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WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



Dennis B. Weis Interviews Charles Amato

...Charles Amato. I was born on June 6th, 1942. My current address is 10117 Southeast Stanley. My telephone number is 654-5653. The best time to reach me is anywhere from 10AM to 6PM at my work number, which is 282-1460. I prefer not to be called at home.

My height is 5'9". I weigh 170-175 most of the time. I've been married 10 years and we have no children. At present I am a recreation instructor for the Portland Bureau of Parks and Recreation. I've been with them 15 years.

Titles I've won are Mr. Portland, Mr. Oregon, Most Muscular in the Northwest, Mr. Pacific Coast, Mr. Western USA, 2nd place in Junior Mr. America and I have won Best

Abdominals in Mr. America in 1970, 1971 and 1975. I was 5th in Mr. American in 1970. I was 7th in 1971 and 1975 and I was 6th in my height class in 1977.

My favorite pastime, other than weight training, is fishing. I spend a lot of time doing that out in the woods. I enjoy getting out with nature and being able to enjoy the fresh air and enjoy the creation that God has given us. I do catch a lot of fish and part of my incentive also is that it provides first-class protein and food for me that in about as natural a state as you can possibly obtain it.

I also spend quite a bit of time [studying the Bible](#) and my philosophies of life and the way I relate it to my bodybuilding are all tied-up in that, or influenced by my Bible reading.



I became interested in bodybuilding or actually began it when I graduated from high school, but my interest started as a young boy. I, right from the very beginning, always was aware of muscle and admired people that had it. However, I was extremely skinny myself and it used to sort of bother me to see people that were built, because it reminded me how insufficient I was.

When I got into high school, I started doing pushups. We were given, our freshman year, a fitness test and I could only do 12 pushups, and a friend of mine did 15. So, I thought, I'm going to start working on that. And so, after school, at nights, I would go home and for about 15-minutes I'd start doing pushups and oh, a few chin-ups and then my mother told me that she's seen Charles Atlas on "What's My Line" and he stated that if you tensed your muscles against each other that this would make them grow.

So, I, just on my own, started inventing a way of doing this for each body part. So, I'd incorporate my pushups and my dynamic tension together and I invented ways of doing reverse dips off the banister up from the 2nd floor of my mother's home, which I don't think she ever knew about. A lot of things like this.

I worked with my dad on his produce truck and I'd always practice lifting crates of celery with one arm up over my head. So, all the time I was in high school I was doing this sort of thing. Our lunch hours we'd go out to the park and I there practiced doing muscle-ups and chin-ups and then I was inspired by a person by the...his last name was...his name was Roger Sattara. He was able to do a one-arm chin-up. This just really inspired me. So, I started working on that.

First, I would just jump up on the bar and grab it and then try to pull myself up. And by the time I was a sophomore, I could pull myself, with a little bit of a jump, into a one-arm chin-up. And I started working on both arms. By my junior year, I could do a good one-arm chin-up. In fact, I could do maybe two. By my senior year I could do up to seven one-arm chin-ups from almost a dead-hang, and go up and come down again and back up. To this day, I can still do one-arm chin-ups. I can do one or two with each arm.

Once I... My friends in high school couldn't help but notice that I was becoming developed, because I started out being very skinny. However, what I did have was...that I wasn't aware of then, I had a good natural structure to start with, even though I was skinny. And as I stated, most everyone thought I was already lifting weights when I was a senior in high school.

As I stated, that by the time I was a senior in high school, the kids all thought I was already lifting weights and a lot of them suggest that I should go over the Loprinzi's Gym and enter the Mr. Portland Contest. So, I did have this desire to body build. I

wanted to do it. I didn't know anything about competition, though, or bodybuilding. And I went over to Loprinzi's and right away they saw me and they said I was a natural, especially Joe's brother, Dave. They were surprised at my tricep development and my abdominal development and they told me if I'd train I'd be Mr. Portland in six months.

So, this wasn't what started me training. I trained because I've always, from the time I was a little kid, admired muscle, muscular development and people that appeared physically fit. So, this is what I wanted for myself. It, to this day, is my motivating factor in training. It's actually physical fitness, having a nice appearance and being in good health and having a feeling of confidence within myself.

However, once I started bodybuilding, then contests became a motivating factor. I started training at Sam's in July of 1960, and I won the Mr. Portland contest about six months later, just as they said I would. I've been training since then. That's a total of 17 years. I have never taken a layoff, a willful layoff. I lost a little bit of time when I was in the Service and I had mononucleosis about 1963 as a result of training too hard and eating improperly and working and going to school and just plain not living as I should have, living immorally, all these things brought me to a low ebb in my life. And after that illness, then I had to stop and take a good look at myself and what I was doing. And slowly, from that point on, my life started changing for the better.

When I first started training at Loprinzi's that was when I made the most radical gains. I went from a body weight of 150 pounds up to 165 in a period of, I'd say, six months, about six to nine months. I made about an inch-and-a-half gain on my arms and legs and about a three to four inch gain in my chest. So, I really did respond to the weights at first.

But, from then on, and to this day, my training has been, and gaining has been, very slow and just in little steps. And I would say that I am, at this point, and at any point when I compete, the sum total of everything I had done up to that point.

I prefer training in a health studio. Being that I work for the City of Portland and we have our own weight lifting facility, I do all my training here at the Matt Dishman Community Center in our weight room. But, I do not have even a dumbbell at home, and I would not prefer to train at home. I like being surrounded by people when I train. I like the atmosphere of the gym, the fact that everyone there is there for the purpose of training and developing and when you see other people training, it motivates you to train also. And at the gym there's nothing else you can do. You're within in the situation and it causes you to do one thing, and that is train. At home, there's the possibility of distractions and that type of thing.

