



WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



Mike Westerdal of CriticalBench.com Interviews Brian Cannone

MW: Hey everybody, this is Mike Westerdal of CriticalBench.com and this is your weekly muscle building expert interview series. Today we've got Brian Cannone on the line. He is a bodybuilding promoter. He's also owner of the very popular website FitnessAtlantic.com. And he's also competed in bodybuilding. He's a good friend of mine. I don't know, maybe ten years now we've known each other. We actually met in Connecticut when I was personal training at a gym. And he was just looking to get the word out about his show and I was passing out some fliers for him. We got to talking and now I actually help him with his website and product development as well.

But, the reason we're doing this call tonight, we're going to be talking about bodybuilding competition, but not necessarily just for people that want to compete, we've just talking about some of the strategies that bodybuilders use to get in such

great shape, how they build muscle and how they get themselves so lean for a competition.

So, welcome, Brian, thanks a lot for being on the call. Go ahead and introduce yourself to everybody.

BC: Oh, thanks, Mike, and thanks everybody on Critical Bench. It's a great website and I'm really happy to be part of your program here.

MW: So, how long have you been running the Fitness Atlantic competition? Tell us a little bit about that just so we know where you're coming from.

BC: Well, I started off really into bodybuilding at about...I'd say 1991. I started training for shows. I did a couple of shows and really enjoyed it, became very passionate about the sport. I was part of the Mr./Miss Connecticut and I competed in a Mr. Connecticut contest. And the promoter pretty much...he remembered me because I was so into it. I sold a lot of tickets, really. And he remembered that part about me and when it became time for him to move on, he offered me the show.

So, I started running the Mr./Miss Connecticut in, I'd say, 1993 was the first one. And ran that show until I started doing the Fitness Atlantic and making it more of a larger scale show. And that was in 1999. So, since 1999.

MW: So, the Fitness Atlantic competition, tell us a little bit about that. That's a regional show in New England that qualifies people to get a pro card? Or, how does that work?

BC: Yeah, well, we've been doing it as a muscle mania, naturally bodybuilding competition along with Fitness, Fitness America and stuff like that. And I've been doing that until last year when we broke away and became an independent contest. And this year it becomes a national show. So, it will be the United States Championships and it will be in conjunction with the World Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation with Paul Dillett over in Canada. So, this will be the very first United States show qualifying people for pro in bodybuilding, fitness model, diva bikini and a couple of other different shows that we have within it. And bodybuilding being a big part of this area in New England and now it will be on a national scale.

MW: Yeah, that's awesome. Congratulations on the success of the competition. I mean, it's just gotten bigger and bigger and more popular. Everybody always has great things to say about it. It's definitely an awesome event. I've been to a couple of them. I had the privilege when I was living up there. Now, I'm down in Florida, for you guys on the call that don't know that.

Yeah, you've got a lot of experience with this, but not just as the promoter. I mean, you're friends with a lot of the competitors. You worked as a personal trainer.

You've done nutrition at the health clubs, and you've done this yourself. So, you've got like a wealth of knowledge that we'd like to tap into tonight.

Let's get started a little bit talking about, for a natural bodybuilder, how do you balance out how ripped you want to get versus how big you want to get? Is there a plan to that? do people bulk up and then try to get ripped? Or, is there kind of a strategy or an overview or something you could tell us a little bit about that?

BC: Yeah, pretty much anybody can really get into bodybuilding. You can go from a novice competitor to an advanced and even at the pro level. What they want to really understand is that bodybuilding is about, number one, muscle size. So, you do want to try to gain muscle size. But, you also want to look at the symmetry of your body. So, you're looking at keeping a small waist, getting wide shoulders, wide back, good sweep to your legs and having everything really look in proportion. And then, as you get ready for a contest, it's all about your conditioning and your definition. So, everybody in bodybuilding really should be looking for those three things. It's not always how big you are. It's your symmetry, it's your definition and conditioning.

WM: Well, I was just going to ask you about conditioning, because with my sports background, when I hear the word conditioning, I'm thinking your heart, your lung capacity, things like that. What does conditioning mean in a bodybuilding competition?

BC: Yeah, it's definitely not that. It's not really how fit you are, but it's how fit you look. So, conditioning would be more definition of your muscles. So, you're looking for the guy that's the leanest. And with that, you could be symmetrical, you could have a lot of muscle size, but then you're really looking for the guy that has that shredded muscle, the guy that's really...his muscles are separated. You can see like an anatomy chart looking at somebody. You see every little muscle and every fiber, really showing up. Body fat levels are really, really low.

WM: Yeah, we got some guys listening and some girls, probably in great shape, but how do you get to that final level where whether somebody wanted to compete or not? What level of body fat percentage would you say the winning bodybuilders are. And what are some strategies you can use to get to that same level?

BC: Well, you don't want to get too hung-up on just having like your caliper pinch test on your body fat. It really is perception of how you look. So, with that in mind, it's not... I could tell you, hey Mike, get to 6% and you'll be great. But, that's not always true because a guy with more size may not necessarily have the lowest point percentage if he's getting like a body fat caliper pinch test.

So, it's really how you look and getting into that condition. I would say, though, average guys go from six to four percent, somewhere in that range. And doing that, you

want to really watch that you're conditioning all year long is pretty good. And that would be how low your body fat is just normally.

What you find is that a lot of guys aren't necessarily looking to just eat everything in the world and every calorie they can find just to be as heavy as possible. There are people that look at it and say, well, out of season or in season, off season weight, for the most part, you are finding that guys are staying somewhere in the range of 10 pounds, a little bit out from their contest shape. They're finding that holding a lot of body fat isn't necessarily helping them as it comes time to get ready for their next contest.

