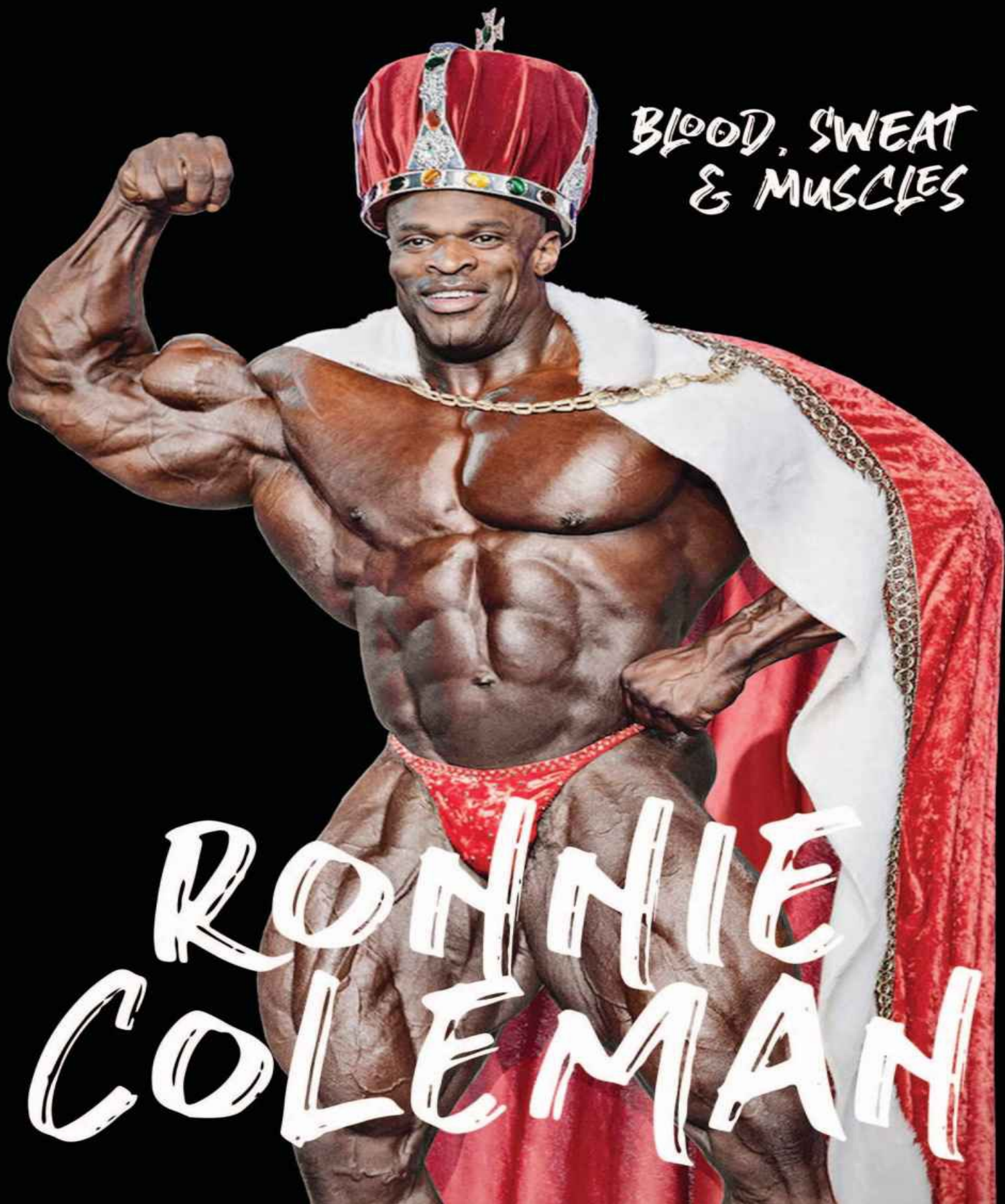


YEAH BUDDY!