I find that I can train well either by myself or with a partner. There are certain exercises I enjoy doing with a partner, such as bench pressing and squatting, basically

because of the motivation and having a spot. But other than that, I really can train either way. But, at the present time I do train with one to two partners and I have most of my training career, mainly because people have always wanted to train with me. And so, I will use one set of people for a while, then when they burnout or get tired of it, I'll got to someone else.

In regards to having injuries, I've had... I mean, my main problem has been shoulder injuries. From the very start of my training, I could tell that press behind the necks and certain other shoulder...mainly the press behind the neck was the exercise that gave me the most trouble. It would tend to make my shoulders start to get sore. And then, after oh, about four or five years of training, bench pressing would give me a little bit of a problem.

But, I never had anything severe until I started doing an exercise called the flying circle. This is where I would lay on a flat bench, I could take two dumbbells, one dumbbell in each hand and bring them back overhead and then swing them around along my sides and bring them back up together. For some reason, I had...this seemed to be a natural exercise for me. I had a lot more strength in this exercise than most people had. And I worked up to the point where I could handle up to 60 pounds on that exercise. Most people would consider using 15 to 20.

Well, one day, after not having done it for a while, I came in and it was just a minor warm-up, went right into some fairly heavy ones with about 50 pounds. And I felt sort of a sensation in my shoulder, but nothing that I could really put my finger on. It wasn't any sharp pain. But, the next morning when I woke up I could hardly lift my arm up to shoulder level.

This injury caused me about nine months worth of grief. It took about nine months before I could train to the point where I didn't feel that that shoulder was interfering or holding me back. And then from that point on, I've had to watch that shoulder.

Through the years, as I have learned more about training correctly and not going too heavy or pushing heavy all the time, I have eliminated injuries to a great deal. I feel that actually, a person could almost total eliminate injuries if he will train properly and not get into the heavy weight syndrome where you constantly, every workout, are trying to push your weights heavier and heavier.

I do feel that you must go heavy to increase your size, but I think the cycle that Russ Knipp has used in power lifting is probably the best method to follow, even in bodybuilding. And that is to go with a heavy workout, followed by a very light workout, followed then by a medium workout and then another heavy workout. And going through this type of system repetitively, all the time.

When I mentioned about exercises that I would use, you ask on your sheet here about frequently burning-out or going stale on certain exercises. And I stated that I felt I was the sum-total of everything that I have done. When I was younger and more inexperienced in training, I would try to stay with certain exercises that I felt to be good exercises or ones I knew produced good results. I would tend to stay with these exercises as long as I possibly could and carry them out for two or three or four months, even.

But, I would always end up, you know, going stale and I think at least a month or two of that last two months would be just maintaining or treading water. I wouldn't be increasing or actually gaining. I might even have been going backwards. At this present time, I am convinced that a person should change his routine about every six weeks, no matter what it is, and that there is no best routine or best way.

You asked about using a PHA system and all these other different systems. I don't...condone or condemn either or any of these systems. I feel that they're all beneficial, that a person, if he's going to stay interested in bodybuilding, as got to incorporate as much variety into his training as he possibly can.

I'm going to give you a sheet which has the... I recorded or put down the routine that I followed for the six week period before the Mr. America contest this year, for 1977, that I followed and it will show you how I've incorporated a lot of variety within a given routine that I setup so that every workout is slightly different and slightly different day. and it keeps it interesting that way. But even this routine, as a whole, has to be completely changed for a whole new set of exercises and another routine after it becomes ineffective, in about a six week period.

So, I, every six weeks, to change my routine, if possible. I realize that there are certain exercises that are more effective than other exercises and I always regret having to give-up certain things. Squatting is an example. I feel that that's one of the best exercises that exists for maintaining body weight and strength and size.

Whenever I'm able to do squats and do them effectively to where my body is responding, because I'm not stale on them, I always am at my biggest and strongest. It causes all my other groups to increase also.

Bench press is another one that I feel is extremely beneficial in keeping up size and strength. I always hate to let that go. Heavy dips with weight. I like to use anywhere from 70 to 120 pounds on dips for 10 to 12 reps. I find that when I'm doing those I'm always at my biggest.

Good old standing barbell curls. Actually, just the good old basic exercises, dead lifting, all these things seem to give me the best results. But, you cannot stay with any

of these exercises or at least I can't, for more than about six weeks and obtain positive results.

In regards to skin tone and this type of thing, I believe that that has to come from within. Your diet has got to be good. It should be balanced. I don't believe in these radical diets where you are on extremely high protein and low carbohydrate intakes. I know for a fact that they're harmful to your health, that they bring on colds, that they get your body out of balance and if a person is going to maintain good health, he needs a moderate amount of proteins, carbohydrates, fats. These things should come from all the natural sources such as fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, whole grains, whole seeds and nuts, some meat, fish, eggs and your dairy products. Good fat sources would be olive oil, avocados, cream, butter, sesame seed oil, these types of sources, wheat germ oil. Incorporate all these into my diet at varying times and varying amounts. I try not to overdo any one thing.

In the past, when I first started bodybuilding, I did every harmful thing imaginable as far as diet goes. First I was on the high protein syndrome. I used Kaufman's High Protein Powder until it was coming out of my ears, practically replaced my regular food and I know that that was one of the things that brought on my mononucleosis. I also was forcing in huge amounts of powdered skim milk, because I had been told it was high in protein, and using a lot of canned foods like tuna, which I feel is not very healthful. Desiccated liver would be another thing.