So, most of these guys are looking at about 12 weeks of hard, strict dieting for a show. Some guys get away with as little as six weeks, depending on that condition that you keep your physique in all year long.

MW: Okay, that's interesting. Because from watching or looking at some of the bodybuilding magazine, which I try not to do, but in natural versus the non-tested competitions, I mean, you see some pictures where these guys are just massive and they call it like bulking or off season. Is it more of a natural versus unnatural that do this, like the natural guys try to stay in shape all year long? Why do you see some of the guys in the magazines that look like they blow-up by like 40 or 50 pounds some times of the year?

BC: Yeah, you know, I really don't know too much about drug use and steroids and what kind of programs these people are on. And the scary thing about that is, a lot of guys who do go on this stuff, it's not legal. So, you're using an illegal drug that you're buying off somebody and you really don't know where they got it. It's not like you can go to a doctor and get a prescription and be like, okay, I'm going to go on a steroid program now.

MW: You can, but probably not for bodybuilding, but there are guys getting hormone replacement therapy. But, that's not for competing in bodybuilding.

BC: Yeah, who knows? I mean, you never know. If you are getting it from a doctor in some type of way, you don't know how shady that guy is. So, it's not something that I am familiar with. And what I find is regardless, regardless of these guys, whether they're a pro level that's a non-tested show or a tested show, if you don't know how to get your physique into top condition and really be able to win any type of show without steroids, you really have no right jumping on steroids. That's the way I look at it.

It's like, if you're not a top level natural bodybuilder and doing well already, you start adding drugs in the mix and you're just really taking chances on what your physique's going to look like or knowing the right program and really becoming like

some kind of chemist. And you really should know the basics first before you even consider anything at that kind of level and doing that kind of damage to your body.

So, you really have to understand dieting. And the main thing is, regardless of what you're trying to do, you're trying to just look good for the beach, you're trying just to pack on muscle, you want to go to nightclubs and look good. You just want to make your physique look better. Even with power lifting. You want to increase your size and in your muscle, you really should take a look at understanding nutrition first. Because, a lot of guys will say, well, what's more important? Your workout or your diet? How much is this and how much is that and the guys will always say, well, it's 80% nutrition and 20% workout. It's really 100% of both.

You've got to work out like a maniac. You have to eat like a maniac. And you want to understand what you're doing. It's about the calories you intake. So, if you're trying to gain muscle, you've got to understand just the basics. It takes 3,500 calories to gain a pound, or to lose a pound of body fat. So, you're working within that math. And you want to understand your carbs, proteins and fats and your ratios and how many calories you should be taking-in, depending on what your goal is.

So, if you're looking to pack on muscle, you're looking to gain muscle, you have to understand what you have to increase 3,500 calories. And how are you going to do that is probably by eating the best food choices that you can. So, you're not going to go out and just buy a pizza with cheese on it and be like...just down the whole thing to try to gain a couple of pounds on the scale. You're going to say, okay, well, let me go and eat chicken breast, turkey, egg whites, cottage cheese. You're going to say, really take a look at your protein levels. That's really number one, because carbs are easy. Everybody can go and eat a lot of carbs.

But, when you start preparing all these foods, the main thing is you're going to find that you have to go out and do your food shopping and you have to load up on protein. And, you also want to prepare that food ahead of time. So, you want to eat more chicken, turkey, fish, egg whites, your low fat, nonfat dairy products, your egg whites. And then, you want to split those calories up throughout your meals throughout the day. This way, they digest and you're able to actually absorb those calories you're putting in.

So, you're going to find out that everybody's doing five to six meals per day or they're doing protein shakes or weight gain shakes. They're doing things every three hours. It's eat no less than two hours and no more than four hours apart. And you're going to find that your body will digest that food much better and start spreading out those meals and being consistent. You can't eat a whole bunch of calories on one day and then very little on the next.

There's those people that they up and down their calories when they're on a low fat diet. They're trying to see these changes. Consistency! You want to be consistent. You want to have a plan and then follow the plan.

MW: They're some good tips. Is that the type of low carb dieting? How much carbs are you talking about, and do you change that as you get closer to the 12 weeks before the competition?

BC: Well, the carbs come in many different forms. So, you want to really take a look at what's a high fiber carb? What's the best quality carbohydrates you could be eating? Now, I would say sweet potatoes and regular potatoes, brown rice, oatmeal in the morning, any type of hot cereal like Oatbran, Cream of Wheat. Those are your main complex carbs that would be the majority of your diet. And you would replace things like your breads and your pastas and your refined types of foods, and your overly processed stuff. So, you're eating cleaner.

So, you're going to eat some better quality carbohydrates and you're going to split those up with your meals, too. So, you're having number one, your protein. Number two, think about the types of carbs you're going to have. I don't believe in super low carb types of diets. I believe in quality carbs are going to keep you fuller. Carbohydrates give you glycogen in your muscles. So, along with your glycogen and drinking a lot of water, you're going to be full. You're going to have really full muscles because you're eating carbohydrates.

So, you want to have your protein, your carbohydrates and then unsaturated fats. Things like that would be like flax seed oil or canola oil or safflower oil, some type of healthy...

MW: Natural peanut butter, coconut oil?

BC: Yeah. I'm not big on those. I think they are higher in saturated fat. A lot of people, I think, like peanut butter. They just like the taste of peanut butter. So, a lot of people eat it. I think you're much better off with like a good...like Udo's Choice flax seed oil would be a better choice for you fat source. Because, I think it is healthier for you. And keeping your saturated fat is healthier just overall. Any doctor would tell you to keep your fats low.

So, I think your quality protein... When you're looking at protein, too, most guys, probably most guys in the type of program you have here from Critical Bench are bigger guys. You can really load up on your protein and the type of protein you're eating and how much. You're going to find a lot of people don't really do like nine ounces of chicken breast. I mean, that's a lot of chicken. You're buying like a family pack of chicken every like two or three days and you're cooking it up and you're preparing that

and splitting it up into like Tupperware containers along with your carbs, some vegetables.