MY INCREDIBLE STORY

BLOOD, SWEAT
& MUSCLES



RONNIE
COLEMAN

Everybody Loves *Yeah Buddy! My Incredible Story* and Ronnie Coleman

“Ronnie became a whole new dimension. It was unbelievable. He showed bodybuilders that there was a whole other way of size and proportion.”

— Arnold Schwarzenegger, Seven-time Mr. Olympia (1970-1975, 1980)
Hollywood Superstar and former Governor of California

“In the world of professional Bodybuilding, the name Ronnie Coleman stands alone. There has never been an athlete physically able or willing to take the sport beyond the limits of human expectations. Ronnie did it to the extent that the sport may never witness it again.”

— Lee Haney, Eight-time Mr. Olympia (1984-1991)

“Ronnie Coleman was my idol and someone I looked up to tremendously. Ronnie trained his ass off. He was a very humble guy. I respected him so much.”

— Jay Cutler, Four-time Mr. Olympia (2006-2007, 2009-2010)

“There is only one, Ronnie. I don’t have the ability to say that I was with Arnold or Lee, but I do have the ability to say I was on stage with the greatest Olympia of all time. And I don’t think that anyone will ever beat his overall conditioning. They may beat his records of victories, but that’s only because he isn’t standing next to him.”

— Flex Wheeler, Four-time Arnold Classic Champion (1993, 1997-1998, 2000)

“Even after I turned pro and won several pro shows and competed at the Olympia Ronnie was the only bodybuilder on the planet I looked at and knew I couldn’t beat (I beat everyone else). He was larger than life, and his worked ethic matched his inhuman size.”

— Branch Warren, Two-time Arnold Classic Champion (2001 and 2002)

“Everyone talks about Ronnie’s genetics, and yes, they are superior to 99.9% of the world, but it’s his work ethic that truly separates him. Not only when he trained but also with his diet, not one time did I ever hear a single complaint. He just did it and all the while holding a full-time job as a policeman.”

— Brian Dobson, Ronnie’s trainer and owner and operator of the legendary Metroflex Gym in Arlington, Texas

“Ronnie opens up in a way which he has never done before. Here we will see the real Ronnie behind the muscles and the training.”

— SportLife Magazine

“It wasn’t human to naturally perceive what he looked like at his peak, at his best. His mindset is just at another level.” (1)

— Kevin Levrone, Two-time Arnold Classic champion (1994, 1996)

“Ronnie Coleman had things on his body that we had never seen on a Mr. Olympia prior to him and we probably won’t see on another Mr. Olympia after him.” (1)

— Shawn Ray, 1991 Arnold Classic Champion.

“Ronnie Coleman looked like an alien. There was nobody you could compare that to. Nobody had that.” (1)

— Kai Greene, Three-time Arnold Classic champion (2009-2010, 2016)

“The unbelievable story of the greatest bodybuilder the world has ever known.”

— Men’s Health Magazine

“A beautiful book on the story of the king of Bodybuilding... Ronnie Coleman.”

— Women’s Health Magazine

Yeah Buddy! My Incredible Story

Yeah Buddy!
My Incredible Story

RONNIE COLEMAN

With forewords by:

Brian Dobson
Jay Cutler
Lee Haney
Flex Wheeler
Branch Warren



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*To my mom, Jesse,
For all your love and support.*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude first and foremost, to my mom Jesse, who was there with me from the start. I would also like to thank my wife Susan, who is the best life partner one could ever ask for. I also want to thank my daughters, Valencia, Jamilleah, Suzy, Lola, Sophia, and Layla, for making me a better man and a better father. I also want to say 'Thank you' to my dear friend Brian Dobson, who brought me into bodybuilding, and to my brothers in iron, who know who they are.

Thank you all!

Yeah Buddy!

My Incredible Story

RONNIE COLEMAN

FOREWORD BY BRIAN DOBSON

Ronnie's Trainer and Owner and Operator of the legendary Metroflex Gym

In 1990 one of my members was an Arlington policeman and also a bodybuilder and powerlifter. He came to me telling me about this rookie cop who was a muscular freak. He said he had arms like Arnold and vascularity like you have never seen before. After hearing about him a few more times, I asked him to have him come down as I needed a training partner.

