

Women get chance to display deltoids

Locals pop biceps in lengthy competition

By DOUG FICK
Of the Emerald

Dick Morton was not in a joking mood.

He rushed onstage, snorting and growling, scattering reporters, photographers and competitors. A few of the more timid appeared ready to dive for cover.

But the object of the 220-pound weightlifter's animosity was not those on stage but a 446-pound barbell. He lay under it and, grunting, lifted it from his chest to arm's length, directly above his face.

Morton's lift signaled the end of the bench press phase of the 1979 Emerald Empire Bench Press and Body Building Championships.

Last Saturday's event, sponsored and run by Fletcher Newman of Fletcher's Pump Room of Eugene, brought weightlifters, body builders and assorted other well-developed folks from throughout the state to the Springfield High School Auditorium.

"To me, it's another way of expressing myself, and if men can't relate ..."

The bench press contest pitted men and women — ranging in weight from 114 to more than 250 pounds — against a barbell. To successfully complete a bench press, a competitor lies prostrate on a bench, lowers a loaded barbell down to his chest and pushes it back up to arm's length.

The crowd of about 150 responded enthusiastically to the competitors' lifting efforts, but many seemed equally entertained by the subsequent awards presentation, which matched the victorious lifters against the charms of trophy girl Nina Renfrow.

Renfrow won hands down. Resplendent in a swirling white dress and painstakingly arranged coiffure, Renfrow presented trophies to the winners, whose job it was then to figure out how to respond to the 15-year-old. Some of the big guys gave her a rousing smooch, but most managed only a quick peck or a wan smile.

There were at least three people, however, who seemed to find neither the weightlifting nor the ceremony very interesting. The three, members of the Oregon Academy for Artistic Gymnastics, entered the backstage area, gave the weightlifters bored looks, and proceeded to nonchalantly warm up. The gymnasts ranged in age from nine to 13, and combined they probably weighed less than many of the competitors. The youngsters performed a brief tumbling act following the bench press contest and left.

After a physique *pas de deux* (a dual posing routine) by

Fletcher and Jamie Newman, the event continued with the bodybuilding contests. In the first competition, Bret Montgomery, a 19-year-old Elmira resident, beat out four other finalists to become Mr. Teen Lane County.

Like all contestants in the bodybuilding events, Montgomery was judged on overall muscular development, posing and development in each of the body categories: arms, legs, chest, back and stomach. Individual trophies were awarded to the winners in each body category in addition to overall prizes.

"It's an individual sport that I can carry on with after high school," says Mark Delp, who finished second in the contest. Despite his loss, Delp, a full-time bodybuilder since he graduated from high school last year, says he plans to continue competition for a long time.

Following the Mr. Lane County contest, won by KVAL-TV producer Wayne Baseden, the stage was set for the Ms. Emerald Empire contest. The contest, an area first, was publicized as revolutionary.

It was a small revolution.

The two competitors, Jamie Newman and Bonnie Renfrow, each did routines designed to show posing grace as well as muscularity, symmetry, and back and leg development. But not everyone thought it was graceful.

"That's gross," said one small spectator, pointing to a particularly graphic exhibit of female muscularity.

"She's pretty," her companion retorted.

Michelle Vella, a Eugene resident, watched the event from backstage. She's training to compete, she said, and discounted the theory that weightlifting is not a women's sport.