The other thing, too, is increasing your fiber. When you increase your fiber you're going to speed up your metabolism a lot. So, you want to eat things like broccoli and asparagus and string beans and salads and stuff like that. It's going to help you, definitely going to help you. No matter what your goal is. You're just doing power lifting, you're eating salads and you think like, why would you do it? But, you are going to speed up your metabolism, you're going to stay leaner. It's overall very good to increase those types of carbs in almost every meal, too.

So, I try to stress to people, even in breakfast. I have guys dieting for a bodybuilding contest, I'll be like okay, I want you to do nine egg whites in the morning, a bowl of oatmeal and I want you to have some broccoli in your egg whites. They'll go, "Really?" Yeah, just add it in there because you're going to get leaner by eating more vegetables, starch carbs.

MW: They're very low calorie, too, aren't they? I mean, aren't some of those foods ones that it takes just as much calories to actually eat it as the calories you're consuming?

BC: Absolutely. That's what I believe, too. So, I have guys, when they're getting ready for a bodybuilding show, they're doing vegetables six times a day within all of their meals. So, a lot of guys, old school guys, you're going to find a lot of guys will say, well, limit your carbohydrates and after 3 o'clock, don't eat any carbs, just do vegetables. It's like, honestly, your body's not going to know the difference when you're eating these foods. You can wake up from a deep sleep, eat and go right back to sleep. And if you're not eating way, way, way above your caloric expenditure, you're not going to get fat.

So, the timing of the meals, as long as they're spread apart, your body is going to digest them. So, a lot of guys, even bodybuilders used to think, well, I shouldn't eat and go to bed. Yeah, you can. It doesn't matter. So, it's really that total calorie intake. So, you want to kind of figure out where you should be for your calorie intake. Stay consistent and then as you're gaining more muscle you keep increasing your calories, because you're going to keep packing on muscle. But, if you're eating 3,000 calories and you do that for a year, you're eventually going to plateau-out and you need to go to 3,500 calories a day, and then maybe up to 4,000 calories per day.

If you want to keep gaining muscle, it has to come from somewhere, and it's going to come from the amount of calories you're putting in your body. A lot of guys just think, well, if I lift heavy, as heavy as possible and lower my reps down, I'm going to keep gaining size. Well, the size is only going to come from somewhere and it's only

going to come from increasing your calories. So, that's absolutely something you want to look at, regardless of what you're training for.

MW: Okay, well, you didn't mention fruits. What about fruits?

BC: Yeah, I forgot about fruits. Fruits are another form of carbohydrate, more of a simple carb. They do burn a lot faster. Whether you're going to have an apple or an orange or a grapefruit or anything like that, it's a great carb. Some are higher in fiber than others. Like, a banana is actually higher in calories than like an apple would be. So, those are great foods to have.

You're going to find that guys, as they get ready for their bodybuilding show and they start to decrease their calories, most of them stay consistent with their protein, almost right up to a bodybuilding show. What they're going to fluctuate is the carbohydrates that they're taking in and changing the types. So, you'll find somebody at like 12 weeks out is definitely going to have some fruit in their diet, and as they get towards 6 weeks out, it's probably going to be the thing that they eliminate, is taking away those types of carbs as they get closer and closer to the bodybuilding show.

MW: Now, because it's a simple carb or it's got the sucrose in it? Is that something that might be best to eat after a workout? Is that something you believe in?

BC: Yeah, a lot of people talk about the window. It's like, they think the workout and then they have this window. I think, honestly, I think that that window is really something that's there if your calories are so low. I think somebody that's four weeks out from a bodybuilding show and they're really, really lean. They're like 6% body fat and they work out like a crazy person for like a hour and they're really depleted in the amount of calories they take in, at that point, if they eat like an apple, they'd probably feel like they got more out of it than somebody who's six months out from a bodybuilding show. There are a lot of guys that believe in that taking pure sugar right after a workout is something that's good.

I'm really not from that type of training philosophy. I've never been one to believe really so much in that. There are a lot of guys that will drink like a carbohydrate drink right after their workout. If you're not that low to be depleted, I really just think you're putting a lot of sugar in your body and you're spiking your insulin level.

So, it's not something that I put in people's programs. I don't really tell people so much about the window of opportunity. I just believe that if you're eating your six meals a day and if you even made it eight. The more often you're eating and the more consistent you are, you're going to see changes in your physique. You're going to see changes. You're going to gain muscle or you're going to get leaner depending on your program and your nutrition.

MW: Yeah, good point. So, with the protein, that's very important. We're eating a lot of it. Do you have a recommendation on how many grams of protein per day, depending on what you weigh or how many grams per meal? Is there a certain amount that your body can't digest after that?

BC: The old school way, the way that a lot of people would say is it's 1 gram per pound. So, if you weigh like 180 pounds, you're taking in 180 grams of protein.

MW: And then divide that by your six meals?

BC: Yeah. But, you know, there are so many guys that go so much higher than that. They go like to 2 grams. And they increase a lot more. There would be people that I guess would say, well, that's not...it's a lot of work on your kidneys to digest that type of stuff. But, I really have seen that guys doing like 9 egg whites in the morning and then a can of tuna fish a couple of hours later and then 9 ounces of chicken or turkey every three hours after that, they're going to see a lot more.

MW: Yeah, and the calories don't add up. I mean, someone else who's eating junk might wind up eating less food and getting a lot more calories.

BC: Absolutely. Absolutely. They eat a lot more calories of not quality type of foods.

MW: Yeah, it's hard to eat that much protein for some people.