Shortly after, in comes Ronnie wearing a solid red old style sweatsuit. The veins in his arms and legs were clearly visible through the thick sweatsuit material. We trained chest that day, and by the end of the workout, it was pretty clear that this guy could be a future Mr. Olympia, and I told him so.

I don't think Ronnie even knew what Mr. Olympia was back then. About three months later, we entered him into Mr. Texas. In less than a year he won the heavyweight spot for the U.S.A. Team Universe and traveled to Katowice, Poland where he won the overall, bringing home an IFBB pro card. I don't think any bodybuilder ever went from first show to IFBB pro in less than a year like Ronnie.

His journey through the pro ranks was not easy, but I was confident he would eventually be on top.

The training we all went through was legendary, not only in regards to volume, weight, and intensity, but also the heat and cold we had to endure. In the beginning, Ronnie and I were pretty much the same

strength, but it didn't take long for him to beat me. I would bring in other great lifters and bodybuilders. Some of them could outlift Ronnie at first but not for long. Soon he would outmatch them. Eventually, he got so strong that we would sometimes set up two different areas in the gym, one for Ronnie alone and another for the rest of us lesser mortals.

That was great fun and a very exciting time for us all. Everyone in the gym benefitted from the supernatural acts of strength Ronnie would perform on his way to becoming Mr. Olympia. This helped us all push ourselves harder.

Back then, I didn't know what a divine appointment was, but now it's evident that Ronnie coming to Metroflex was precisely that. God had a plan.

Metroflex was locally renowned as the hard-core, champion-producing gym, but once Ronnie started winning, everyone in the bodybuilding community worldwide started to know who we were and still are today.

Thanks to Ronnie, we have visitors from all across the United States and the world almost every day.

Everyone talks about Ronnie's genetic makeup and it is indeed 99.9% higher than others. However, what truly sets him apart from the rest is work ethic. This was so, not only in his training, but his diet. I never heard one single complaint from him. He just did it. And he did it while also working full-time as a policeman.

Although he no longer competes, he still trains every day. He would train and train hard even the nights before each of the surgeries he has had to endure.

He always has a positive and happy attitude, and he is always willing to encourage the up-and-coming young bucks at the gym.

I love him as a brother and I thank God for bringing us together many years ago.

God bless Ronnie Coleman.

Brian Dobson

Arlington, Texas, 2019.

FOREWORD BY JAY CULTER

Four-Time Mr. Olympia, (2006-2007, 2009-2010)

There's no question that the rivalry between Ronnie Coleman and myself was the greatest of all time in the sport of bodybuilding.

Ronnie was truly my idol and coming up as a fan of his, I won the 2000 Night of champions and was honored to be congratulated by him. When we met that night in 2000, I never envisioned nor realized that I was going to fight with him for the controversial 2001 Mr. Olympia trophy as well as many other battles that would ensue. These victories were monumental not only to me, but to the sport of bodybuilding.

I consider Ronnie Coleman the greatest bodybuilder of all time, and even though I was finally able to beat him, he was well past his prime when I did so. And even then, it was still a major challenge and honor for me.

There will never be anyone who will be able to duplicate the package that Ronnie brought to bodybuilding and to the Olympia stage. His conditioning, size, power, strength, symmetry, definition, work-ethic and humility are simply unparalleled. Ronnie lived and breathed bodybuilding. To me, he simply is the epitome of what bodybuilding is.

Ronnie was much more than a guy who simply won bodybuilding titles and had a physique like no other. Ronnie was and genuinely is as good a person as there can be. He is passionate, humble,

dedicated and loyal. And the biggest loyalty of all is to his fans. I remember when we did guest appearances, Ronnie and I used to train together at around midnight. After that, instead of going to bed, Ronnie spent hours and hours answering the emails that his fans sent him. There just aren't a lot of people like this.

