

Litigator pumps iron, outlasts opponents

Michael
Schonbuch keeps
his energy high
with weightlifting

By America Hernandez
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Trial litigator Michael N. Schonbuch remembers well the day he decided to start bodybuilding. It was September 1969, and Arnold Schwarzenegger

had just been featured on the cover of Muscle Magazine.

"I was 12 years old, and I don't know exactly how I got my hands on that magazine, but Arnold was doing this side chest pose and he was just massive," Schonbuch recalled. "I said to myself, 'Wow, I want to start lifting,' and within a month I ripped the sleeves off all my shirts and went out and got a 110-pound weight set and flat bench for my birthday."

Since that day 37 years ago, Schonbuch — now a partner at Daniels Fine Israel Schonbuch

& Lebovits LLP in Los Angeles who specializes in defending Hollywood bars, nightclubs and concert venues from premises liability suits — hasn't let a busy life and career get in the way of his strength training.

Up at 4 a.m. every morning, he works from home until six before clocking two hours at the gym and taking his kids to school.

When handling trials out of town, the morning starts at 3:30 a.m., and Schonbuch plans the location of his meals in advance and ensures his hotel has the proper equipment so his rhythm is not disturbed.

Those accustomed to his routine will recognize the telltale six scrambled eggwhites, bowl of fruit and bottled water delivered up to his suite every morning at 7 a.m. like clockwork. He's often in bed by 8 p.m.

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—Gary A. Dordick

"It makes a 100 percent difference," Schonbuch said. "I'm centered, fatigue is never a factor, and every single day in trial I feel like no matter what's going on I can handle it."

Gary A. Dordick, a sole practitioner in Beverly Hills, said he has learned to be wary when he finds himself in court and Schonbuch arrives, healthy lunch and packet of vitamins in hand.

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"I've had several trials with him where by the time I get into the courtroom, I'm lucky to get there on time, and he's already been up for four hours, been to the gym and is rarin' to go," he added.

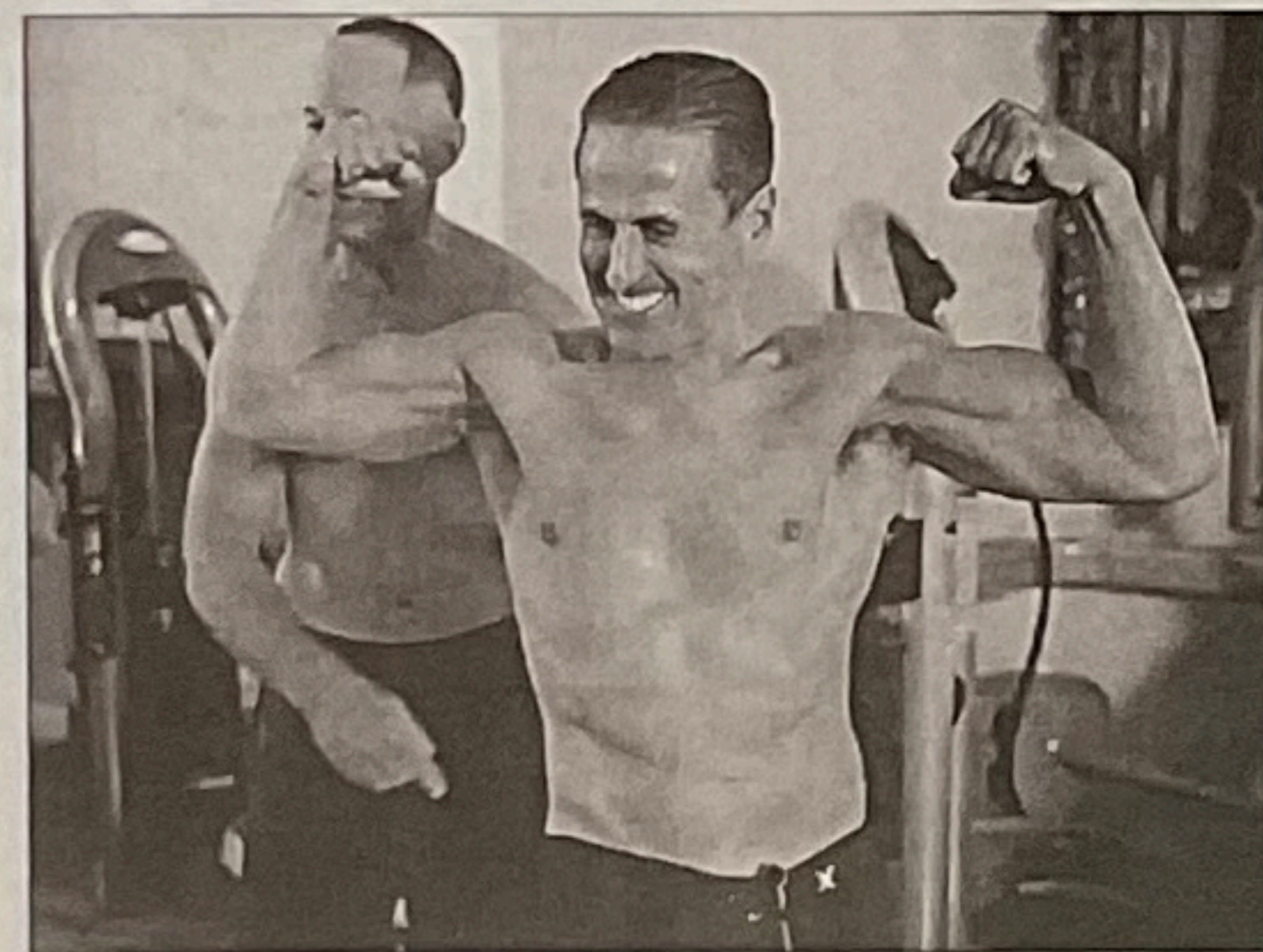
Schonbuch, a Staten Island native, said he fondly remembers his college days where he'd outlast his friends lifting 315 pound weights.