BC: People have no idea. They have no idea how hard that is. And even if you're doing the 1 gram, it's still a lot of food. You know, when you're eating clean and you're eating good quality protein. And that's why a lot of guys will go to the supplements and they'll start doing all these shakes and stuff. And a lot of people, they think the shake is what's doing it. They think, well, if I go and get a protein shake, then I just do that three times a day and I'm good.

You're so much better off eating solid food. If you're eating like chicken breast and you're doing that five times a day, and egg whites in the morning along with some cottage cheese and solid foods, your body has to break them down and digest them. You're drinking this protein shake, regardless how good they say the label is or the marketing behind it, you're so much better off with the food. The supplement is to supplement when you can't eat.

So now, you're working, it's the middle of the day and there's absolutely no way you can sit down and eat 9 ounces of chicken breast. Yeah, get your shaker out and put your protein in it with water and shake it up and drink that. That's when you use it.

A lot of people, they become dependent on the supplement. The supplements are just an extra thing for when you can't do the food. If you have time to do the food, do the food. You're going to see so much more results from eating solid foods.

MW: Yeah, I agree with that. I mean, that's the protein shakes. Are there any other supplements that you recommend?

BC: Well, I believe that creatine is good to take. And that's something that sometimes people will mix that with like grapefruit juice or something like that. You're going to find that most of the creatines on the market today are mixed with some type of glucose, some type of sugary substance where people aren't...they're not buying straight creatine monohydrate anymore. They're buying creatine that has a fancy name and a fancy label that's mixed with a flavor and it tastes good and it had a bunch of other things that nobody knows what it is. And it's supposed to be where it's doing a little bit more for you or has this fancy thing on it. It's basically like a replacement of drinking a little bit of juice or something else that's put in there.

But, your basic creatine is fine. It will probably cost you less money if you can get it. Five grams of creatine, you do it in that little scooper that comes in the jar. I don't believe that the loading is all that necessary. I think when creatine first came out, the big thing was load it up for like a week and you start taking it so many times per day.

Creatine basically will have your body hold about five pounds of water weight. So, some guys will cut it out before a show. Some guys leave it in. They use it when the load up on that final week. But, most of the guys will eliminate it because guys feel that the creatine makes them a little bit smoother. So, they're holding more water weight so it's something they eliminate. But, by holding onto that five pounds, it does help you when you're recovering and when you're working out. you feel better, you get a better pump. So, creatine's definitely something that's good.

Glutamine is another for after the workout. A lot of guys will take a glutamine product. These things, again, you can get just a straight bland one, but everybody else is marketing, all the companies are marketing, these pre-workout and after workout type of products that are a little bit more fancier now days. Whether or not they're better, I'm not entirely sure how much is marketing and hype and how much of it is really because it's a better quality product for you.

MW: Yeah, it's hard to tell. I mean, there's no regulation on these supplements anyway.

BC: Now, you know, and that's the thing. A lot of people ask about the whey proteins, too. So, whey protein you're going to find comes in like a casein product, which is like a milk and egg type of thing. It's a little bit more slow digesting. It's not as

quality and people what will spend a little bit more on protein will find that there's isolate proteins, the isolates are a little bit easier to digest. They're a little bit quicker into your system. They are more expensive. But, the isolate proteins are supposed to be a better product

So, if you did take a protein powder, you probably would want to take an isolate protein, a creatine product and a glutamine. Most of the other products that are out on the bodybuilding market, you're going to find are pre-workout type of things. And the pre-workouts are loaded up with caffeine, things that just make you feel...

MW: Stimulants to make you feel like you're getting a good workout. Things that give you a flush.

BC: That's crazy, but I think a lot of the flush feeling comes from like things they put in there just to make you flush like that, a little tingling...

MW: Yeah, they'll put that in.

BC: They'll throw a little niacin in there, you feel tingly and you're like, aw, this stuff is working. So, you could drink a cup of coffee and go workout. If that's going to do it for you. A lot of guys get used to caffeine, so it doesn't do anything for them anymore, and then they start getting hooked on these pre-workout things and it's hard to get off of them once you start taking stuff like that.

You know, back a few years ago, everybody was taking ephedra, and then ephedra came off the market and I think it is back on the market again. But, it's something that really increases your heart rate and it really... You find that ephedra was in a lot of the different products that are for people who are sick, because it's like as asthma medication. It opens up your lung capacity.

MW: Yeah, it's a bronchiole dilator.

BC: Yeah, and it speeds your heart rate up. But, you know, a lot of people are using that as a fat burner, to think that it's increasing your metabolism. So, they were taking it like throughout the day and they'd take it with aspirin, which like thins your blood. And then they'd take it with a cup of coffee.

MW: That was the three ingredients in the old fat burners. You had the aspirin, the caffeine and the ephedrine together, was like supposedly one of the best fat burning formulas.

BC: Whether or not it's burning fat or just making it some kind of like go craziness, you know. It's making you fidgety and...

MW: Was that like the old Hydroxycuts and stuff from back in the day?

BC: Yeah, a lot of that stuff has changed. So, if you stick with what you're doing, you stick with really good, consistent type of program, you're going to find that once you do start taking those things, you're going to become dependent on them. And it's going to be hard to stop using like a pre-workout type of thing.

So, I would just tell people, what I recommend is just drink a little black coffee, drink a lot of water, because coffee is a diuretic. It's going to make you go to the bathroom a lot more. And you want to have a lot of water in your body. So, you want to drink about a gallon of water a day, throughout the entire day.

If you're just using a little coffee as your stimulant before your workout, you're not going to become dependent as bad. There's people who...I don't know a lot of people who drink any coffee, I don't know to do that. But, if you have a little coffee, go workout, you get used to it and you're fine. You're going to see just as many results.