To be at such a high level, and for him to be as real as he was, Ronnie was also an outstanding competitor on stage. There was Ronnie and then there was everyone else. We all knew that. Despite this, however, he never thought he was better than anyone in terms of life. He was always very humble, very down to Earth, and very real in who he was. And this is the reason why he is so respected.

Ronnie is changing people's lives just by living his own life. He is an inspiration for others, and I have so much respect for him not only as a bodybuilder, but as a person.

As a young bodybuilding fighter to be the best, all I wanted was to beat Ronnie. I wanted to beat him so bad that there came a point where winning the Olympia was secondary to me. All I wanted was to beat him in some competition. This, in turn, made me the best bodybuilder I could ever be, and it was all thanks to Ronnie and the way he pushed me to be my best. It made me a better champion and a better bodybuilder.

I truly can't say enough about who Ronnie is, what he represented, and what he means to the sport of bodybuilding. I know that the magazines often hyped us as enemies, but this was never the case. Ronnie and I were always friends, and I feel honored to have competed next to him.

Thank you, Ronnie,

Jay Cutler

Four-Time Mr. Olympia.

Las Vegas, Nevada.

FOREWORD BY LEE HANEY

Eight-Time Mr. Olympia (1984-1991)

In the world of professional bodybuilding, the name Ronnie Coleman stands alone.

There has never been an athlete physically able or willing to take the sport beyond the limits of human expectations. Ronnie did it to the point where the sport may never see it again.

In his time, he was without question, the most massive physique to ever grace the stage.

The Great Ronnie Coleman.

Lee Haney

Eight-Time Mr. Olympia.

Chairman to the President's Council on Fitness.

Founder of the International Association of Fitness Science.

FOREWORD BY FLEX WHEELER

Four-Time Arnold Classic Champion (1993, 1997, 1998, 2000)

There is only one Ronnie Coleman. As we stood on stage together many times, a lot of people would think that I am upset with him, but that's not true. Ronnie and I are the closest of friends and I love him. For me, it is a pleasure just being in front of that greatness. There was never competition between us. He is my greatest friend and we always did the best that we could. I could never hold against him the fact that he was always the best.

The real sign of a champion is moving on. I don't have the ability to say that I was with Arnold Schwarzenegger or Lee Haney, but I do have the ability to say I was on stage with the greatest Mr. Olympia of all time. And I don't think that anyone will ever beat his overall conditioning. They may beat his records of victories, but that's only because they aren't standing next to him.

It's an honor that he wanted me to be a part of this. I feel honored to be a part of this book. I am very grateful to him and I speak only the truth. I would do anything for my dear friend, so all I'm doing is bear witness to the man he was.

Flex Wheeler

Four-Time Arnold Classic

Las Vegas, Nevada, 2019.

FOREWORD BY BRANCH WARREN

Two-Time Arnold Classic Champion (2001 and 2002)

I walked into the Metroflex Gym for the first time in 1992. A friend took me there and told me that Metroflex was a “real” gym, and that’s where I needed to go in order to become a bodybuilder. My friend turned out to be Ronnie Coleman’s workout partner.

Brian Dobson introduced me to Ronnie, who was not yet a pro and only a fraction of the bodybuilder he was destined to become.

So, for the next three months, I trained with Ronnie and Mark (his workout partner) and won the Teenage Metroplex Classic. They let me train with them because I gave 100% in every set.

The one time I questioned they way we were training, I got slapped in the head and told to shut the fuck up and do what I was told. I did, and it worked. Not long after that, Ronnie won the Universe, turned pro, and went on to become the greatest of all time.

Even after I turned pro and won several pro shows and competed at the Olympia, Ronnie was the only bodybuilder on the planet I looked up to. I knew I couldn’t beat him even though I could beat everyone else.

He was larger than life. His work ethic matched his superhuman size. I realize now how fortunate I was to train at Metroflex during that time because I was surrounded by greatness.