When you are putting large amounts of any of these proteins into your body, you eventually overburden your kidneys and your liver so that you become very susceptible to viruses, colds, flu and this sort of thing. Colds would be frequent when you're on a very high protein diet like that.

However, if I'm getting ready for a contest, that would be the only time, for maybe a six week period, that I would up my protein intake to where I felt it was out of balance with the rest of my intake of other nutrients. And then, the minute I'm through competing, I get right back into a very balanced diet again.

But, I'll state right now, at this point in the interview, that competitive bodybuilding is not a healthful endeavor or pursuit. I know this to be a fact through my own competing. I have never used drugs, but I feel that even just going to extremes in the intake of protein and this sort of thing causes problems in your health, especially in making you susceptible to colds and flu and this sort of thing.

In regards to junk foods, I try to keep junk foods really down in my diet. I have most of my life. However, because I have a fairly high metabolism rate, I can get by with eating more junk food than probably other people could. One thing I have

observed that will tend to smooth me out is a lot of ice cream. If I eat ice cream fairly regularly, I do seem to smooth out some. But, I still never really lose my cuts.

The basic pattern that I follow in my diet is that Monday through Friday I eat very correctly and carefully. And then on the weekends, I will tend to go off of my diet some. On Saturday nights I always have a nice pizza, although I tend to have mushroom and beef with fresh tomatoes on it. So, even that isn't too terrible. I always make a trip to Baskin Robbins, which is our local ice cream store around here. It has good quality ice cream and I usually have three big scoops of that. And if I feel like having a hamburger Saturday afternoon, I might have one or two of those.

On Sunday, sometimes my grandmother will invite us over for dinner and I might have a big bowl of spaghetti and meatballs or something of that nature. I might even have some French bread. Sometimes I might even have a piece of pie, but I really have cut... I'm to the point where I don't like every cake or pie or any pastry type of thing. In fact, I've never eaten pastry except before I started training with weights. I just do not eat pastry. I feel that pastry and soda pop are probably the two most detrimental, harmful foods a person can put in his body.

I know that sleep and rest are very important. If I go to bed at 10:30 every night, my body automatically starts going up, even if I don't change anything else. If I go to bed past 12 o'clock and keep my total hours of sleep to around six or seven, I start losing weight. And it doesn't matter how much I eat, I will have difficulty keeping my weight up where I would like it. I feel very comfortable at 175, but if I start missing sleep I'll go right down to 170.

In regards to being married and holding a job and being a bodybuilder, I feel that I can maintain good physical condition, and this... I have to speak for myself. I don't know what others feel are necessary for them because of their varying metabolisms and so on. But, 45-minutes to an hour, four times a week will keep me in peak condition to where I would be no more than one month away from contest condition. I don't have to put in two workouts a day, three hours a workout, to maintain a good healthful appearance.

As far as your work goes, the person can usually, because most gyms are open anywhere from nine in the morning until ten at night, you can usually squeeze in an hour a day somewhere. So, I don't...I don't feel that bodybuilding should dominate your life in any way. Or, I don't feel that it even has to. Except when getting ready for a contest, for the period of time just prior to the meet, you do need more sleep than normal. You need to put in longer workouts and this will definitely affect your job and your family life.

However, if this is done just for a one-month or six-week period once a year, I think that your job and your wife can live with that. You can arrange maybe your vacation time around your training or there's ways of getting around it.

But...I feel that there's no need for a person to have to give-up his family and his job and everything else that's important in life for the sake of bodybuilding or having a good body. It can be done just by using common sense and moderation.

I do not drink during workouts. I don't feel that I...I have no need to. I very seldom get thirsty while I'm training. All I... I think that if a person does feel thirst, then he should drink water. Or, maybe under rare circumstances, a little bit of apple juice or orange juice might be okay. But, basically, if you can just train without drinking anything, I think you're going to have better workouts and I think putting anything into your system while you're training just slows you down.

I would also state that I would like to have at least three hours distance between the time I ate and then time that I train. Any type of food at all in your stomach is going to hinder and slow down your workout.

As I mentioned before, I had mononucleosis for a period of three months in 1963. So, I couldn't train for a total of three months. When I went back to training, I found myself in a very weakened condition. I had gained... I weighed about the same, but I had lost a lot of my muscle size and it had been replaced with fat, because I was required to just stay in bed during that time. The doctor gave me the idea that I was supposed to eat a lot, or eat well. And at that time, I wasn't...didn't have the nutritional knowledge I have now and I was snacking on Cheez-It crackers and things like that while watching television. I put on a lot of slop, fat.

And it took me about a year to get back into the kind of condition I was in prior to getting sick. Again, I want to state that I got sick. It didn't just happen to me. I brought it on myself. I brought it on by force-feeding, by consuming large amounts of milk, by taking in too many protein supplements, by not living correctly. And I can state with all certainty that illness is brought on by sin, whether it's sinning against the direct laws that God's given us, or sinning against the natural laws that He has put into our environment. But, the more in-tune that a person becomes with all these laws, the better health and better life he will have.

For the bodybuilder getting into his first contest, I would say the most important thing is, don't enter if you're too fat. You should definitely have yourself in good shape. You should feel confident about the way you look before you enter. And I would spend at least three months practicing your posing.