I've seen people that, whether taking all these kinds of pre-workout stuff or not taking them, you're not going to be able to tell the difference whether somebody's on a pre-workout supplement or not taking it, as far as their physique is going to look.

MW: Right. Really, I feel like it just gives you energy for the workout. It gets you fired-up, energy and it's just a stimulant to make you work out harder. So, if you can get that on your own or just from some coffee, that's probably healthier for you.

BC: It's definitely a lot more healthier. A lot of the products that are on the market, a lot of people say, well, they're probably all made in the same laboratory and sticking a different label on the bottle. You want to look at your mainstays, the ones that have been around for a long time. And that's your basic stuff. Your protein powder, your creatine and your glutamine have been around forever. They're proven to really work and help people out.

Most people who get the best results, you're going to find if you're really talking to them, you really see what they're doing, they're consistent in their diets. There's not too many people that are that genetically gifted that can eat McDonalds and pizza and Subway sandwiches and all this other stuff and they're completely...the calories up one day, down one day, all over the place, and have a great looking physique.

You're going to find that most of these people are pretty consistent in how they eat. There are some people that will tell you, like awe, I eat whatever I want. I can do whatever. And this guy looks fantastic.

MW: Is that true or is he just saying that?

BC: He don't go that crazy. He really doesn't go that crazy. He'll eat like one slice of pizza and stop. He ate one slice. I don't know anybody else that can do one slice and stop. Everybody else would eat half a pie or a whole pie.

MW: It's like, either don't do it or eat the whole half of pizza.

BC: And he's a machine. He's in the gym every day. He's working out like crazy. So, that's all a lot of hard work. These people that really look good, it's a lot of hard work. You want to look at everything they're doing, their activity level. Some people are just busy people. Some people, they say, well, I have a slow metabolism. Well, they probably don't eat that well. You can increase your metabolism by the better that you eat.

So, if you're eating six meals a day, you're doing clean protein, a really clean carb, maybe you eat some fruit in the morning, you're doing vegetables at almost every meal, you're drinking a gallon of water a day, you're probably doing some cardio. So, even if you're trying to gain size, adding in walking on the treadmill for 30 minutes is not going to shrink you down to a string bean. It's not. It's just going to make you leaner. You're walking at your target heart range or even a little bit under it. It's going to help you stay leaner, keep the fat off your body.

So, keeping the fat off your body is going to...not going to change how much you could bench, necessarily. You know? It doesn't really change that much. If you're carrying around 50 pounds of body fat on your body, it doesn't make you a big, strong guy. So, you want to try to pack on 10 pounds of solid muscle in a year and it's noticeable. Ten pounds of muscle is a lot of muscle to gain. And people who aren't doing like 4,000 calories a day and understanding nutrition and really keeping it clean, they're not going to see the same results as somebody who is.

MW: Yeah. Wow.

BC: Another thing about...I guess the other thing to cover as far as anybody who does want to compete is, the hardest part is when they start to get lean enough. They get down to 6% body fat, they want to start getting down to like 4%. They might start doing double sessions of cardio. They're really going crazy.

You're going to find that the people who are the most successful are the ones that can stay consistent with it the longest. Somebody who doesn't have to crash diet in the last few weeks. If you're down to four weeks to a contest, you're one month out, and your body fat is still at like 10% and you can't see your abs and you want to crash for the last four weeks, I've seen people do it. I've seen people get ready and be on stage at like 5%. But, they're never the best. They can always be better.

And to be better would probably be a month out, to be at like 6%. You just want to drop one or two more percent. What I've seen is that most guys who are dropping percentages of body fat, it's usually in the range of two pounds per percent, done correctly.

So, if you're at 6% a month out, you're going to drop about four more pounds of fat. Not necessarily weight, because you're going to drop down to that four percent. You still may look a little bit smooth like you're holding water, then you're going to do a little depletion of your water, which is really just like, eliminating your sodium as you get like four days out to the show.

So, there are a lot of guys that get into that whole last week of what to do. And the problem is, when guys get to that level and they're looking to make the adjustments in their body in the last week of competition, if you don't look great a week out from your show, and you're looking to manipulate yourself to really be ready for competition, some of it maybe that you're just not that ready.

So, if you look great a week out and then you're just manipulating a little bit of your sodium in the last few days, you're going to find that you can really be in great shape. But, if you're just not ready and it's a week out and you're just going crazy all these different tactics that people do, and they carb deplete from the Sunday to the Wednesday and then from Wednesday out they start carbing up, what happens is, a guy will go, he'll get all the way down to the last week of the show. Then, he'll eliminate all the carbs completely and just eat protein. And he'll do that from Sunday to like Wednesday afternoon. And then, he'll start going crazy, eating like sweet potatoes and rice and stuff like that. And then some of the guys, old school, they'll start like the day of the show, they eat like pancakes with syrup and everything else on there. A lot of it is really trial and error.

MW: What will that do, eating the pancakes and the syrup the day of? That just make the muscles fuller?

BC: You know, there are a lot of guys that say...they'll kind of eat something the day of the show and then they think that that's the magic food. They'll go, oh, I was ready for a contest and I just wasn't full enough and I ate a pizza and then I looked fantastic. So, they think pizza is like the magic food from now on. They're like, every time I do a show from now on I'm going to eat a pizza before.

MW: So, it's almost like a ritual or something, or some kind of good luck thing?

BC: Sort of, but what it is, is that they're just that low on body fat that they're probably going to benefit more if they just ate like a sweet potato and their chicken and something else. Some guys what they'll find is as they're carbing up, those last few

days, they'll need a little bit more of those higher glycemic carbohydrates. So, they'll start doing some white rice instead of brown. Because, the white rice is all digested into your body. And, they'll do like white potatoes instead of sweet because they're higher glycemic level. So, your body will absorb those.

