The Sporting Life

Dynamic duo Vic Braden and Gideon Ariel

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Dynamic Duo Vic Braden and Gideon Ariel: Revolutionizing Sports and Beyond

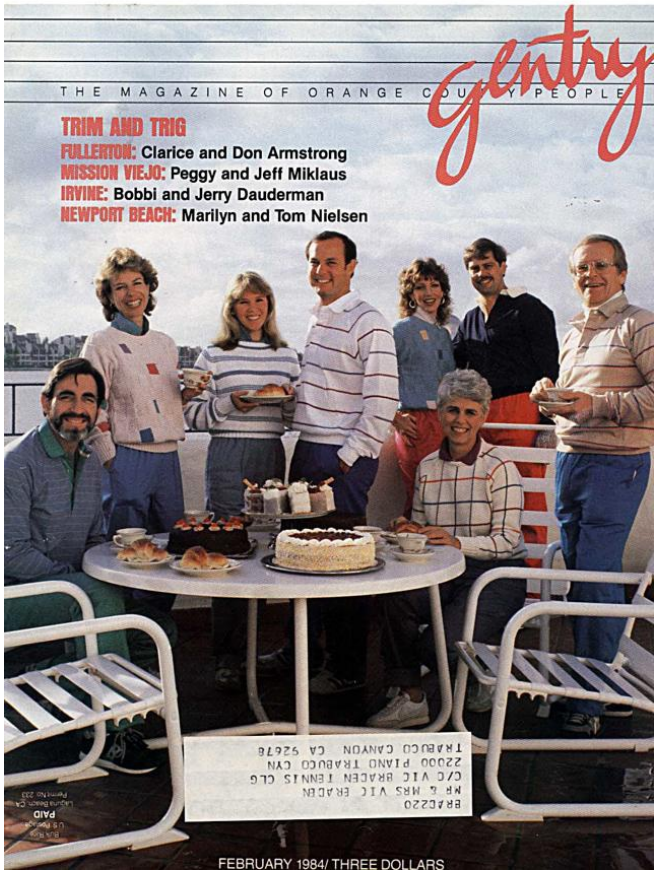
In this article, Howard Handy explores the partnership between Vic Braden and Gideon Ariel, two pioneers in the field of sports science. Braden, a renowned tennis coach, and Ariel, a biomechanics expert, have combined their expertise to establish a research center at Coto de Caza, Orange County. The center, which opened in 1980, uses advanced technology to analyze and improve the performance of athletes, including the United States women's volleyball team.

Braden's journey began with the establishment of his Tennis College in San Diego County in 1970. He later moved to Coto de Caza in 1972, where he expanded his operations to include the research center. Ariel, on the other hand, was born in Israel and represented his country in the Olympics as a discus thrower. He later moved to the United States to study exercise science and has since become a leading figure in the field of biomechanics.

The duo's work at the research center involves the use of high-speed cameras and sophisticated computer programs to analyze body movements and improve athletic performance. However, their ambitions extend beyond sports. They believe that their research can also benefit the handicapped and mentally retarded, and they are currently developing rehabilitation equipment and exercise programs for these groups.

Despite their success, both Braden and Ariel believe that they have only just begun to explore the potential of their work. They are confident that their research in biomechanics can improve life in many ways, from sports and recreation to healthcare and rehabilitation.

Below find a reprint of the 4 relevant pages of the article "The Sporting Life" in "Gentry":



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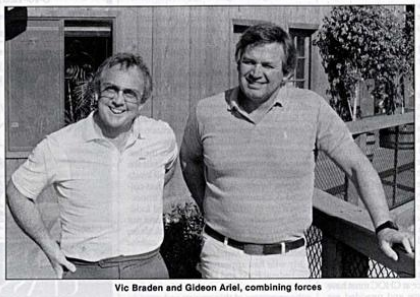

Vic Braden and Gideon Ariel, combining forces

THE SPORTING LIFE

Dynamic duo Vic Braden and Gideon Ariel

By Howard Handy

The best things in life seem to come in pairs.

There's a duo at Coto de Caza who would put that phrase to the test and come out with flying colors.

Vic Braden and Gideon Ariel have combined forces to put the Orange County site of the Modern Pentathlon Olympic competition on the map in other ways.

Making the twosome picture complete, in addition to hosting the pentathlon, Coto de Caza is also the home of the United States women's volleyball team, and it is they, not the Pentathlon competitors, who are benefiting from Braden and Ariel's Research Center. They are favored to win the Gold Medal in Long Beach this summer.