In putting together a posing routine, I would look in the magazines and look at pictures of other bodybuilders and you'll start getting a feeling or an idea of what posing should consist of and then start putting...attempting to duplicate these poses and look at yourself, having your friends also look at you. You definitely need someone to view you and give you a commentary. Omit the ones you don't look good in and keep the ones you do look good in.

You should put your routine together in such a way that there's a lot of motion in your routine. You should be moving from left side to right side, or at least to center. So, if you hit one pose facing left, then sweep over and go into something from the right, and keep the routine moving like this and it will be very interesting. There's nothing worse than a static routine where you just get in one position and go into three or four different poses. It's better to omit a pose than to have a mediocre pose in your routine. So, it's better to have like five good ones than ten that are, some are good and some aren't.

In regards to magazines, I enjoy reading Ironman and Muscle Builder, but especially Ironman. That is quite a magazine. I have, even at this point, I am always searching to see if I can find some new exercises that maybe someone is doing somewhere else that we aren't doing at our own gym.

Just recently, for example...recently, for example, I found an exercise that Fox is doing for triceps with a bar behind his back on the lat machine. We have been doing a similar exercise on a bar like that, but using the lat machine, we got a different feeling and I find it to be very effective.

I also enjoy just looking at the pictures and seeing how the other bodybuilders are doing. And I look mostly, though, for the nutritional articles. Those are of the upmost interest to me. I'm constantly interested in nutritional findings and medical advancements and developments related to bodybuilding and just related to general health.

In regards to steroids and thyroid extracts and all these types of things, as I stated earlier, I have never used them myself. I never would use them and I feel that anyone that is using these particular items has lost touch with reality. He is so into ego and needing some type of positive reinforcement for the bolstering of his image of himself or to fulfill something that's lacking, that he's willing to take a risk and to use something that is known to be detrimental to your health. It's known to be harmful to your liver, it's known that these things are bad for you. So, anyone who will put his life in jeopardy by taking such things, I feel, has a real problem in his concept of life. He has not viewed life correctly and at the present time he is in total darkness.

I don't mean to be saying these things for the sake of running down bodybuilders that use them, but as I stated, I won't use them myself and I feel that, especially after coming away from the 1977 Mr. America contest, that they are necessary if you're going to compete in the top caliber competitions. Because, you cannot get your body weight up to a point and size that is need to compete with these people that are using the drugs.

I was truly amazed at the size and the development that these people had. They... You know, here I've been in bodybuilding 17 years and yet as I viewed these people I felt almost like a beginner must feel when he first walks into a gym. When I saw people like Robby Robinson and Dr. Smith and...who in 1975 competed in Mr. America with me and didn't even make the top 20 and now he's, you know, one of the top contenders. I just couldn't help but be amazed at the change in these people in such a short period of time.

I'm not saying these people use drugs, because I don't...

I know that over a period of 17 years of having observed all these people training that almost no one makes that kind of gain naturally in a period of one to two years to where they would not even be a competitor in one contest and suddenly be the top competitor in the next.

So, when I see these radical, radical size and weight gains and I know that in most cases there must be drugs involved to some degree. And when I see people that lose weight, like 40 to 50 pounds in one month because they quit training or because something happens where they have to cut back a little bit on their training, I know that then they have a drug build.

And I say again that it must...you do need the drugs if you're going to compete in the top contests now. And I'm sorry to say that...I mean, I'm very sorry to see things in this state, because those who would like to compete under natural conditions are completely out of it.

In regards to a positive family relationship when engaged in heavy training, I realize that a person's nerves become a little more edgy during this time because of the intensified training and the increase of protein and slight decrease in carbohydrates, probably in many persons it's a radical decrease in carbohydrates. But, not so in my own case.

But, what I do, I try to be aware that I'm going to become this way and take steps to keep myself under control. Because I'm able to train on the job, since it's...I'm at the

weight room as I'm instructing, I don't...I'm not away from my wife any more than I ever would be under normal conditions. So, I don't have any real problem.

I would say that one thing that is good is if your wife shares a like in your activity. It's going to make it a lot easier on you, and this is my case. My wife, from the very beginning, has enjoyed and encouraged me in my bodybuilding.

For those that have wives that...that are against it, I think there's very little that you can do to appease them. I would say that when you're selecting a marriage partner that this should have been a part of your consideration.

If possible, you might promise to take your wife along with you to the contest and then make a little vacation out of it afterwards. And that might help in the case of wives that aren't too hot for your training, but yet the encouragement that they're going to enjoy a nice vacation later on, after the contest, might help them to get through that time of training where your nerves are edgy and they're likely to be irritated by your special diet and all the extra fuss that has to be maintained and preparing your foods during that time.

In regards to my plans for future bodybuilding, I'm not really too concerned at the moment. I seen in Ironman last month that there may be some contests put on by Chet Yorton that will be for naturals. I might consider entering one or two of those meets in the future. I might enter a Mr. Past 40 in the future and I might never compete again. I really don't know.

As I stated, my bodybuilding is not hinged on contests. My motivation is other factors, as earlier mentioned. And so, I intend to keep it up the rest of my life. I enjoy doing it, I get a positive feeling from doing it and I know that it's a way of keeping healthy throughout the rest of my life.

You ask about the secrets of real bodybuilding success. I would say the most important factor is heredity. You must have the right hereditary structure to begin with. I don't care what you do or how many exercises you do, if the structure isn't there, you cannot be a winner or a high-placer.