Branch Warren

Two-Time Arnold Classic
Arlington, Texas, 2019.

PREFACE

“To each, there comes in their lifetime, a special moment when they are figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a very special thing, unique to them and fitted to their talents. What a tragedy if that moment finds them unprepared or unqualified for that which could have been their finest hour.”

— Sir Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister during World War II.

MR. OLYMPIA COMPETITION

October 10, 1998.

Madison Square Garden, New York City.

The spotlight shines with the strength of a billion suns on our oily, tanned, tight, muscular bodies. Even though we're all down to pretty much the lowest fat percentage our bodies can allow, I can feel as though the focused rays of light melt away every single drop of fat inside my body. The hotter they burn, the better I feel.

I'm surrounded by the best muscle in the world, encircled by a group of muscular real-life Hercules as if we were all standing in the summit of Mount Olympus, being watched by the ancient Greek mythological deities.

We turn, bend, stretch, arch, flex, and pose showing off our perfectly toned, chiseled physiques to the judges below us. To me, they might as well be Zeus and Apollo themselves together as brothers and rulers of the ancient Greek gods. They are about to

choose who among us will stay on Mount Olympus forever as Mr. Olympia, crowned with immortality, next to other muscular idols.

They can only choose one of them based on the perfection of the marble-like carved musculature, proportion, density, muscle quality, definition, tone, and the dancing and posing abilities of the gods-to-be. It's a dance for life, a dance for remembrance, and a dance for eternal glory.

It seems to me as if these judges are looking for the finest work of art in the highest renowned gallery of the universe. We are all genuine works of art and sculptors of our bodies, but the judges can only pick one.

I feel my veins throbbing, blood flowing, energy pumping, and muscles filled in a perfect body. I have worked as hard as always to reach this point. I have achieved physical excellence. Now, it's time for me to display it.

There are 18 of us, all gods of glory, ready to be crowned the best. There are many favorites but I am not one of them. My mission is to be one of the five or six finest works of art. I do not aim to a rank higher than that. Flex Wheeler, Sultan of Symmetry and god of genetics, is the clear favorite. I don't see myself catching up with him any time soon.

Other possible winners who are also clearly ahead of me are Chris Cormier, Shawn Ray, Nasser El Sonbaty, and Kevin Levrone, all champions in their own right and real-life superheroes with bodies molded by the hands of God himself. Standing next to them, I think to myself, "It's only a matter of time before one of these kings of muscle is crowned before my eyes." I'm lucky just to be standing next to them.

I'm okay with that. I'm on my journey, enjoying every moment of my existence, proud of who I am and where I'm standing. I will be happy just to have a place next to them.

To me, bodybuilding is an art. I love it like I love life itself. It's an extremely pleasurable experience that brings to me so much joy, tranquility, serenity, calmness, and delight that I feel like a winner just to be able to stand there. I feel satisfied; genuinely and truly happy. If by any chance I get to win, my highest dreams will have come true. I'd faint from emotion.

I'm flowing around the stage, posing for the judges in graceful and smooth arrangement. From pose to pose, and from section to section, I do my best to display my muscles in the most elegant manner possible. I turn my back to display the granite wall I have engraved. I show them so that they can see the real-life body armor that I have carved through years of determination and hard work.

The sweat from my intense flexing, mixes with the oil I have covered myself with, forming a pure elixir of champions. Yet, it doesn't show, as the lights burning high above me make this combination evaporate on the spot.

I can't see anything. The light is so bright it blinds me and prevents me from seeing the audience, the judges, and even some of my competitors. But I don't need my sight. All I need are my instincts and knowledge, so I continue showing off my muscular structure.

Suddenly, through the cheers of the crowd, I hear the words "Stop, the placing announcements will begin." I'm getting nervous. They're about to announce the winners of this great contest.

This is not new to me. I've been here before, but this time my goal is to rank higher than ever before. I therefore I listen more carefully than I used to. The judges start calling out names from rank 10th down. The eight remaining competitors are no longer on stage, as they have all been eliminated before this showdown even started.