At age 19, the Club Med resort in Bermuda gave him free room and board to bodybuild at its facilities and train guests, he said.

Thomas S. Ingrassia, founding partner and chair of the Employment and Labor department at Pettit Kohn Ingrassia & Lutz PC in San Diego, confirmed that

Schonbuch's routine has stood the test of time.

The pair were fraternity brothers at the State University of New York at Albany in 1987. Schonbuch schooled Ingrassia on how to lift big-time and impress women, Ingrassia recalled. They went on to become roommates at Boston University School of Law, where the circle of devotees grew larger.



Courtesy of Dr. Bill Dorfman

Schonbuch today, age 50.

"We had a whole group of guys in law school get real serious about bodybuilding, mostly because of Mike," Ingrassia said.

"Now I'm flabby, and one of those guys that plans to go every day and actually gets there twice a week," Ingrassia added. "But since the day I met him, Mike has been absolutely consistent and regimented."

During law school, Ingrassia said, breakfast consisted of a protein shake. Lunch was two hardboiled eggs, whites only. Dinner was broiled chicken, five nights a week. Dordick said the menu for Schonbuch hasn't changed.

"I went out to dinner with Mike and his weightlifting partner, and not only did I eat more of them put together, I was the only one who ate any bread or drank any alcohol or had dessert, while the two of them shared a steak," Dordick said.

He called Schonbuch's resolve admirable, and added that such discipline and control often translates to a formidable opponent in court.

"I always tell the story of a big fire case I handled out of town against three or four attorneys at least 10 years younger than me," Schonbuch said.