So, when you're that low, you get down to 4% body fat and you're in the last three days, right up to the competition, you cut out things that are holding sodium naturally. So, egg whites are loaded with salt. Tuna fish, of course, would be loaded with salt. Basically, a lot of the...even the foods that are protein have natural salt in them. But, what guys will do is they'll start doing distilled water on those last few days and they sip it. And what they do is they just change around their carbs so that now they're doing, okay, let's do a little white rice. You'll see a lot of guys do rice cakes in those last couple of days or the day of the show. They might use a little bit of honey.

What the really sweet stuff will do it bring out some vascularity in guys. So, if they have some veins and they eat a little bit of honey or something with sugar in it, they're going to see more veins. You're not necessarily judged on veins. So, from the judging table, it's really hard to see things like that.

So, some guys it's more pronounced. Most guys, it's really not. They have to get tanned up, too. So, they use a fake tanning product like Pro Tan or Dream Tan right before the competition for the stage lights. Some guys use a light spray of oil. Some guys, they bring Pam backstage and they spray themselves down with Pam.

You go out on stage, you have bright stage lights flashing on you. So, a lot of the last minute details are very important, but some guys go overboard on things. You want to be ready that week out. You're ready and you're just making a little bit of manipulations where you're not doing things to try to overcompensate and make you ready. So, it's like a week out you're not ready and you think all these crazy things that bodybuilders do in the final week is really going to change your overall look of your body? It's a lot of guess work, and you really have to do a few shows to really get it right.

So, most guys... If somebody's ready for a show, I don't tell them to do the carb depletion. I'll just tell them to just go down a little bit and increase it the last few days, get rid of their sodium and they'll look great. And what they'll find is that they're not going to... You get a guy that's just like... You tell them, all right, I want you to eat a bag of rice cakes and I want you to do jelly on them, all fruit jelly, and I want you to drink wine before your pump-up.

Some guys just feel awful. They do that... You're not used to eating that way and they eat that way and I mean, you used to go back stage at a bodybuilding show and it just smells awful. These guys have gas like crazy. Their bodies aren't used to it.

So, like, you're going from like... You've been training for 12 weeks, eating so clean, now you start putting junk in your body the last day of the show and your body doesn't always adjust well to it.

MW: It feels weird.

BC: Yeah. It gets crazy. And what guys do is they get nervous. And when they get nervous in that last week, because most people, I've never met anybody that says I'm 100% dead-on and I know I got this show. Most people that are training for a bodybuilding show in that last week are very nervous. They're like, I'm going into a show. I don't know who's going to be there. Hopefully I do my best. I want to win, but I'm nervous, so I'm going to go on Bodybuilding.com and find out what some other guy did and I'm going to do some crazy stuff to my diet.

And it can be the worst thing you do. I've seen people really screw it up in that last week. They look fantastic a week out, then they come into the show and they just look awful. And you're like...

MW: Same stuff happens in power lifting, too. People try to cut weight to make a lower weight class and they eat so differently and they have to do all these weird things and then the day of the meet, they just don't feel right. And they didn't put their weight back on. It just like backfires on people sometimes. It sounds very similar to this. Like, you're either ready or you're not. That last week, you can't be messing with things too much.

BC: That's the way to put it, though. It's definitely...when you're a week out, you're either ready or you're not ready.

MW: Well, they say that in power lifting, like, a lot of people don't even lift the last week before the meet because they just say you're not going to get any stronger this week anyway.

BC: You know, they do that with bodybuilding, too. It's like that last week, you know, there are some guys that will go and they'll do like...when they're carb depleting they're doing these fully body workouts and they're doing. They're really trying to get all the glycogen out of their bodies so that when they finally put carbs back in, it's like this super shock.

But, most of the time it's just counterproductive. You're eliminating your carbohydrates and then you're putting them back in. Really all you want to do is get rid of your water. You're not looking to just be flat, look awful a week out and then like add carbs and be like, bam, there it is. Everything just showed up, it's like no, you looked great already.

So, just eliminate your sodium, a little bit of something that's a simple carbohydrate before you pump up before your contest and you're going to look great. And then you'll be fine. You'll feel good. That's definitely such a big thing because if you don't feel good, how well are you going to do? I mean, you feel like garbage, you're out there and you feel like garbage, how fun is that? If you can do it and be 100% and just kind of coast right in, that's really the goal.

MW: This is for guys that are going to compete in a show, what if a regular guy or somebody that's...body fat's not that low,, maybe they're at 10% or something like that. Will doing all these last week manipulations, will that do anything that you'd notice something in their body if they were going on vacation or they wanted to take some pictures or whatever the reason is, but they're not competing in a show. Would doing all these different manipulations like one week out make a noticeable difference in someone that's body fat isn't that low already?

BC: Well, if you're at 10%, 10% is usually where somebody will start to see their abs. Your upper abs are in, you're not seeing your lower abs, the cut to your legs aren't really pronounced. If you're getting down between 8 and 6%, then you do see a lot more definition in your body.

I'd say if you were 10% and you did all these things, maybe, maybe if you cut your sodium you would drop a few pounds from cutting out your water weight. So, if you just really did like chicken and sweet potato and you just made sure you didn't eat tuna fish or egg whites and you watched your salt, you'll tweak your body enough where you will look a little bit better for like a photo shoot or going on vacation for a day.

But, once you start putting that right back in your body, you're gaining those couple of pounds right back. So, if you're down and you're down at like 6% and then you cut your salt for a photo shoot, yeah, I'd recommend watching your salt. If you're going in for a magazine photo shoot and you're just not really contest ready, but you're almost right there. You're full, you just want your abs to be really pronounced for that day, then I would definitely say, watch your salt and drink a lot of distilled water for like three days and come in a little bit harder. Definitely go in a tanning booth or put on a fake tan, if you don't want to use a tanning booth. Use a little Pro Tan or something and just get a little darker. A photo shoot, you definitely want to shave the hair off your body. How you stand, how you pose, how you show yourself is definitely a big thing.

