

# OLD-SCHOOL PRACTICES FOR NEW-WORLD GROWTH

By **ELLINGTON DARDEN**

**I**'ve been involved with bodybuilding for more than 50 years. When I think back on the people who influenced me most, it's not Jay Cutler, Ronnie Coleman or even Arnold Schwarzenegger – all of whom won the Mr. Olympia. It's the golden-age physiques of Clancy Ross, Steve Reeves, Red Lerille, Boyer Coe and Casey Viator – all winners of the AAU Mr. America contest.

Many of the training tips that captured me as a teenager and a young man seem lost or forgotten by today's bodybuilders. It's a shame because there's a treasure trove of muscle-building insight that lies in waiting for those who study history. Sometimes you have to look back to move forward. Here are three old-school practices – and one brand new connection – that, when properly applied, can mean additional progress to your training.

## 1. RIBCAGE EXPANSION: SQUATS AND PULLOVERS

You almost never see the ribcage development on bodybuilders today that you did on the bodybuilders of 40 to 50 years ago. Most of the current champions tend to concentrate more on their pectoral muscles and less on their ribcage. It's time to recognise that enlarging the ribcage can do more to deepen the chest than thickening the pecs can ever do.

When I first started weight training in 1958, I wanted to gain bodyweight. Almost every piece of literature I could find on the subject discussed the importance of stretching and expanding your ribcage so your torso could support more muscle. The suggested way to do this was by doing squats immediately followed by straight-arm pullovers. Some people called them breathing squats and breathing pullovers.

Well, let me tell you, those squats and pullovers were instrumental in me putting on 25 pounds of bodyweight and adding five inches on my chest – all in one summer. I also added a couple of inches on each of my thighs. One of the secrets to getting great results was not only combining squats with pullovers, but also the specific way that you were recommended to breathe during the exercises. Let's examine each movement.

**Breathing squats:** Place a barbell on a squat rack and load it with a moderately heavy weight. Position the bar behind your neck across your trapezius muscles and hold the bar in place with your hands. Straighten your legs to lift the bar off the rack and move back one step. Place your feet shoulder-width apart, toes angled slightly outwards.

Take a deep breath and lower your body until your hamstrings firmly come into contact with your calves. Return

smoothly to the top position and exhale. Take another deep breath and continue for eight reps. It's important that you inhale and exhale only once per rep. Don't stop just yet, however. Keep the barbell on your back. You must progress to the next phase.

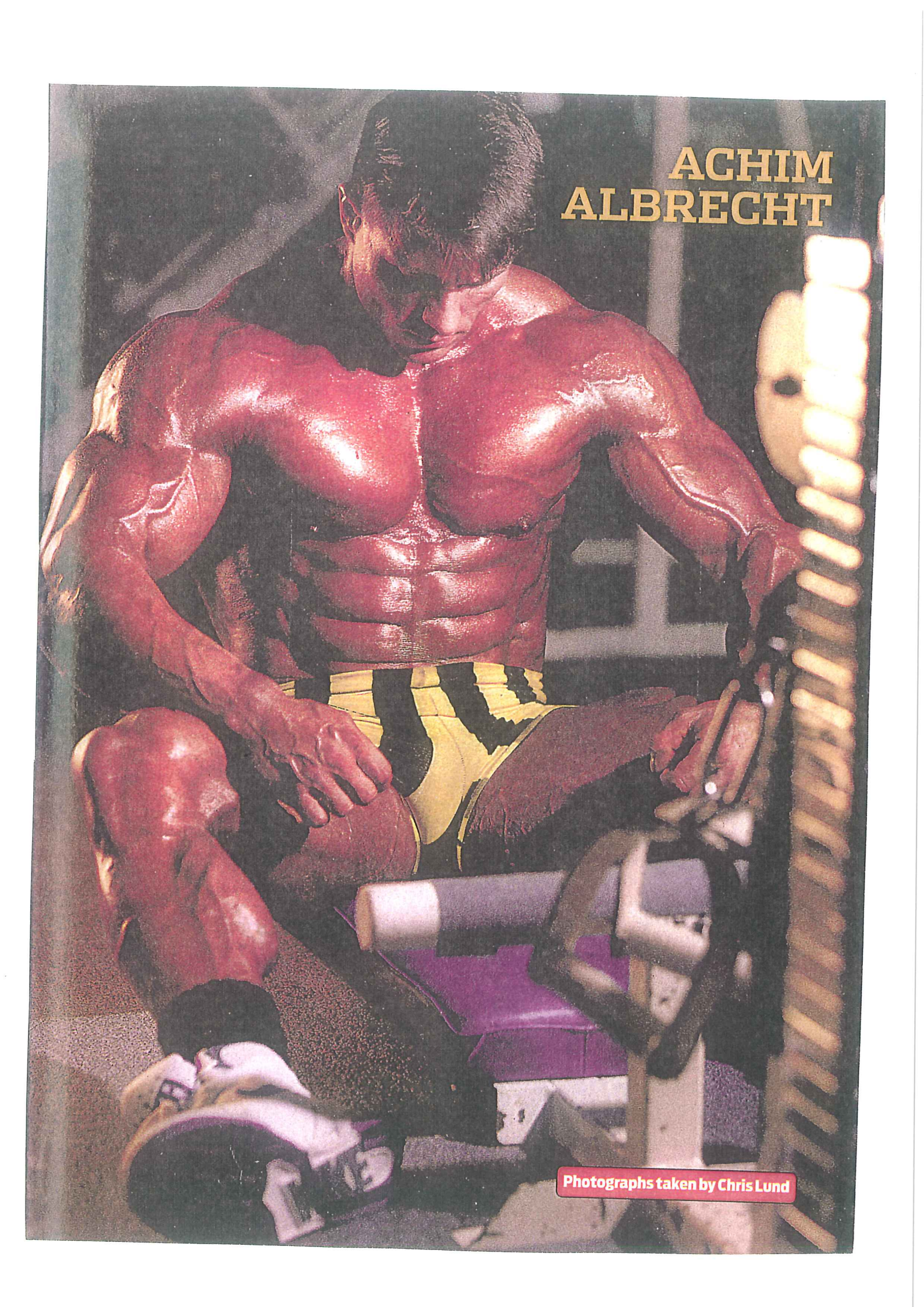
Beginning with the ninth rep, take two deep breaths between reps rather than only one. Continue for another 7 reps, if possible – or 15 reps in total. As soon as you finish your final rep, immediately do breathing pullovers.

