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# Publisher's Letter

by John Balik

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## What a Weekend!

I started producing bodybuilding events in the late '60s as a volunteer with the AAU, which was then the dominant sanctioning organization for amateur bodybuilding in Southern California. That association culminated when I coproduced the '70 AAU Mr. America with Bill Pearl in Culver City.

The first professional bodybuilding event I produced was the '80 IFBB California Grand Prix. Fast forward 28 years: February 15-17, 2008, was the 19th IFBB IRON MAN Pro and its fifth year with the Los Angeles FitExpo. As the saying goes, we've come a long way!

As a teenage bodybuilder I expressed my competitiveness by entering bodybuilding and Olympic weightlifting events. Later, I "graduated" to the other side of the lights to promote the sport that's been central to my life. Bodybuilding and Olympic weightlifting are essentially individual sports—you and the barbell in its most elemental form. You may have a coach or training partner, but you win or lose on your own.

Producing a weekend event like the IRON MAN Pro/Los Angeles FitExpo is at the other end of the spectrum—a collaborative effort with every aspect an important part of the chain. Many people came up to me during the weekend to congratulate me on the IRON MAN Pro and the expo. I accepted the congratulations knowing that such an event can only happen with the effort and support of everyone involved. If any one of the key elements were missing, the IRON MAN Pro/Los Angeles FitExpo weekend couldn't be what it is. Without sponsorship, the event would be financially impossible; without the fantastic lineup of IFBB pro bodybuilders, the fans wouldn't be there; without great lighting, the bodybuilders wouldn't look their best; without the marketing/information push, no one would know about it; without my staff, I'd be stressed beyond recognition. It is really about the team.

Bodybuilding.com and Gaspari Nutrition were the presenting sponsors, and we had great media help from Peter McGough and Robin Chang at AMI/Weider, Steve Blechman at *Muscular Development* and Bob Kennedy at *MuscleMag* and super Web support from Ron Avidan at Getbig.com and Isaac Hinds of Liftstudios.com.

When the '08 competition year is reviewed, I believe the IRON MAN Pro lineup will compare favorably to the Mr. Olympia lineup in depth and quality. A huge thanks to the 32 top IFBB pros for giving the event such fantastic support. Everyone showed up in great condition, and the sellout crowd showed its appreciation.

Many people commented on the superb lighting that enabled the bodybuilders to appear at their best. Mike Neveux, the master of light and shadow, is responsible for creating the visual presentation. The light defines the physiques and determines the quality of the audience's visual experience. From the beginning, the IRON MAN Pro has set the lighting standard, and that's due to Mike's understanding of both the physique and the light that defines it. (See the photo report that begins on page 252.)

The expo itself grew from 40,000 square feet in 2007 to 140,000 in 2008. Our expo partner, National Fitness Productions and its team, with tireless assistance from both Marc Missioreck and Erin Ferries, created an event second only to the Arnold Sports Festival in attendance—almost 20,000 people over 2 1/2 days. The move to the Los Angeles Convention Center was successful on every level, and that move was made possible by the fantastic support of our sponsors and all of the vendors who supported the expo—a big thanks to all.

Next year is our contest's 20th anniversary, and we've already got big plans for it. See you there. **IM**