The other factor that must be coupled with that is a desire to train and the desire...or to achieve pleasure from training. As I say, I receive back a lot of positive reinforcement from my training. I enjoy doing it. I actually look forward to workouts. I don't dread workouts. If I ever come to that point, I know it's time to change my routine.

But, consistency, I was told this by Sam Loprinzi when I first started training. He said that, "time is the factor that will make you, Charlie." And that has been the truth.

The longer you train, to a point, the better you will get. And you are the sum total of everything that you have done.

As far as the future of bodybuilding, I don't really know. I think that we have seen now a couple of top bodybuilders, Tom Sansone and Victor Fazowictz, I believe was his name, have both died in their 30's and it's written up in medical journals as being attributed to steroids. If this is the case, then I think we're going to be seeing many more top names coming down with the same or similar afflictions, or maybe dying at young ages. If this trend continues, then it could be that bodybuilders will get away from steroids.

In either regard, whether we see the super-physiques that we've experienced in the '70s or lesser physiques in the '80s, now that the news media has grabbed hold of bodybuilding. I think that the sport is going to continue to increase and I think that the mood in the country now where physical fitness and stylish clothing that goes along with it, and the need to be slim and trim and all these types of factors are going to continue to encourage and boost our sport upward. I think the potential for it is unlimited in the future.

My beliefs regarding the sport of bodybuilding have not changed over the past year. There was one time when I thought they were going to change, and that was in 1971 when I met Arthur Jones and first used his nautilus machines. I thought that maybe he really had a new weapon or a new secret or something that was going to really cause us to...that were on the slender side, to become hulking giants.

But, I realized, as I said earlier, that only consistency, training regularly, training over a period of time, this is what builds a person. There are no secrets. There are, as I mentioned also earlier, certain exercises which are very effective. And I find that to get myself to peak performance, or to peak size and development, and definition, I will reserve these exercises that I know to be very effective for me, and hold them for the six weeks prior to my competing. So, I will use other exercises to fill in with during the time leading up to the month and a half before I get ready for the contest.

The human body is something that is in a state of flux all the time. The body is trying to maintain the homeostasis or steady-state and we really are a very transitory...we know that the Bible states that our life is a vapor that appears for a while and then vanishes away. Well, this is somewhat true even of our muscle structure. There's no such thing, as we all know, as a permanent condition. You don't build your muscles to a certain point and then they stay there forever. They will constantly be adjusting to whatever exercises you are doing.

So, you will find that when you're on one routine you might hit a peak, and then when you can't do these effective exercises you will, even though you change your

routine, you will have a somewhat different appearance. So, you're constantly in a state of flux. In a healthy state it won't be more than a five-pound variation, at least not in my case.

In regards to the equipment and exercise, I think that any new piece of equipment that comes out is worth considering. Anything that will offer variety is great. I use nautilus machines. I think they're wonderful. I believe that the torso machine did bring my lats up to a point of development I couldn't have achieved with just regular barbells. But, nevertheless, they still didn't build me into some kind of a giant.

Nutrition-wise, as I stated earlier, is just a matter of eating balanced meals. This is what will give you the best overall effect. There are no secret foods or anything else that's going to give you some kind of super gains. In fact, any radical thing that will be extreme in one direction or another will be detrimental in the long run. Any temporary gains you might make, you're going to lose twofold or threefold when you get sick, which will automatically come from excess in any food or any direction.

As far as anyone having an effect on my bodybuilding career, I would say Sam Loprinzi's had the most effect and I found the things that he told to all be true. As I stated earlier, some of the things he told me.

One individual I admired...I think the one I've admired the very most is probably Larry Scott. I was really impressed with his particular physique. I saw him in person at a time when I was just getting started. He competed in the Mr. Pacific Coast contest here in Portland in 1961, and I was in that same contest and I'll never forget the shock effect when I first saw him.

Other than him, I think Steve Reeves would be my second most influential bodybuilder, one whose physique I admired and would...if there was anyone I would like to look like, it would be him. But other than that, I have basically motivated myself. I feel that I've been able to just give myself all the encouragement I've needed.

We talk about off-season, now when I came back from Mr. America I didn't train for a period of one week and then I went back to training with light weights and very high reps. I would go anywhere from 20 to 30 sets. And because I had been going quite heavy and quite intense, I tapered my training off and I also am taking a partial vacation at this time. I'd go fishing about three hours a day. And so, my workouts are maybe a half-hour to 45-minutes long. I feel that it's very essential to give my body this rest time to recuperate.

I think that contest training, if done for a short period of time, doesn't actually hurt anything to any great degree. But, I know that you cannot keep up with that intense type of training for very long without detrimental effects.

So now, I'm allowing my body to train, but in a very relaxed way, more of a fun way. I'm not pushing myself hard, I'm not training super fast. And...

At this point I want to state also that I don't like to take layoffs. I just detest letting myself get out of shape. So, I always trains somewhat, even if it's, as I stated, with light weights and higher reps. I always do something. I do not like inactivity. Even one week off, I dislike, but I feel that I need it. So, I take the one week.

As I stated earlier, I haven't during my whole career, never willfully laid-off of training. In the three month period when I had mono, in '63, was the longest time I ever went without training.

While I was in the Army I maintained some degree of training, because the cook has some weights and he let me use them after-hours. But, I was so exhausted from the training every day that I had little energy left to do very much with. But, I maintained a good physical appearance, even while...in basic training.

In regards to the number of exercises I perform, I like to do about two exercises per body part, about three sets of anywhere from eight to twenty reps per exercise. That's during the off season.