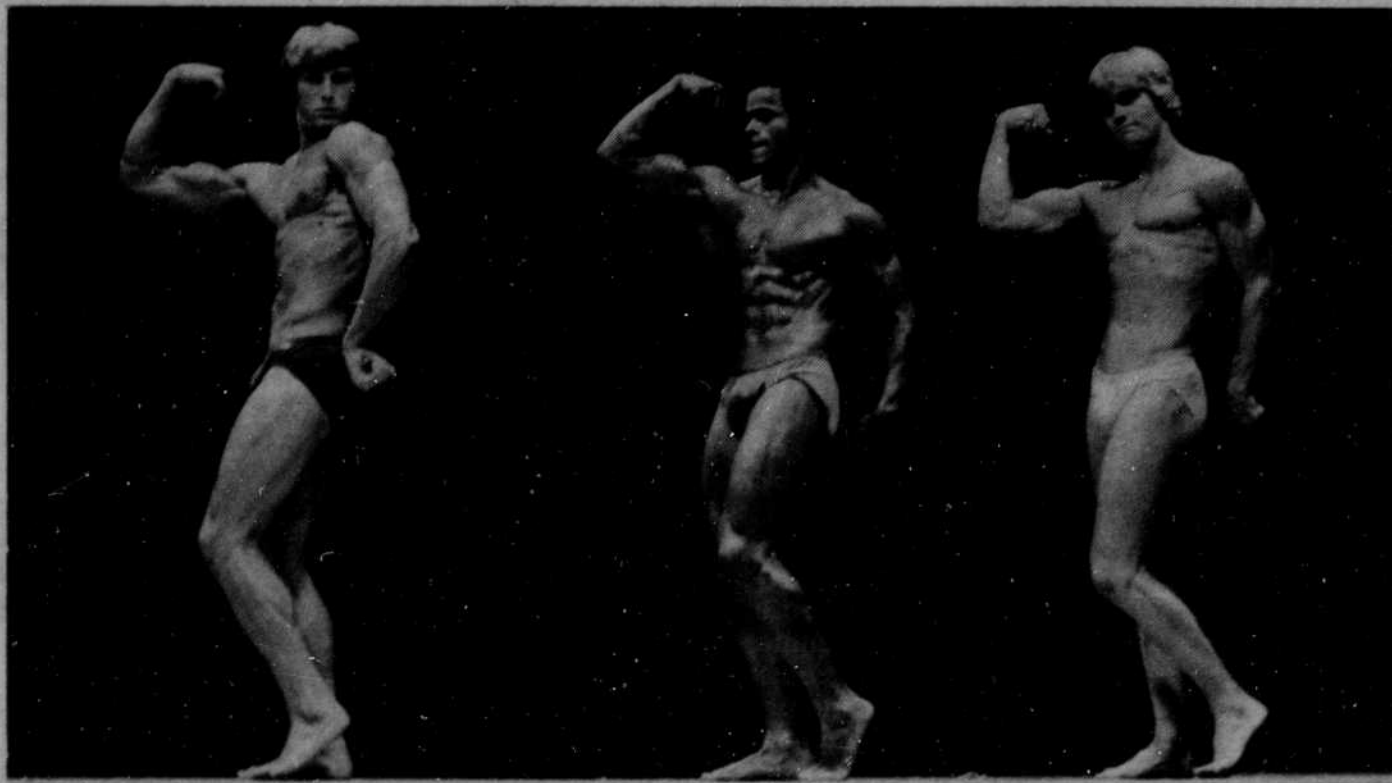
"To me, it's another way of expressing myself, and if men can't relate to that, then fuck 'em ... I give myself more credit because I'm a woman and I have the guts to attempt it."

But by and large, the crowd agreed with her, and responded warmly during their competition. Newman won.

John Burkholder, Mr. USA, stopped by to perform a short posing routine following the women's contest.

By the time the event's centerpiece, the Mr. Emerald Empire contest, got underway, the crowd had dwindled considerably and lost much of its earlier enthusiasm. As it was, most of the spectators seemed to be relatives and friends of the competitors or would-be bodybuilders, who could be seen comparing their muscles to those on stage. They seemed disappointed.

During the somewhat anticlimactic contest, won by Portlander George Pessell, nodding heads could be seen in the crowd, and one young man backstage, dozed off and toppled from his chair.



Three of the five competitors in last Saturday's Mr. Teen Lane County Championship went through various poses for the judges, showing off

their 'muscular' physics. Bret Montgomery, of Elmira, was awarded the Mr. Teen Lane County title for his efforts.

Photo by Jimmi Harris

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