

## Lon Appleby's Body by Garret

In the few years since the documentary *Pumping Iron* was released there's been a noticeable increase in the popularity and profitability of body building. The principal characters of that remarkable film, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lou Ferrigno, have gone on to enjoy a certain amount of notoriety. Arnold, of course, flexed his muscles as *Cosman the Barbarian* while Lou dyed his skin green to become *The Incredible Hulk*.

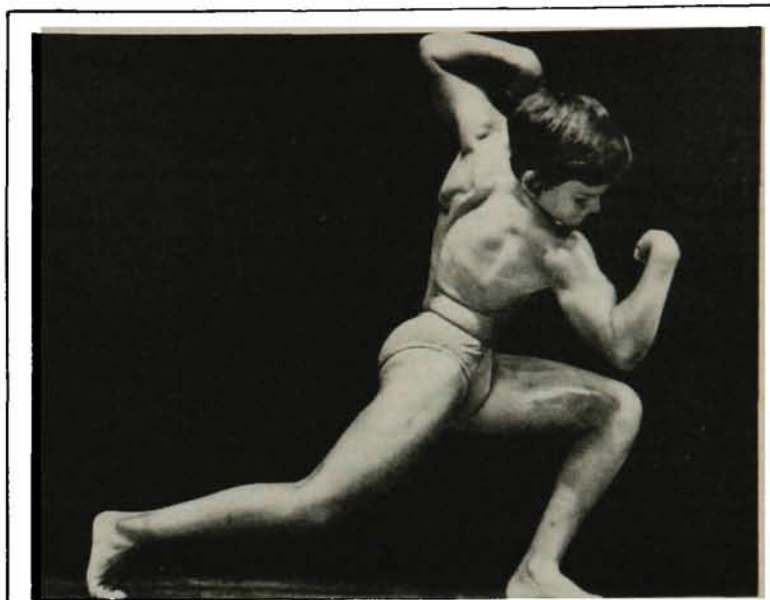
For these reasons, some have argued that body building has finally come out of the closet and deserves to be recognized as a legitimate sport. Others continue to dismiss it as a carnival sideshow, its participants being nothing more than freaks. Opinions no doubt depend largely upon the aesthetic value one places on oiled, near-naked men getting up on a stage to show off their gargantuan biceps and pectorals. Opinions aside, however, one thing is for sure, body building is here to stay. And if you don't believe it, go see *Body By Garret*, a CBC documentary which chronicles a few days in the life of 12-year-old Garret Walsh. As four feet, six inches, and weighing 102 pounds, Garret is considered the youngest competitive body builder in the world. He has to be seen to be believed. The earnestness and the enthusiasm this kid from Toronto applies to his strenuous vocation is astounding, or alarming, depending

on how one views... No, I'm not getting into that again.

"I want to be the best body builder there is. I want to be Mr. Olympia" says Garret with wide-eyed innocence as he works out in his basement. And watching the ease by which he handles the barbells one has no reason to doubt him. Garret, with the help of his father and mother, has the body building regimentation down pat... the push-ups, the bench presses, the jars of vitamins, the protein diet... even the philosophy. "To be in shape makes you live longer."

It's a credit to Lon Appleby, the film's producer/director - something of a wonder himself at age 19 - that *Body By Garret* stays clear of too many puerilities. You see, Garret is one hell of an infectious kid, and too much of a good thing would end up being just that. Appleby shows he has some keen sensibilities when it comes to pacing. He keeps the momentum going by way of timely intercuts between Garret training for a guest spot on the Mr. Olympia contest and the big guys themselves going through their routines to the driving thump of rock music.

A word of caution. Appleby is not out to make the definitive statement on body building. His primary subject is Garret and the 12-year-old comes through with flying colours. He's as genuine as any kid can be. Garret very quickly convinces us that what he's doing to his body may seem a little odd or fanatical to some people but it's a lot better than if he just hung out on the streets. The boy's father, however, is another matter. There's more than a little hint of vicarious living on his part. Having been forced to give up body building due to a



● The body Garret built

pulled heart muscle, the father is literally Garret's shadow. There's no doubt that the father is motivated by love for his son but the way he has coached and molded the boy's life touches the only sad note in the film.

Garret's shining moment comes when he poses for 20 fleeting seconds on the Mr. Olympia stage. As we see him strain and contort his young but sizeable frame, the worth of all that extraordinary effort comes into question. The answer depends largely upon the aesthetic: no, I

promised. The answer is in Garret's kid-in-a-candy-store smile.

S. Paul Zola ●

**BODY BY GARRET** p. d. Lon Appleby d.o.p. John Westheuser sd. Aeryn Weissman add. cam. Paul Dunlop ed. Bruce Annis neg. cutting Wendy Loten titles Patricia Morley mix Marvin Bernstein stills Chris Lund p.c. HAP Productions in association with the CBC running time: 28.50 min., colour, 16mm, dist. International Tele-Film Ent.

## OF THE FOUR CONSIDERATIONS



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November 20 - December 16, 1982

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