I know you did that transformation for the other program you did, right? You did a couple of little adjustments.

MW: Right.

BC: So, you definitely want to look at something like that when you're doing a photo shoot and try to make a few adjustments for what you're doing. I'd say most importantly, just try to get the fat off. If you have time, don't manipulate it, because once you do that, once you start going so bland in your diet that you're not eating fruit, you're cutting back on a lot of things. Once you go so strict on your diet that you're not enjoying what you're eating over a long period of time, eventually you're going to want to binge out.

That's what a lot of guys do, too. A lot of these guys, they gain so much weight because they diet so strict for a show and then they don't really ever indulge in anything that they go ballistic after a show. They end up gaining 20 pounds in like two days because they just go crazy. You know?

Some guys will say enjoy yourself once a week. And they'll take a cheat day. The problem with a cheat day, you still want to stay in your caloric range somehow. If you're doing...here's my cheat day and it's Sunday...

MW: You can diet for a week and on your cheat day you eat everything.

BC: A cheat meal is more acceptable. You're getting ready for a show and you're so far out and you want to enjoy yourself every now and then, you have your Saturday night or your Sunday cheat meal. And you're going to find that you don't be counterproductive that much. But, if you're getting to the point that your cheat day is making your counterproductive for your whole week, then you're not going to see a lot of changes in your body and it's not worth it.

But, you want to have some kind of sanity. What I try to do is tell people, learn how to spice up your foods, don't eat too bland. Don't boil your chicken. Don't eat that. Don't eat hard boiled eggs and crack them open every morning to just eat the whites. They're awful. They taste disgusting.

What I tell guys, go out and buy the Just Whites at Trader Joe's. They come already as just the white part. You don't have to crack your eggs every single morning. Get a little container, spray a little Pam in it and throw them in the microwave for like four minutes. So, you have your egg whites. If you want to use a little bit of catsup and you're that far out from the show that catsup has a little bit of sugar in it, but it's not going to kill you. It's going to taste-up that food a little bit more.

Eat oatmeal in the morning, don't eat the prepackaged oatmeal that comes in flavors like apple cinnamon. It's loaded with sugar. You want to get the big old Quaker Oats, and what you want to do is then add a little cinnamon to it. Some guys, they add a little Nutrasweet or some kind of fake sugar, something in there to make it better.

I like to take my oatmeal in the morning, when I cook it, and throw a banana in there as I cook it in the microwave and then it gets all mushy; it adds a little flavor, it makes it more enjoyable. When you have your chicken and brown rice and your vegetable in a bowl, I like to dice up my chicken, throw a little bit of salsa on it just to really give it a little bit more flavor. Salsa is very low calories, a little bit of salt. But, those things aren't going to matter so much.

MW: That's good for your eggs, too.

BC: Yeah, the salsa's great. I put salsa on everything. But, you want to learn how to enjoy your healthy foods. There are so many people that say, well, when you're getting ready for a bodybuilding show it's awful, it's torture. You're going through 12 weeks of not enjoying yourself. It doesn't have to be that way. You can learn how to cook things that you actually enjoy.

The preparation part of cooking, it is a hassle. If you're cooking three family packs of chicken a week and you're doing egg whites every morning, some people just get bored with what they're doing. So, if you're mixing it up enough, though, that you're actually enjoying the foods that you have, it's going to be great. You're going to see a lot of results. You're going to stick to it forever.

The same as people who get ready for a bodybuilding show. You get down to 4% and then the day after the show it's like, they're off to the buffet and they're just blowing up like crazy. They're just going to gain body fat and they're not going to enjoy it anymore. They're going to feel like crap. It's going to be hard to get them back in the mode again of going back into doing your six meals a day.

Some guys, they'll go and do a show, they'll have a couple of cheat meals right after the show and then bang, they're kind of at least back to a consistency. You don't have to be like completely anal about everything you eat, but you want to be consistent enough where you can start packing on muscle again by eating quality.

There's a lot of guys that do it. In bodybuilding they think it's 12 weeks. So, they eat garbage all year long, they don't do anything to make any really good changes in adding muscle size, and then they do a cram 12 week diet just to get ready for a show. They look the same every time they do a show, and then they get mad.

It's like they get mad at the scores or the judging or anything else to do with it. And it's like, really, you just want to improve every time you do a bodybuilding show. You want to get better each one you do. So, if you're training for a whole year and you're packing on 10 pounds of muscle in a year and you diet-down, every year you're going to look 10 pounds bigger. But, there are so many guys that think of it as an off

season, means they go completely off of everything. And they just basically eat like a pig. And then, 12 weeks out from a show they start, well, now I'll eat healthy.

It's a full, 265 day a year type of program. You want to be like eating good enough that you're always getting better, whether or not you do a show or not. It's like, learn how to eat for your body, learn how to gain muscle and it's all about nutrition. A lot of guys, bodybuilders, really old school used to go three on, one off, as far as a workout goes. You're going to find a lot more guys, especially natural bodybuilders, doing one body part a day.

So, they do like chest on Monday, legs on Tuesday, take a day off, come back and do back the next day is shoulders, take a day off. Then, they do their arms and do abs like once or twice a week. They're seeing a lot more results than the guy that's going at it three times on and then one day off and then repeating the cycle again.

People have definitely taken more time to recuperate. They're working out a little bit harder. Bodybuilding, I always recommend guys go and stay strong right up until a show. If you're squatting 315 for 10 reps and as you get ready for a show, you just keep eliminating your calories so much and so much and so much that you go overboard and you're doing two hours of cardio a day and you're getting weaker and weaker and weaker, you're probably losing muscle.

