groove for the upcoming fall and winter season.

Bob Crist would bring a full team down from Virginia and serve as a judge. Bob also talked two of the most recognized officials in the sport, Morris Weissbrot and Rudy Sablo, to come to Winston-Salem as well. Barry Whitcomb and Roman Miliec, representing the YBC, did some of their best lifting at this contest.

Ernie Pickett used it as a test meet prior to the '68 Olympic Trials and pressed 470, in excess of the World Record. Crist gave him a white light, but Rudy and Morris turned him down, saying the bar stopped on the way up – a stupid ruling. Had it passed, it would have been a landmark accomplishment for the state. No lifter had ever set a World Record in North Carolina. The Roten brothers were regulars, and Kenny Moore made it a homecoming and did well before his many friends and fans. It was also a not-to-miss meet for Tommy and me, and our clinics with Jack were very well received.

The contestant who traveled the greatest distance was Bobby Hise. He hitchhiked from Los Angeles to Winston-Salem to be a part of the contest and hang out with Tommy. He didn't bring a single piece of lifting gear and had to borrow everything from shoes to belt, yet he turned in a masterful performance, posting his lifetime best total, 955 at 181, and walked off with "Best Lifter" trophy.

This is the contest where I met John Coffee, Bob Neff, and Harvey Newton. All three eventually had a great influence on Olympic lifting in their regions.

But in all honesty, one of the main reasons I always took part in this competition was so I could spend time with Jack and have him entertain us after the contest. All the York lifters would gather in a motel room and turn the floor over to Jack. We would laugh until tears ran down our faces and encourage him to provide us with more imitations of the Winston-Salem Y. The best year was when Ernie competed and he and Jack shared the floor, trying to outdo one another.

Ernie had a thirty-minute bit about an extremely cheap employee he worked with at the Continental Can Company in Baltimore. The very stingy older man was a janitor, a Russian Jew, who gave frugality a whole new meaning. He never packed a lunch; instead, he would go through the garbage after everyone ate their lunches and eat whatever they had discarded. To save on the water bill at his apartment he would stand in a water spray which was intended for the workers to wash their hands, and bathe.

When Ernie had everyone rolling on the floor as he described the odd behavior of this little man, he would end with the story of the safety shoes. Two shoes were put on display to show workers what they should be wearing, but knowing that they might be stolen, those in charge put two left shoes in the display case. This didn't deter the janitor in the least. He walked about the building in two left shoes, not caring that he was being laughed at by all the other workers.

By the time Jack and Ernie ran out of material, their audience would be totally exhausted from laughing so much. Even when my lifting didn't go as planned, I always left Winston-Salem with a smile on my face.

The Tarbeel Connection

While it was Kenny who got the ball rolling with his brave move to York, it was Jack who singlehandedly changed the way Olympic lifters trained in North Carolina and encouraged them to take part in national-level contests. Jack was always willing to provide advice to any lifter who sought him out, and over time he became one of the most knowledgeable strength and bodybuilding coaches in the country. His influence spilled over to neighboring states as well, and helped elevate the quality of lifting all over the South. He was truly one of the movers and shakers in the country, and his dedication to Olympic lifting was an inspiration to all of us at York.

[Starting Strength](#) : [Resources](#) : [Articles](#) : [Forums](#) : [Discuss This Article](#)

Copyright 2014 The Aasgaard Company. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by copyright law.