As I stated, I'm constantly using variations. So, my off season might run anywhere from...it could run as long as two years time between contests. So, I'm constantly in a state of variation. If I follow a real light routine for a while, I might follow it up with a moderate routine for a while, a moderately heavy. That will be followed by a very heavy, basic power lifting type routine. And then maybe back to a light one again, or maybe into a routine that incorporates some odd things like rope climbing, which we've done, climbing the rope, a 20-foot rope.

Using an exer-genie or what's it called, an Apollo Exerciser. We put a 50-foot rope on this thing and adjust the tension and then run down the hallway, which is about 60 or 70 feet long. And we run against the resistance of this Apollo Exerciser and it developed tremendous endurance. You would...it makes running seem like nothing after running against that thing.

So, we'll incorporate that as part of our routine. Like, for legs we would run one or two sets of the Apollo Exerciser and then from there we would go into our squatting and maybe some leg extension and some calf work and then that would be it.

In regards to the length of my workouts, I feel that one hour is sufficient most anytime. When I'm getting ready for a contest, I lengthen my workouts to one or two workouts a day that will be between one-and-a-half to three hours.

As far as my body weight goes, it does decrease a little bit. I had my body weight up to almost 180 for the contest. It will go down between 170 and 175 during the off season.

I have always been the type that has had a problem gaining weight. I stay at...I have a high metabolism rate and I can eat quite a bit of food without gaining, without getting fat, excessively. I am always in a fairly defined state. My skin tends to be on the thin side.

In regards to bulking-up, I don't like to... I don't believe that it's healthful to vary your body weight greatly in any direction. I think a person should just eat a well-balanced diet and let his body weight go where it wants to. Eat when you're hungry and don't eat if you're not hungry. It's just as simple as that.

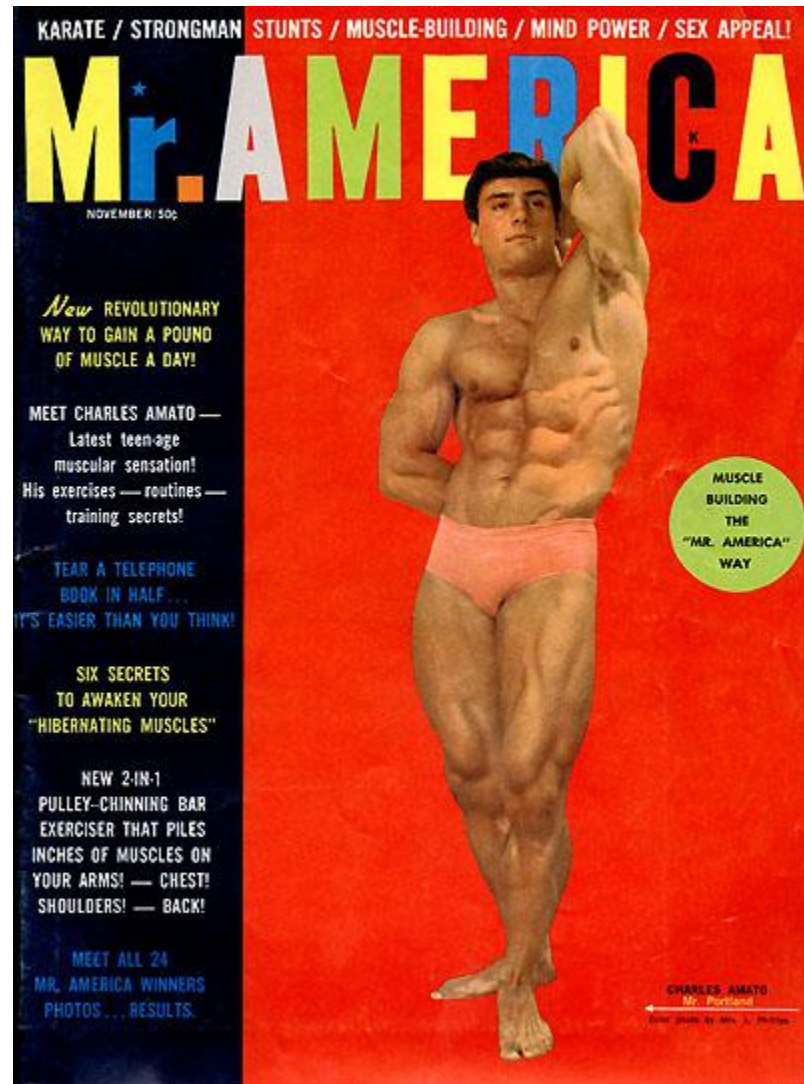
I read a book once by this Dr. Jarvis on Vermont Folk Medicine and he had some very interesting thoughts that I have applied to my own life. And one of them was that we, as humans, have tended to not obey our body or animal-like instincts. We get into...we have certain concepts like for example we should eat three meals a day, so we do that, whether we're hungry or not. But, instead the person, I believe, should eat when he's hungry and don't eat when you're not hungry. Obey that instinct. When you're sick, don't eat at all if you don't feel like eating. In fact, fasting a little will tend to turn sickness around and help you get over it quicker.

You asked about what type of nutritional program I follow during the off season. Well, this is the type of program I'm on most all the time for my life. As I mentioned earlier, I told you what I eat and how I eat, so there isn't too much that needs to be said. But, I will tell you what supplements I use.