**Breathing pullovers:** Pullovers are a terrific ribcage exercise, especially if you do them after squats. Again, you'll be emphasising the same breathing pattern.

Lie crossways on a low bench. Hold a dumbbell on one end with your palms on the inside handle area of the weight plates. Extend your head slightly off the bench, with the dumbbell over your chest and your elbows straight.

Take a deep breath and lower the dumbbell behind your head and try to touch the floor. Keep your arms as straight as possible. As the dumbbell approaches the floor, drop your buttocks a little while keeping your feet together and legs relatively straight. You'll have a slight arch in your middle and lower back and you'll feel an unusual pull throughout your torso in this bottom stretch. Lift the dumbbell slowly back to the over-chest position.





# ACHIM ALBRECHT

Photographs taken by Chris Lund



Practise one deep breath during each of the first eight reps, and two deep breaths – and hold the second one – during reps 9 to 15.

It will require several learning sessions using moderate resistance to get the hang of breathing squats and breathing pullovers but within two weeks, you should be able to progress to heavier and heavier weights in both.

Note: You may substitute the leg press machine for the squat. Also, in place of the squat, some trainees experience good results using trap-bar deadlifts or regular deadlifts. Just be sure and perform the breathing in the same style.

For an intermediate bodybuilder, your goal is to accomplish the breathing squat with 225 pounds and the breathing pullover with 45 pounds. Keep working hard and try to increase the resistance – while adhering to strict form.

When you can do the breathing squats with 315 pounds and the breathing pullovers with 65 pounds – both for 15 reps – you'll have a ribcage that will be wide, thick, and deep.

## 2. BOTTOM-FOCUSED CALF RAISES

Are your calves stalled at a certain level of development? Here's a neat technique that I learned from Dan Ilse, who won Mr. Texas in 1961. Dan was 5' 10" tall and weighed 200 pounds, and he had impressive, diamond-shaped, 18-inch calves.

Ilse thought the key to stimulating calf growth was to pay more attention to the stretched position than the contracted position and he emphasised the stretch in a unique way. He divided the standard calf raise into two parts: the bottom half and the top half. He began his set by doing 12 bottom-half reps; followed by 12 top-half reps; followed by 12 bottom-half reps.

Overall, he performed twice as many bottom-half reps as he did top-half reps. When he could do 15 reps in each of the three divisions, he upped the resistance. Try the bottom-focused

movements the next time you do calf raises and see if they don't make a difference in your growth stimulation.