"Jean Pierre Fux," they call out. Jean lifts his arms as he celebrates his 10th place.

“9th place goes to Mike Matarazzo.” I’m relieved as they call his number. This year, at least I will rank higher than I did at last year’s Olympia.

“8th place, Ernie Taylor.” Oh, great!

“7th place, Lee Priest.” I’m doing better than Lee Priest since last time he beat me.

“6th place...” I was sure they were going to call my name next. “Chris Cormier.” Wow! I’m gonna place top five. My goal will be realized.

“5th place, Shawn Ray.” Oh my god! I’m going to be 4th. This is awesome! I just beat Shawn Ray!

“4th place, Kevin Levrone.” Oh, man! Kevin was one of the clear favorites. My heart starts to pump just as I realize I’m going to the podium.

“3rd place, Nasser El Sonbaty.” What the hell is going on? I’m second!

“2nd place...” Suddenly, the arena goes completely silent. I look around me and realize that only Flex and I are standing there. I can’t believe I’m right next to him, competing for first place. I wasn’t even supposed to be here. I’m ecstatic with joy! I know I’m not going to win. It’s Flex’s turn this time, Dorian Yates is long gone. It’s time for bodybuilding to enter the Flex Wheeler era. I don’t mind that a bit. I’m going to be second.

Time passes by. The deep silence continues. Tension is building up like a piano wire about to deliver the first note at a classical concert. You know it’s coming, but the air is deadly still.

“2nd place, Flex Wheeler!” Oh My God!

I collapse to the ground. I faint. I’m the champion. I am the most

muscular man in the world. The pressure of all those years of working my butt off, all the workout pain from training like a cargo mule at the gym, of working hard to make a living as a Police Officer while pumping iron in the mornings; all those years of working at jobs that barely allow me to make ends meet; all that hard study, hard training, it all suddenly peels away and morphs into deep satisfaction.

The ecstasy and frenzy is so strong that my legs turn rubbery, and I fall down. All I can hear is my breathing and the cheers of the crowd. I don't remember anything else. In fact, I am so surprised I can't remember anything at all from that night. I was in shock. All I knew then is I was the best bodybuilder in the world.

MY FINEST HOUR

That night in 1998 has been the proudest and most rewarding moment of my life. Of course, the days when each of my six daughters were born and when I married my wife and soulmate Susan were also magical, but the satisfaction of winning that Mr. Olympia was a completely different thing.

That beautiful day all the frustration I had carried around throughout my bodybuilding career, up until that moment, from the silent grief that went through my mind when I couldn't land jobs as an accountant despite the fact that I majored in that area of study, to when I had to work at a Domino's Pizza because they gave me free pizza, to when I couldn't find a job, to when I had to apply for food stamps from the government as a college student, to when I felt that my life was going nowhere fast, all that just vanished suddenly.

Suddenly, it didn't matter. All that mattered at that point is that I was a champion. I had achieved victory in a competition in which only a handful of people can even aspire to qualify for, let alone win. It was, without a doubt, the best moment in my entire life. It was, indeed, my finest hour.

Every single day I remember that instant with pride, dignity, honor, and happiness. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. I thank God every day for giving me that opportunity.

MY LEGACY

As many of you already know, that 1998 victory would be my first in a series of eight consecutive wins. During that time, I didn't lose any single major competition. As you will find out later in this story, I'm not a man who likes to brag about my achievements, but I would be cutting myself short if I did not fully explain how big an achievement those victories were for me and everything bodybuilding means to me. I will elaborate on the details later in the story, but it is important for me to mention that those eight victories tied my idol Lee Haney's wins for most of all time, beating legend Arnold Schwarzenegger's seven Mr. Olympia trophies, as well as those hall-of-fame bodybuilders, Sergio Oliva, Frank Zane, Franco Columbu, Dorian Yates, and many others.