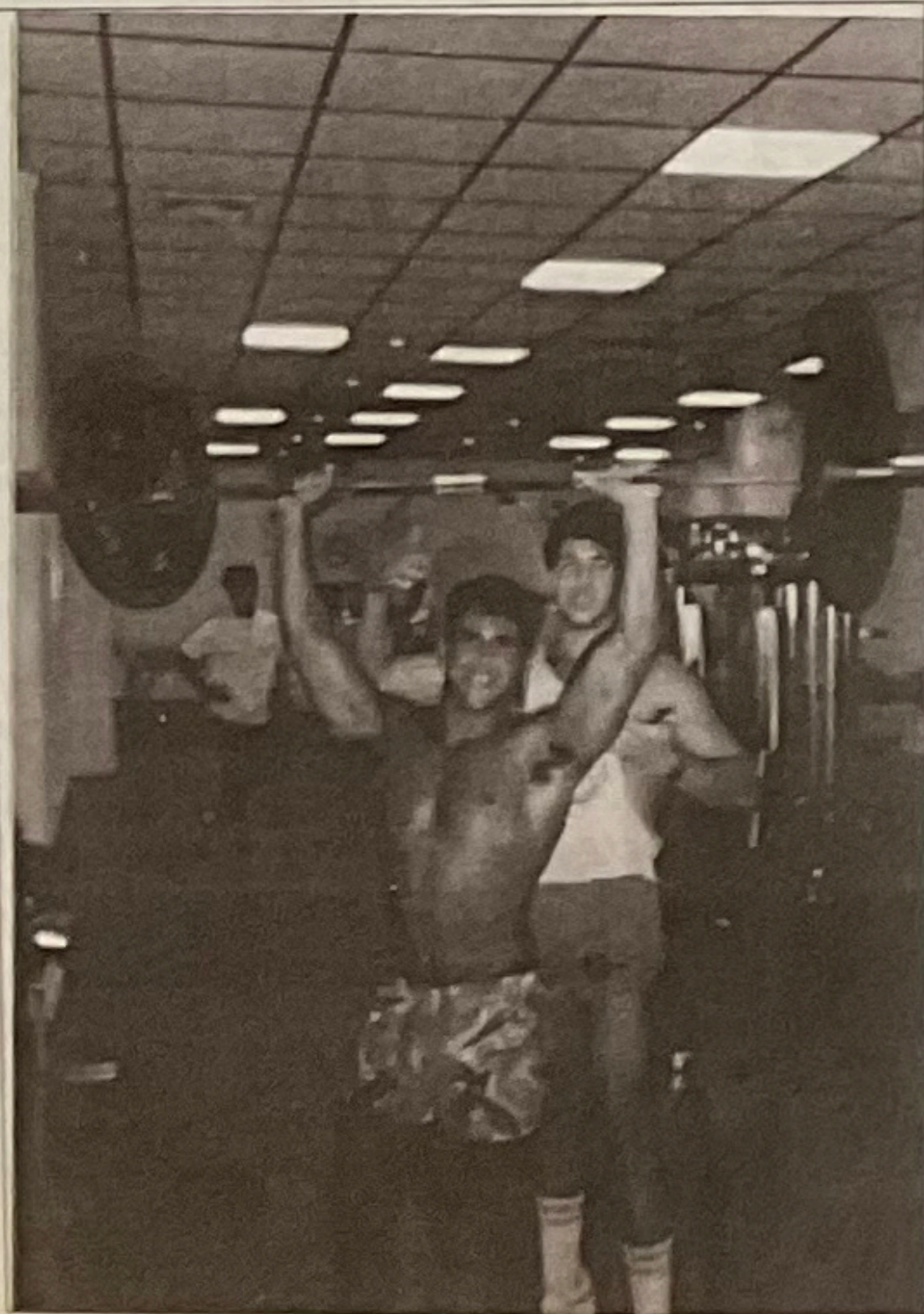
The young associates started the trial full of pep, but by the third week became exhausted due to coffee, late nights and poor diet, Schonbuch recounted.

Ingrassia, who stopped by to see closing arguments in another of Schonbuch's cases, said "Mike was on his game while his opponents looked like they had had it — haggard, beat up, and on their last legs."

Both Dordick and Ingrassia also credited Schonbuch with not sacrificing family time for his passion.

"Many lawyers work out when the day is done, when that time is best for helping kids with homework and spending time together," Dordick said. "Mike's got it figured out much better, he gets his workout in when everyone's still sleeping."

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Courtesy of Michael Schonbuch

Trial attorney Michael Schonbuch in 1985 at the age of 19, bodybuilding at Club Med in Bermuda.