## 3. ACCENTUATE THE NEGATIVE

Before 1972, bodybuilders paid no attention to the negative, eccentric, or lowering phase of an exercise. We performed the positive or lifting part of each exercise with reasonable focus. The negative phase, however, was done mindlessly and sometimes, just dropped.

In the spring of 1972, Arthur Jones – who invented Nautilus equipment – challenged bodybuilders to not think in terms of how much they could lift, but in terms of how much they could lower.

Thanks to Jones's pioneering work, almost every bodybuilder today has used 'negatives' at the end of a set. Negatives are done in several ways, usually with a spotter. After the last rep, for instance, a spotter helps lift the weight and the trainee continues the lowering (since he's 40 per cent stronger negatively than positively) for several more reps. Or, instead of assisting with the lifting at the end, the spotter supplies hand resistance carefully to the barbell or machine for another rep or two.

The above techniques are only two aspects of eccentrics that Jones explored. A more productive style, but mostly neglected now, involved what Jones called negative-only training, where he eliminated the positive phase of the exercise as much as possible and honed in exclusively on the negative.

Jones tried throughout the 1970s to develop machines that involved foot pedals so you could do the heavier-than-normal lifting with your legs and the lowering with only your arms and torso. His attempts proved to be cumbersome and complex. Overall, nothing worked better for the arms and torso than placing a bench under a chinning bar or parallel bars and performing negative chins and negative dips.

The concept involved attaching addi-

tional weight around the waist with a wide belt, chain and dumbbell. Then, it was the trainee's job to climb (by stepping on the bench) to the high position of a chin-up or dip, stabilise the body, lower smoothly from the top to the bottom, and repeat for 6 to 10 reps. This was a nifty home-gym way to use the legs to force the upper body to work heavier and harder.

The object of any negative-only exercise is to lower the weight slowly, very slowly, but without interrupting the downward movement. At the start of a negative exercise, you should be able to stop the downward movement if you try, but do not try. After 5 or 6 reps you should be unable to stop downward movement no matter how hard you try. However, you should still be able to guide it in a slow, steady, smooth descent. Finally, after 2 or 3 more reps you should find it impossible to stop the downward acceleration. At that moment, you should terminate the exercise.

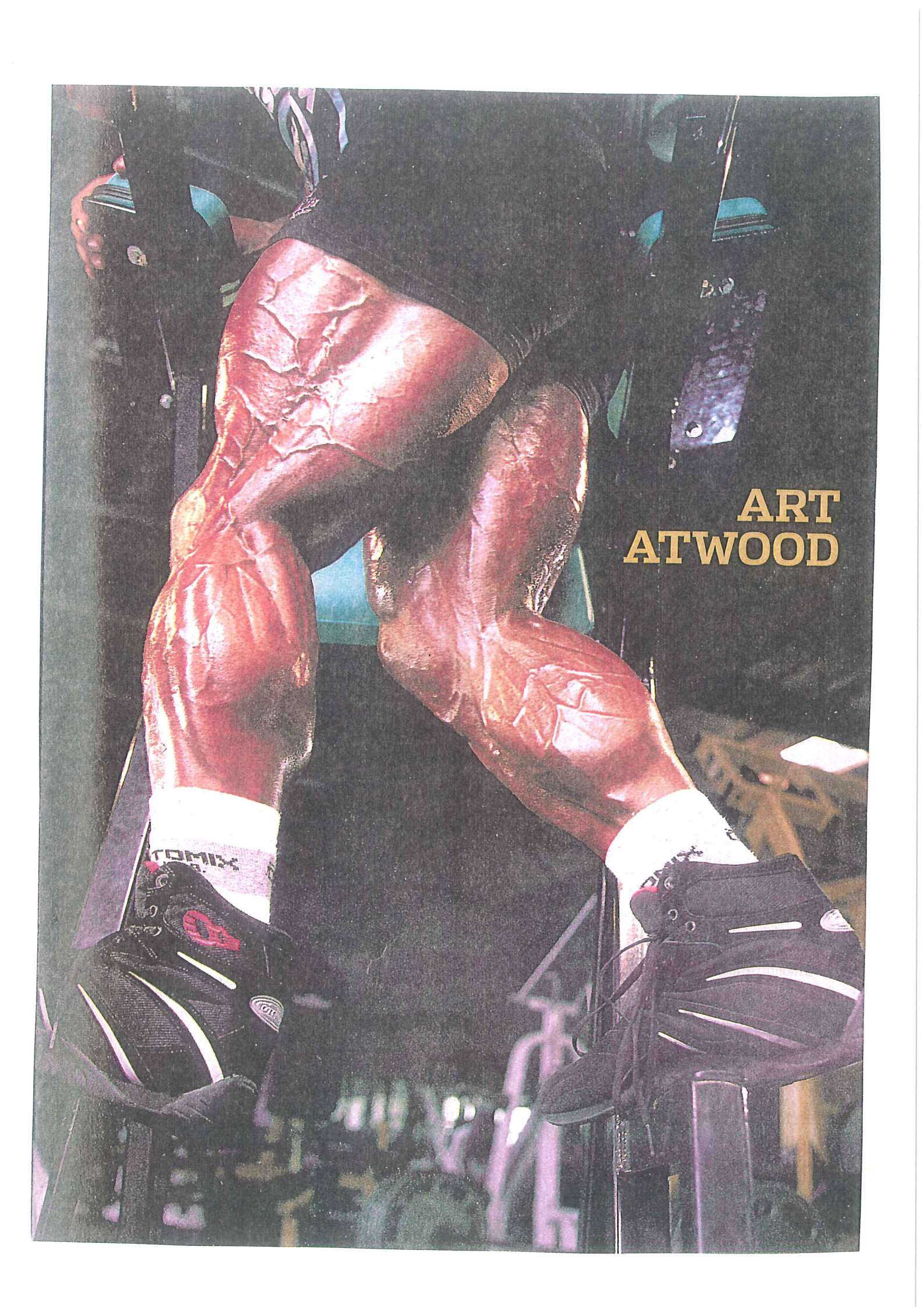
Properly performed negative chins and dips, therefore, assure more complete exercise for the involved muscles because the resistance is never thrown. It always moves at a smooth, steady pace and, as a result, provides more thorough involvement of the muscle fibres.