So, I always recommend that these guys keep their weights high and just really take the time to get ready. There are a lot of guys that don't like to diet, so they try to diet in six weeks instead of doing it for 12. When there are guys that can do it over a period of 6 months to get ready for a show and just dial it in, dead on. They've got it right down to a science. The longer you take to do it, that's probably the better off you're going to be.

MW: Yeah, that makes sense. Speaking of dialing it in, we've covered a lot of ground tonight. There are a lot of things we've talked about that we could get into more detail about. But, you've actually got a whole program and a whole book that really goes in depth on a lot of this stuff. That book is called Stage Ready Nutrition and Training. And I see that even comes with 14 weeks of pre-contest meal plans. And this is your experience, having worked with different bodybuilders, figure fitness and model competitors. You want to just tell us a little bit about the book and how that came about?

BC: Yeah. As a bodybuilder promoter, you really can't be everybody's personal trainer. It's something where like if you're helping somebody get ready for a show... You know, years ago when I ran the Mr./Miss Connecticut it was different. It was a very local show. I'd go and I'd train like 20 guys in my gym. We'd have a posing class and just kind of get all the local people into the show, and you pretty much knew everybody

that was in it. As the show grew into Fitness Atlantic and got bigger and people came in from all over the place, what you found is you really can't have the guy that you're working with on a regular basis and get him ready.

So, as years went on, I've stepped further and further away from helping people get ready for a show. And what I found is when I didn't want to help somebody, it was almost like a conflict of interest. It's like, I'm the promoter. I really can't be like personal training guys into the show. It's just not right.

So, what I did is I just put the book together. I have so much information from working with these people, knowing what the different people are following, knowing what they're doing. I wrote Stage Ready. And some people look at Stage Ready and they purchase the book and they go, well, this is pretty basic information. Well, it is, but the thing is, if you're not following the basic information, what else are you not doing?

You know? It's like, you need to eat all those foods we talked about, do everything, figure out your caloric intake. Figure out your calorie expenditure, how much cardio you should be doing for what you weigh right now. It's really good to take a look at your basics and start right from scratch. From anybody from a beginner to advanced really needs to look at your basics. You have to be following the basics.

From there, there's the bonuses that come with it. And the basic thing is a good one. The more advanced would be to have the 14 weeks where it walks you through. You can actually look at what are the things that you start to slowly eliminate from your diet. So, all you have to do is adjust the calories in that program for the 14 weeks out to the show.

And then, with that, too, as a special bonus, get's insider tips. So, insider tips comes with that, too, that shows from each different category the different changes that they do from some of the people who have done the show that give some of their input into what to do in the last, final stage.

There's also that extra bonus, too, that we have in addition to that which walks them through. So, anybody can do Stage Ready. Stage Ready will walk you through whether you want to compete or just look like a bodybuilder. And once you do Stage Ready, once you want to really learn those different extra tips like posing, tanning, registration for a show, the different divisions that are in a show, what types of shows there are to do, what are all the little final tips actually into the sport of that division that you're doing, whether it's bodybuilding, bikini, figure, fitness modeling. Those are broken down over 12 weeks with videos and other reports for each week.

WM: Cool. Well, that's what I was going to say, if you want to learn how to get in great shape, why not learn it from the people that are doing this as competitors. So, that's cool that other people can use this, too, and it's not just for people that want to compete.

I'll put a link below in the transcript of the interview, if anybody wants to go check out Stage Ready, Brian's book. It's a really good book, highly recommended. Anything else you wanted to add tonight, Brian? Otherwise I wanted to thank you for taking the time to go over this with us and teach us some of these lessons.

BC: Well, thank you for having me on here. The Fitness Atlantic competition is in Connecticut. It's usually the last weekend of April, one of those last two weeks. I think for next year, for 2011, when it becomes United States Championships, we'll have some special guests come down. We're working very closely with Paul Dillet. Paul Dillet was IFBB professional. He was in the top 10 Mr. Olympia. He won the Night of Champions. That was a huge show back in the day. A really good guy, same philosophies as me.

Opportunities for the athletes. No matter how well you do, whether you're the winner of the show or just a participant in the show, you're going to be treated fairly. You're going to be treated with just as much respect. You're going to walk away with a lot of goodies.

Last year we did like \$50,000 in like extra bonus prizes that we just gave to everybody. Everybody walked away with two goodie bags, loaded up with supplements and t-shirts and all kinds of stuff. We had prizes, we had photo shoots, a lot of great opportunities. Because, competing in bodybuilding isn't just about trying to win. It's a personal experience.

You go into a show and you're walking away with your trophy, and that's how you look. So, every time you get ready for a show, it's a great experience not just because it's a sport and you're competing against people. It's really like the little extra part that kind of makes it tough. To compete in a show is just a great experience because you learn your physique and you learn how to manipulate your body to look the best you've ever looked. And that's really where everybody should walk away as a winner and feel like a champion regardless how they place.

MW: Cool. And to learn more about that, just head over to FitnessAtlantic.com and get all the information about the show. And it's not just a competition site, there's tons and tons of information on there. And Brian's got a personal blog, too. You can get there from the home page, or just got to FitnessAtlantic.com/access and you'll see Brian's personal blog as well.

So, thanks a lot Brian. It's awesome talking to you tonight, and I'm sure I'll catch up with you later on in the week.

BC: Okay, thanks Mike.

MW: All right, thank you.

More Information On Brian Cannone's [Stage Ready Secrets](#).



"Lindsay Messina, Mo Mendez, and Alicia Marie all competed in my Fitness Atlantic competition. Now I got them and all the other competitors to open up and reveal the real secrets they use to get in super shape."

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