I use Rosehips 500 mg vitamin C tables. I take about one or two of those a day. I will take vitamin A tables, 10,000 units from fish liver oil during time when I'm using my eyes a lot, especially when I fish or when I'm doing an awful lot of reading or studying. I use in conjunction with the A, lecithin capsule or two. I find it seems to help utilize the A. Once... There are times when I will use wheat germ oil. I use it in the form of Prometol, which is the form that was used when the tests were done on...to prove that wheat germ oil had hereditary....or I mean endurance factors in it. It was...Dr. Puritan used Prometol and not straight wheat germ oil. So, for that reason I use the Prometol myself.

I found though...I do not use vitamin E at all. I've found that if I use vitamin E or even too much Prometol that I tend to go to bed, sleep sound for four hours and then wake up and not be able to go back to sleep. I'll find that I have to get up and spend an hour reading or doing something and then going back to bed again, sleeping maybe two or three more hours. So, for that reason I don't use vitamin E very much.

Other than that, I have in the past used desiccated liver, but I'm convinced it's more detrimental than beneficial, that it will cause problems in your joints. You're going to have a high uric acid content in your body, at least that's the effect I had. Joints will tend to get sore. They'll feel like you've got sandpaper in them if you go too heavy on weights. Also, as I mentioned earlier, a lot of liver intake will make you very susceptible to colds and flu.



It does have some beneficial effects. It does make the skin look nice. It tends to give the skin a glow. Although, I've read some nutritionists claim this kind of golden or yellowish effect is a sign of some problem taking place in your liver and it's not really healthful at all.

So, I really am against any kind of protein supplements. I feel that a person can definitely get all the protein he needs from eggs, fish, meat and your dairy products.

As far as my condition during the off season, as I stated earlier, I'm never more than a month away from being ready to put on a closing exhibition or compete in a contest. I feel that I maintain a good appearance with good definition year around. I'm sure that the majority of this is due to my diet, but I must state that a lot of is also due to my heredity.

When I'm getting ready for a contest, I will allow myself about three total months in getting ready for that contest. As I mentioned, the last six weeks are the intense, hard training with my most effective exercises. Prior to that, I'm on a routine that I generally incorporate not too much straining and fairly heavy weights, but I don't force myself to failure, because I want my energy level and my driving level and my tension level to be at its peak, at the six week period before the contest. So, I can give my all into that last six weeks.

As I state, I maintain good condition all the time, so because of that I don't require a...you know, an extreme drawn-out training program to get into good shape for a contest.

In regards to specialization, that is something I have never believed in. I find that if a person will work his body equally right from the start, that in the long run everything will balance-out. It's just a matter of time, just like Sam Loprinzi told me and I found that to be true, that no matter how odd a person might look at the beginning, if he will follow a balanced routine and stay with it he will eventually become balanced.

And besides, when you specialize, you're going to pick exercises that are your most effective and when you come off that routine, any gains that you've made are going to diminish after you come off the routine. So, I don't feel that you've gained a thing by it, other than to just waste your time on one area.

If you enjoy specializing, if you find that that's a variation in training that is very enjoyable and keeps you going, then I'm not against it. But, I have never incorporated it into my training and I don't encourage anyone else to.

In contest preparation, I start three months in advance, as I mentioned before, getting ready for the contest. The first two months will be spent in deliberately not over-training myself so as to have a maximum amount of energy left for the final six weeks. Once I get into the six weeks training, I use extreme tension in all my exercising. By that I mean I control the weight from start to finish and I don't pause between reps.

It's like doing dynamic tension through the whole exercise and through each rep until I've completed the number of reps I intend to do, which would be...and I go to failure. I really push myself to failure, which usually can be anywhere from five reps up to fifteen reps. It will vary.

In training this way, the amount of weight that you use is not too important, unless you use too much weight. In other words, you want to use weights that you can control. I go as heavy as I can, but yet with weights that I can have full control over.

In gauging my progress and getting ready for a contest, I use two things, one is the mirror and the other is the response I get from the people around me. You can really tell...and I don't ask for comments or criticisms, but I'm very attentive to what anyone says. And people in the gym are the first ones to tell you whether you look like you're gaining weight or losing weight. So, if they tell me I look like I'm gaining and as I say, hardness is never a problem with me. So, if they say it looks to them like I'm getting bigger, or they're really impressed or the comment on something, then that's positive feedback to me. And if not, if I don't hear anything or if a negative comment is made, then I know that I need to make some adjustment, either in diet or in training.

I think that this feedback from people around you is more important than looking in a mirror, because it's really hard to look at yourself as you are. I think it's very easy to deceive yourself or to see something that isn't there.

Generally, I develop an overall feeling about my progress. And like in this last contest that I went into, it was positive all the way. I had constant feedback from the people saying they could see I was gaining weight, that I looked bigger. I was getting stronger in my workouts. This is also another gauge. If my weight or strength continually increases in my workouts, and while still maintaining a super-strict control that I maintain, then I know myself that I'm gaining. So, another way that I can tell is by the amount of weight increase that I'm making and within my reps.

And as I stated earlier, when it comes to contest training, I really like to have a training partner then. I did have a very excellent one this time. I like to choose someone who's about the same strength that I am, because even though I'm aware of certain psychological factors, I don't like having a partner that's a lot stronger than me. It tends to depress me if he's constantly doing more than I am. And if I'm too much stronger than he is, then I'm afraid that I may tend not to push as hard as I should. But, by having somebody that's about equal, I seem to get my hardest workouts under those conditions.

As far as our speed in performing each individual repetition of a set, I try to go as fast as I can while maintaining the super-strict form. So, it would probably appear that my reps are fairly slow, because as I say, I don't pause at the bottom, I don't pause at the top. I keep the weight moving, but with extreme tension. And so, all I can say then is that I'm going as fast as I can while maintaining this perfect, strict tension-building form.