For more than 30 years, I've performed negative chins and dips with fairly good results but there was a problem that kept bothering me. That was the problem of continuity, maintaining the intensity of the negative work. It's easy to lapse into resting too long between repetitions.

A lag time of only three seconds between negative chins or dips allows some recovery to occur, and once you approach using 100 pounds attached to your bodyweight, you invariably start doing a series of single attempts. Such heavy, single-attempt efforts are not only inefficient but increase the risk of injury.

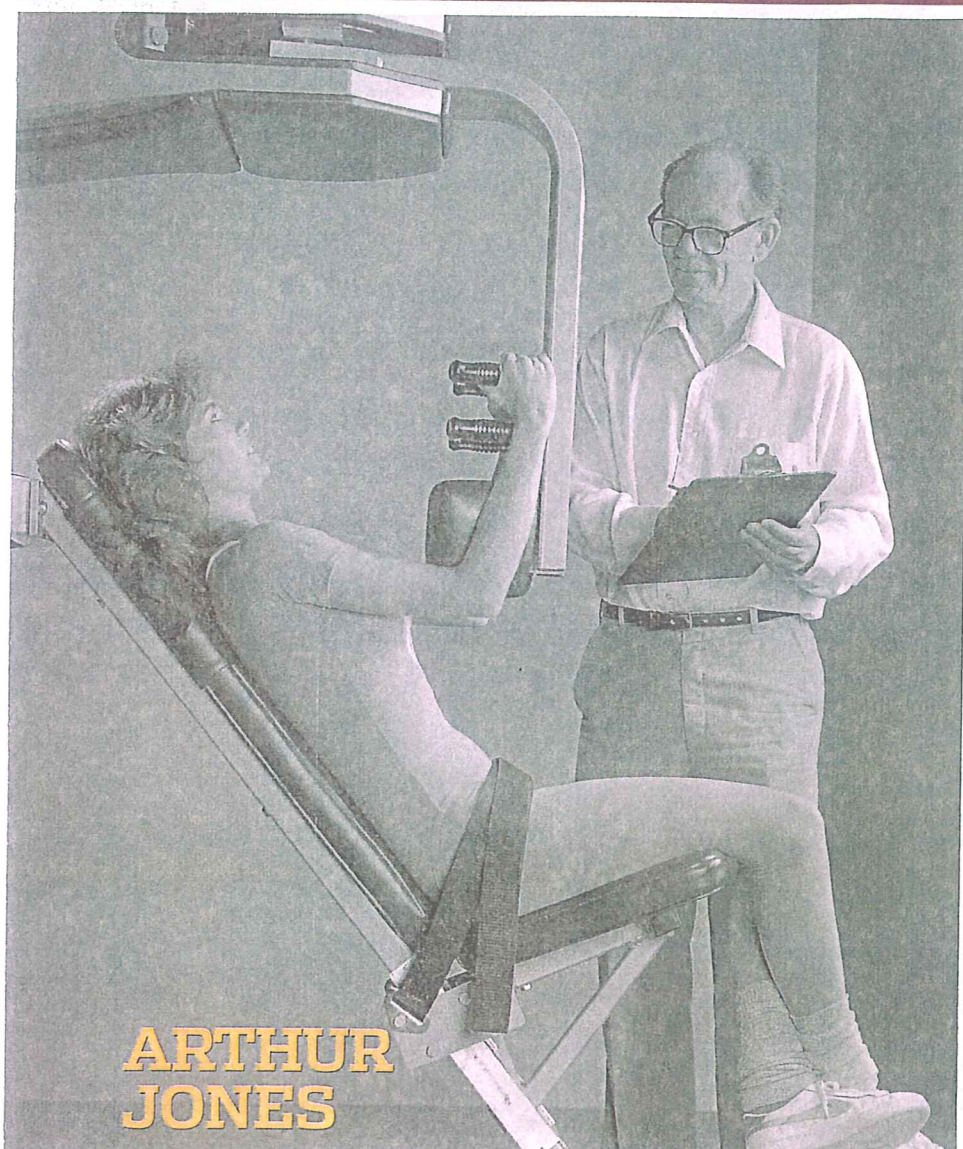
I knew there had to be a better way to perform negative exercise. But after experiencing three decades of trying different ideas and failing, I had almost given up hope.