Braden came to Coto de Caza first after developing his Vic Braden Tennis College at Rancho de Bernardo in San Diego County in 1970.

"I moved to Coto de Caza in 1972 and we opened the facility in August of '74," Braden recalls. "Now I have the best of all worlds right here with tennis and the research center.

"When I came here, the property was owned by Penn-Central Railroad and they were in bankruptcy. They also owned Great Southwest Amusement Parks and Victor Palmieri was chairman of the board. He had a great interest in human beings and told me that if I reached a bottom line in dollars, he would finance further development here."

Needless to say, Braden accomplished this purpose in a hurry, establishing his Tennis College as one of the major learning centers for the sport in the country.

Braden, born in Monroe, Michigan on August 2, 1929, is one of seven children, and the first of his family to graduate from college. He gained his B.A. degree in psychology from Kalamazoo College in Michigan and his masters from UCLA and Cal State University, Los Angeles. He also spent some time at the University of Toledo where he was a physical education instructor, assistant basketball coach and head tennis coach.

While tennis has been his life, he came into it quite by accident.

"I started playing tennis when I was a youngster after being caught stealing tennis balls," he says. "The coach at the club got me interested in playing instead of stealing. I've been at it ever since in one capacity or another."

After leaving Toledo, he became an instructor and sixth grade psychologist at the Topanga Elementary School in Los Angeles. He then moved to UCLA as an instructor in the psychology clinic school and from there to Hermosa Beach for two years as district psychologist.

In 1961 he joined the Jack Kramer Tennis Camp as manager and head pro and became associated with the Jack Kramer World Championship Tennis Tour as an assistant director.

It was from there that he went to Rancho de Bernardo with the AVCO Development Corporation and founded the Vic Braden Tennis College. That's his chief interest today, along with the research center and speaking engagements throughout the world. Braden Tennis Camps are also located in Germany and others will soon open in Switzerland and Osaka, Japan.

He figures he spends about thirty percent of his time with the Tennis College where he has a staff of thirty people, including fourteen instructors.

He also devotes time to boxers, fencers, discus throwers and others at Coto de Caza's research center.

And it was Braden who brought Ariel to the center.

"I was talking with Bill Toomey (Olympic decathlon champion), discussing the need for a disciplinary approach to sports one day," Braden says.

"He told me, 'there's another nut just like you on the East Coast named Gideon Ariel. You should get in touch with him.'

"I did and invited him out to discuss the possibility of a research center. The first time we met we talked until four in the morning.

"He could quantify human movement from films and had started a computer analysis program in Amherst, Massachusetts. We spent a lot of crazy hours together and I found he was the greatest biochemist in the world. He really produces and isn't afraid to work long hours.

"When I approached him about putting in a research center here in Orange County, I figured it would take about two years in the planning stages. Instead, he said we should start that Saturday (this was on Thursday!)."

Soon after the project was started, a major storm wiped it out. It took longer to complete than first anticipated.

"He (Ariel) has an insatiable curiosity about everything and is eccentric in certain ways," Braden continues. "I hear about people having arguments with him, but in all the time we've been together, we've never had one."

Dr. Gideon Ariel was born in Israel some forty-four years ago and grew up in a boarding school near Tel Aviv. As a youth, he wasn't particularly skilled in sports, but had a keen interest in competition. He learned that Israel's best discus thrower had a pitiful record. He took up the challenge, and made the Israel Olympic Team in 1960 and again in 1964 as a discus thrower. He didn't win anything, saying he was too emotional.

In 1960 he earned a physical education degree at Israel's Wingate Institute, a college for athletes. But it was during his Olympic years he gained an insight into coaching. "Every coach contradicted every other coach in what they told me to do," he says.

He turned to LeRoy Walker, later a United States Olympic track and field coach, and the two talked about forces, velocity, displacement and angles in sports. It was this approach that started him on the scientific path to sports and a continuing interest in movement of the human body.

He came to the United States to study exercise science at the University of Massachusetts and earned a degree in nine months. His student projects included computerized exercise science.

Ariel serves as chairman of Biomechanics and Computer Science for the United States Olympic Committee, and it was he who interested his fellow Israeli, Arie Selinger, to bring the women's volleyball team to Coto de Caza to train.

