

Moe Most was “ambassador” of Muscle Beach

Gymnast who led
impromptu shows
dies at 89

OBITUARY |

BY VALERIE J. NELSON
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — The unofficial ringmaster of the impromptu shows at Santa Monica's Muscle Beach from the 1930s through the 1950s was Deforrest “Moe” Most, a gymnast who had a talent for convincing teens, tourists — and the occasional celebrity — that they, too, could join in.

“He was the ambassador for Muscle Beach,” said Paula Boelsems, an acrobat who trained there in the 1940s. “I can't tell you how many times he did things for people ... and how many people stood on his shoulders.”

Mr. Most, who later worked as a prop maker for Hollywood studios, died of heart failure Sept. 2 at Santa Monica Hospital, said his son, Steven. Mr. Most was 89 and had lived in Venice for decades.

“Moe was one of the greatest athletes I've ever known. We did tricks that nobody else had ever done,” said Jack LaLanne, one of the many physical-fitness pioneers who got their start on the strip of sand.

“He also was a wonderful human being. If you had him as a friend you were lucky,” LaLanne said.

As a student at Belmont High School in 1934, Mr. Most was one of the first regulars to discover Muscle Beach, a spit of beachfront south of the Santa Monica Pier where the nation's obsession with fitness is said to have been born.

As director of Muscle Beach from 1947 to 1958, Mr. Most was in charge of the equipment and activities, including staging Mr. and Miss Muscle Beach contests and countless other quirky competitions involving feats of strength or gymnastic skills.

With his “gentle and confidence-instilling enthusiasm,”

Mr. Most was able to give passers-by a “thrill of a lifetime” that sometimes changed their lives, Steven Most said.

Bob Yerkes was 11 when he wandered onto the beach in 1943 looking for a game of pingpong. Mr. Most asked him, “Wouldn't you rather do acrobatics?”

“He put me on his shoulders, and I was hooked right away,” said Yerkes, who ran away from home to join the circus at 15 and later became a Hollywood stuntman.

Many other muscular characters who exercised and performed on the 24-by-80-foot platform near the beach's rings and parallel bars found fame. Among them were Joe Gold, founder of Gold's Gym; bodybuilder and actor Steve “Hercules” Reeves; and acrobat Glenn Sundby, who once walked down the 898 steps of the Washington Monument on his hands.

With his great physical strength and unerring sense of balance, Mr. Most developed a reputation as a champion “understander,” the term for the bottom man of the human pyramids for which Muscle Beach was famous.

One stunt Mr. Most said he wished he had documented involved singer-actor Roy Rogers, who on a whim climbed atop a three-man tower with Mr. Most in the anchor position. Rogers was still wearing his cowboy boots.

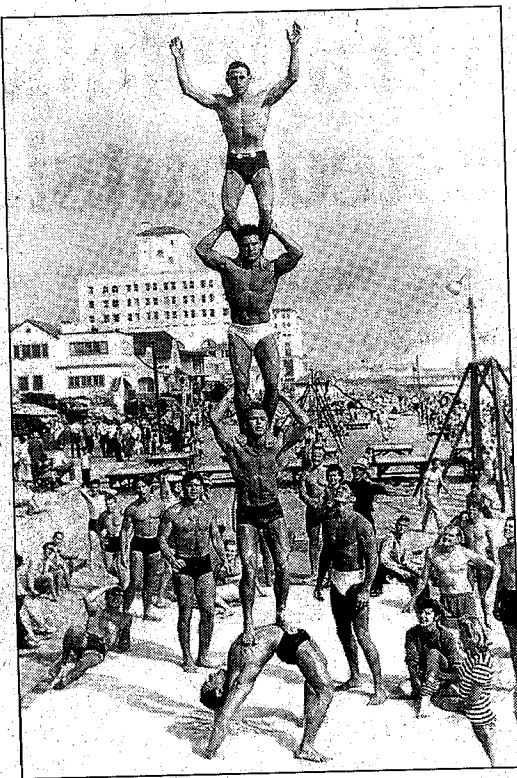
Deforrest Roy Most was born April 23, 1917, in Los Angeles, the second of six children of Reuben, a contractor, and Blanche, a homemaker who named him after inventor Lee de Forest.

Mr. Most, who was twice divorced, was married to his third wife, Jackie, for 40 years until her death in 1999. A son, Michael, died in 2000.

In addition to son Steven, of Carmel Valley, and brother Burton, of New York City, Mr. Most is survived by his sisters, Brodea Drogin, of Palm Springs, and Sonya Most, of Burbank, and two grandchildren.

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In this undated photo provided by Angel City Press, Harold Zinkin, on the bottom doing a backbend, supports Deforrest “Moe” Most, who supports Jack LaLanne with Gene Miller, on top.



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