A photograph of a very muscular man in a gym, performing a pull-up. He is wearing a black tank top, white socks with "TOMMY HILF" text, and black sneakers with white stripes. His arms are highly defined, showing extreme muscle mass and vascularity. The background is a dark gym with various equipment.

**ART  
ATWOOD**





## ARTHUR JONES

### THE SWEDISH SOLUTION

On November 18th, 2008, I travelled to Stockholm, Sweden, to meet with Mats Thulin, whom I had met in 1980 at a Nautilus Seminar in Florida. Mats later became a distributor of Nautilus equipment in Scandinavia. Thulin had phoned a month earlier, enthusiastic about what he called 'a new way to accentuate the negative, without the use of the legs or the help of an assistant'.

In Stockholm, when I critically examined what Thulin had done – and applied it under workout conditions – a lightning bolt went off in my head. "This is the missing key. Why didn't Arthur Jones, one of his engineers – or even me – think of this approach decades ago?"

The approach that Thulin applies so effectively involves a tilting weight stack powered by an electric motor. As the user begins the positive stroke, the weight stack leans to a 45-degree angle – instantly reducing the selected resistance by approximately 29 per cent. At the apex of the positive stroke, the tilted weight stack returns to vertical. The user then lowers 100 per cent of the selected resistance.

Instead of continuing to search for ways to add resistance on the negative, which was the strategy Jones and others had chosen, Thulin figured out a way to subtract weight from the positive. This is a brilliant step forward in the evolution of eccentrics, as well as the advancement of strength-training machines.

Thulin, in conjunction with the design help of a Swedish automotive team, is launching his negative-accentuated equipment – which he has named X-FORCE – throughout Europe and the United States in September of 2009.

Example: Let's say you select 140 pounds on the X-Force Chest Press machine. As you enter the machine, seat yourself properly, pull a lever, and grasp the handles; the weight stack tilts to 45 degrees. As you perform the positive phase, you are moving 100 pounds of resistance. (Note: 100 is 29 per cent less than 140 pounds and 140 is 40 per cent more than 100 pounds.)

Quickly, in 0.5 of a second, the weight stack goes back to the vertical position as you do a controlled negative with 140 pounds. Ideally, you would continue performing 100-pound positives and 140-pound negatives for approximately 7 or 8 full reps.

I salute Mats Thulin for reviving the power of negative exercise. Serious trainees have much to look forward to with X-Force.

### GO OLD SCHOOL, THE NEW WAY

Bodybuilding history can be interesting, revealing, and meaningful. It can most definitely lead to new developments and better training results.

Try some breathing squats and pull-overs, perform a set of bottom-focused calf raises, hit those negative-only chins and dips, and check out X-Force.

Isn't it time for you to study the past to accelerate to the future? **FLEX**

*Ellington Darden, Ph.D., was Director of Research for Nautilus Sports/Medical Industries for 17 years. He is the author of 47 fitness books, the latest being The New Bodybuilding for Old-School Results. More information about this manual, plus pictures of X-Force, may be found on his website: [www.drdarden.com](http://www.drdarden.com).*