Since the women's volleyball team has

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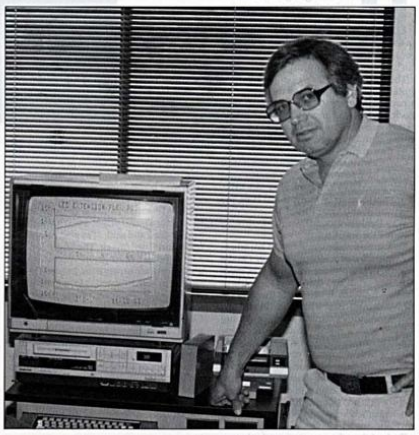

Gideon Ariel and the Ariel Computerized Exercise Machine combining arm and leg functions.

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been training at the Trabuco Canyon layout, Ariel has seen them grow to near perfection and doesn't hesitate to predict an Olympic Gold Medal for the team when they play in Long Beach next year.

While Ariel doesn't profess to take the place of a coach with this computerized system that took over ten-thousand hours to program, he does feel that supplementing their work is essential. But, he doesn't confine his interest to athletes alone. He is also looking to the future and help for the handicapped and mentally retarded.

The Coto de Caza Research Center was opened in 1980 and is the third such unit put together by Ariel. He started in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1969 and since then has also put together the computerized program used at the site of the United States Olympic training facility at Colorado Springs.

"Computers have a perfect memory and are fast, but they are also dumb," he says. "Man has a poor memory and is slow. But man is intelligent."

At the present time, Ariel is marketing the Ariel 4000 Series computerized exercise systems. He has more than one hundred sixty of these units sold to hospitals, rehabilitation centers, athletic teams and others interested in physical fitness and therapy. The units are far ahead of anything currently in the field and will open a completely new field of therapy.

Ariel has changed athletes' exercise habits, training and rehabilitation. He is helping to change thinking about human motion, as well. The 4000 Series incorporates his system of biomechanical analysis and he's extremely confident in the way it will help the world.

"The retarded and handicapped will be helped more than you can dream." With a computer, you can stimulate those dreams.

"We analyze human movements and design rehabilitation equipment for those who purchase our system. The business executive will be provided with cassettes detailing exercises to use in hotel rooms while traveling, then the results will be tested on the computer when they return home.

"We are programming the units to deal with illness technology and to work with people afflicted with muscular dystrophy. The wheelchair tennis program is also being helped.

"Super athletes can do things normal people can't do, but they also have parts of their bodies, such as knees, that are hurt at times. We are trying to aid them in the fastest possible rehabilitation. We feel we are gaining greater efficiency for treating others by knowing about the super athletes and their problems."

He uses the women's volleyball team as an example of helping the super athletes to the road to success, but adds a word of caution: "We're not taking the place of a coach. Without the coaches, we couldn't get the results we have achieved.

"The women's volleyball team is a good example. It was virtually impossible for them to train at Colorado Springs, so I invited them here. They are training under ideal conditions and are sure to win the Gold Medal in July."

Ariel and Braden have worked closely in many phases of the program, and the wheelchair tennis player is no exception.

"We've tried to help handicapped people play tennis as close to the way normal people do as possible. We've studied the characteristics involved and tried to figure what changes need to be made to help them change direction or stop suddenly on the court.

"We've also worked with race horses. While you can't talk to horses to feed information into the computer, you can film them when they are yearlings and are startled. In this manner we can detect possible future winners by their reaction.

"If you look at Olympic athletes, you find very few who had fathers who won Gold Medals before them. Horses are much the same and it isn't always the top money-winner who makes the best sire."

Ariel is the brains behind the sophisticated computer center and the man who programs everything connected with human body movement to moves of opposing teams on the court. Braden also plays a leading role operating the high speed moving picture cameras.

The films are analyzed by Ariel and put on the screen with a sonic pen, which makes them stick men and women rather than full pictures. In this way, he can more clearly examine the body movements and help achieve the individual's maximum potential.

While the athlete has been the testing grounds for much of the sophisticated programming at Coto de Caza through Braden and Ariel, the future holds unlimited possibilities in many walks of life.

"Biomechanics offers much larger and more positive opportunities than just a consumer's guide to sports and recreation equipment and techniques," says Ariel. "Biomechanics can literally improve life from cradle to grave."

In today's complex society, it is no small wonder that the study of body movement to aid super athletes today will help others less fortunate tomorrow. The story has only just begun.

The fifty-four-year-old Braden figures he will have to live another one hundred seventy-six years to successfully achieve the "conservative" list of things he wants to accomplish in his lifetime.

That might not be long enough for either man to accomplish such goals, sixteen-hour days notwithstanding. □

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