

Mad Is Good

Putting The Inner Monster To Work

~ By Charles Peeples ~

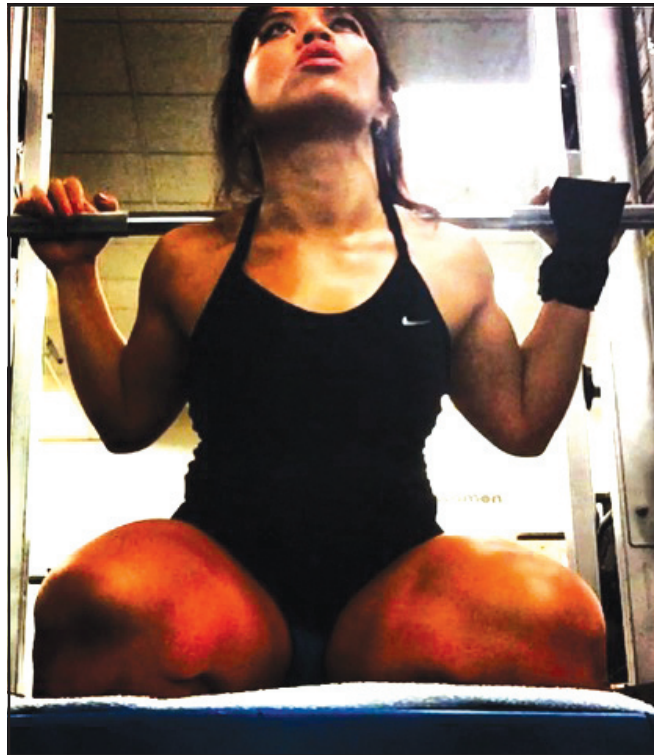
Is novice Figure competitor Trish Sabater's intensity fueled by fantasies as action-heroine "Quadzumi" - or whuppin' up on a few abusive ex's and oh's?"



The blonde mom of three, splashed with chalk dust, cinches in her lifting belt and sits on the end of a weight bench in a packed auditorium, shuffling her feet. Her hubby crouches in front of her, mumbles a word or two of encouragement, then abruptly slaps her in the face a few times. "Arrrrgh," the woman growls, sustaining this concocted drama as she flops back to ram a couple hundred pounds off the rack. If you've been in enough gyms (or watched enough jock movies) you've seen this ritual in one form or another. And you don't need to be a sports physiologist to understand the effectiveness of pre-effort stimulation, be it a slap, an ammonia vial ("Wake up and smell the ammonia!" announces one powerlifter tee) or a yell (the U.S. Army even codified their "HOOAH!" with a commercially-available energy bar). Whatever works!

Unfortunately in the modern health-club environment, slapping, yells and ammonia vials don't always go over real well. Neither does slamming your head against a wall. The general population, who constitute most health-club habitués, find this uncivilized stuff more intimidating than inspiring, and club managers have to keep the numbers happy. Only the janitor gets to use ammonia. Wanna yell? Take it to the dojo. Nonetheless, stimulation of this sort can still be had... it merely requires an internalized approach.

One book called it the "heightened arousal mode."



Arnold once referred to his "mental visualization principle," claiming he visualized his biceps as mountain peaks. Few can relate to that sort of motivation (it struck me as sappy, which might be why he's the Governor and I'm not), yet we can all fuel up on a silly Walter Mitty vision, be it shuffling, fists aloft, atop the Art Museum steps, blowing past the pack on the way up the Manayunk Wall or performing some athletic overachievement that brings a crowd of thousands to its feet. But some of us need something more robust and primal than the usual imagined personal-bests, and it's safe to say that one resource we can all tap is... anger. Being mad is a

universal experience, even for those who claim to be so mellow, meditational and metaphysical they find such emotions foreign to them. Aw, c'mon, we've all got an inner monster - someone's rubbed every one of us the wrong way at least once, releasing a flood of energy. You can't deny "mad" - and you shouldn't. It's real, natural and it's... there.

I recall the perplexed expressions I caused while giving a health/fitness presentation called "Think for Yourself" at a high-school assembly, when I extolled the value of anger. Of course these kids had all received conflict-resolution training, being told, more or less, that anger must be denied and ignored, which is about like saying libido will subside if you simply refuse to acknowledge it. No, it needs to be

acknowledged, and then steered. “Should automobiles be outlawed?” I challenged them. “You could conceivably kill more people in two seconds with an Audi than with an Uzi. Like the auto, like the atom, for good or ill, mad contains enormous energy. Energy has value. Steer it.”

Ironically, this approach to using mad involves being a little...OK, childish. It means using your imagination in an unfettered way, which most adults have been conditioned by society and culture not to do. But that’s all right because since this is internal, nobody can see your juvenile renderings. My particular model is the legendary schooling of a disrespectful Ernie Terrell or Floyd Patterson in the ring by the great Muhammad Ali, whose outward demeanor, invariably more clown than frown, belied the stinging punishment he meted out in the ring. Any real-life re-enactment of such public retribution would get anyone else killed, maimed, imprisoned or sued. But that’s not going to keep me from at least imagining the whole world watching me bounce some antagonist against a wall and demanding “What’s my name?” as I slam a few extra reps past the pain barrier. If you’re strapped for villains, you needn’t look any further than the news; a veritable cornucopia of terrorists, thugs and other vermin await your use as fury-fodder. I’m as non-violent as they come, but in my mind I can be as impolite as I wanna be. And while the touchy-feely, metaphysical types may be appalled at such an approach, this brutal-mental device has never failed me on the preacher-curl bench (to the dismay of my elbow joints). Actors used to do a similar sort of internalizing, drawing on past life experiences to bring out an emotion; it was called “the Method,” promoted by an acting guru named Stanislavsky, and popularized by the likes of Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, and Dustin Hoffman before it fell out of favor as being too contrived. The internal drama, often as not, had nothing to do with the external, but was merely a tool to fool the movie-camera lens, which can spot false emoting but can’t tell the difference between your grief over your lover’s tragic fate or Rover, who became road-kill when you were eight.

So go ahead and let your childish notions out to play... don’t worry what anyone else is going to think, because as long as you keep it inside, all anyone’s going to see is your intense effort. OK, if you’re muttering “What’s my name? What’s my name?” (as I did in a final sprint on an U.B.E. machine while rehabbing a shoulder a few years ago) you might get a few laughs. But the world can always use a few more of those.

Mad is good. Mad is right. Mad gets stuff done. Mad works. And you can quote me on that.

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