My workout tempo is fairly fast. We...the time it takes my partner to do his set is about the only rest period there is. We try to really smoke on through our routines. I think there is a point, though, where you can train too fast, where you don't allow sufficient recovery from your prior set, and therefore you do a series of sets that are not as heavy and not as many reps within the set as you possibly could have done, and thereby not working your muscle as hard.

What I'm going to say now relating to proper mental attitude isn't anything new; others have said it. But, I know it to be true and that is that once I have made up my mind to compete in a contest and to train for it, something seems to happen. My workouts just automatically seem to get better, my mind, my every thought is into training and getting good workouts and getting stronger and getting bigger. I keep thinking about these things: strength, progress, size. I keep running these things through my mind. I won't allow myself to think of anything else.

I do quite a bit of posing prior to my workouts, it sort of warms me up for my workout. And it also gives me a good, positive feeling as I go into my workout. Because, posing, if it's done properly, will make you look good and give you a good positive mental feedback. So, I would always do this before my workout, I would pose and not strip down in posing trunks, but just in a formfitting t-shirt and a pair of jeans. I would watch my form. I was more concerned with my form than anything else, the overall positioning of each limb and leg and body part in relation to the others.

Sometimes you can lose sight of...by seeing definition as to the proper symmetrical balances of the body. And by wearing clothes and posing in clothes, I feel that I can really tell if a leg is bent just right or...and how it looks in relation to the arm and if there's enough tilt in the torso, whatever, or twist.

You almost have to kid yourself or convince yourself or trick yourself into an attitude of pushing forward, of go, of success. There will be absolutely no failure tolerated. There will be no such thing as bad workouts. There will only be success and positive achievement. That's the attitude, that's the way I keep thinking as I go into this. And it really, really worked this last time, probably better than any time yet. I might attribute it just to the number of years I've been training.

Being negative, you might as well forget entering altogether if you start getting into a negative type of thinking, because you definitely will not achieve a peak and you won't be going in at your best. All through the contest, even though I placed 6th in my height class, I know from the feedback I got from my friends here and from my own, what I saw in the mirror, and from what the scale said and from the amount of weights that I was using, plus the fact that I had the best tan I've ever had that I was in the best shape of my life in this last contest.

The only reason I can attribute...the only thing I can attribute to not doing as well is that the contest has so many super people in it and so huge, that I just felt like I was practically in a different class altogether. I've never had this feeling as much as I did this year, the line-up from start to finish was absolutely super. I've just never seen such development on individuals.

In discussing steroids earlier, I came to the conclusion that practically everyone in the contest must have been on them because I remember in past contests there were a lot of people, like Anibal Lopez and Chuck Collras and Mike Dayton, and others that had more natural appearing physiques, that you could tell they weren't using drugs, that they were just using good nutrition and training hard.

But this time, everyone had the super look. And so, I may be wrong in my conclusion, but from what I saw at Golds and heard and observed, I am fairly well convinced that most everyone in that contest was on steroids in some form or another.

But, in view of all this, I still maintain a positive mental attitude. I never enjoyed competing more than I did in this contest, especially because of the fantastic show that I was because of Ken Sprague. But also, just because I felt confident and when I went out and posed, I couldn't wait to show what I had and to do the best job that I've ever done. And so, I came away from the experience feeling good and feeling like I did the best I could with what I had.

About The Interviewer Dennis B. Weis, a.k.a. Yukon Hercules

Official Web site: <http://www.dennisbweis.com>

Dennis B. Weis is a Ketchikan, Alaska-based power/bodybuilder. He is a hard-hitting, uncompromising freelance professional writer and investigative research consultant in the fields of bodybuilding, nutrition, physiology, and powerlifting.

Dennis was first published over two decades ago (1976) in the pages of Iron Man magazine. Since that time he has become known to almost every mainstream bodybuilding/physique magazine's readership throughout the United States and Europe. The magazines that publish his articles include and are not limited to Bodybuilding Monthly (U.K. publication), Exercise For Men Only, Hardgainer (Nicosia, Cyprus, publication), Iron Man, Muscle & Fitness, Muscle Mag Int'l, and Natural Bodybuilding & Fitness.

You have undoubtedly read dozens of his 100+ feature-length articles in many of the popular worldwide magazines -- under his own name and under the names of certain top physique stars and powerlifting personalities.

The credentials of this prolific writer extend beyond the scope of just writing articles, for he

is the author of three critically acclaimed best-selling books: Mass! (1986), Raw Muscle (1989), and his newest release, Anabolic Muscle Mass: The Secrets of Anabolic Reinforcement Without Steroids.

In recognition of his writing accomplishments, he has received Meritorious Service Awards relating to all published works as a magazine consultant and published book author. In addition to these honors, he has performed Barnes & Noble and Waldenbooks autograph parties and window displays for his books. He has also been a featured guest on various radio talk shows around the country, where he shares his knowledge and experience regarding such issues as bodybuilding and the super-fitness lifestyle.

During the past two decades he has established a small but dynamic one-man business to service male and female bodybuilders, fitness buffs, and powerlifting enthusiasts of all types with very personal (one to one or mail order), and highly professional instruction on all phases of physical excellence.

He has coached literally hundreds of select clients, one of the most notable being a personal training advisor to the 1983 Miss Minnesota winner. One of the training tools he uses as a personal trainer is the revolutionary and famous Samra R.E.S.T. principle.



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