These victories also laid a foundation for my legacy not only as one of the best bodybuilders --if not the greatest bodybuilder of all time-- but also validated my hardcore training methods of brute strength and free weights, which were a methodology that my coach, dear friend, and angel on earth Brian Dobson instructed me in.

According to journalists and other bodybuilders, after that victory in 1998, the world of muscle entered the Ronnie Coleman era. And even though that era also came to an end, my legacy in the world of bodybuilding never ended. There was a before Ronnie Coleman and an after Ronnie Coleman. I say this in all humility. The bodies of bodybuilding would never be the same.

The world of bodybuilding would never be the same. Back then, physiques that were leaner, smaller, and more precisely defined, rather than mass volume, were crowned as champions. After me, it

was those that were gigantic, with granite-like firmness, and statue-like definition that were deemed to be the best. Of course, before me, there were bodybuilders with those characteristics, but I was the one who pushed them further and into the limits of what was humanly possible.

THIS BOOK IS MY STORY

This, my dear friend and reader, is the story of you, me, and bodybuilding. It's the story of how a humble and simple country boy from Louisiana grew up and fought to become the biggest bodybuilder and muscular man in history. It is the story of how I trained, ate, and worked to become that person. It's the story of how I became a bodybuilder while working a full-time job as a police officer, sworn to uphold the law, and having several part-time jobs on the side. It's also the story of how I became the strongest bodybuilder ever and of how I always managed to keep a positive attitude despite many setbacks in life, including very recent ones. It's also the story of how I became a father, husband, and family man; of how I became a supplement entrepreneur and a big motivator for people like you, dear reader, who wants to workout and become as healthy and strong as you can.

My goal in this book is simple. I want to tell my story as I have never told it before. I am honored that you have chosen to pick this up book and read it. I am sure you won't regret it. I'm very grateful indeed!

Let's get started!

Yeah Buddy! Lightweight Baby!

INTRODUCTION

“Why do we do these things? Why do we lift weights? It’s human nature. It’s to find who is the alpha male. It’s to find who can pick up the heaviest weight from the floor, who is the strongest. And that’s why we do it. And this story it’s a part of history, and it will continue to be a part of history for thousands and millions of years to come. I’m sure of it.”

— Eddie “The Beast” Hall, 2017 World’s Strongest Man and the first man in history to deadlift the “impossible” 500 kilos (1100 pounds).

When people approach me on the street and tell me, “Oh, man, Ronnie, you are my hero, you are the best bodybuilder ever, you are the GOAT,” I usually get embarrassed. Of course, it’s an honor to be considered a hero to many people out there!

I never set out to become an inspiration for others, but it’s incredibly rewarding to know that others have improved their lives thanks to me. I’ve never enjoyed being called the best of all times in any of its forms, like “the greatest bodybuilder ever,” “the strongest man ever,” or any other title related. Being admired is great, but truly I’ve never really considered myself or thought of myself as the greatest bodybuilder ever.

I am very proud of my achievements as a person. I am incredibly pleased to have left that small town in rural Louisiana to become a bodybuilder, entrepreneur, and an inspiration to people to become healthier and improve their lives. I’ve never thought of myself as the best. I always thought that there are many other bodybuilders out

there better than me, including my good friends Flex Wheeler, Kevin Levrone, Shawn Ray, Nasser El Sonbaty, Lee Priest, and other legendary bodybuilders like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Lee Haney, Dorian Yates, and Sergio Oliva.

When people tell me that I'm better than they are, I often tell myself and amiably tell them, "Man, you must be joking. There's no way that I'm better than those guys." Even when I won my first Mr. Olympia title, I still thought that many of the other guys were better than me. Even after Joe Weider, the creator of Mr. Olympia and a man I was fortunate enough to call my friend, told me I was going to be at the top of bodybuilding for a long time because of my incredible physique, I still think he was joking.

Even today, when people come to me and share how I've changed their lives, or they show me my name tattooed on their body, or when they say my phrases in my gym, I'm still surprised. In January of 2019, I went to Colombia to promote my supplement brand on a fitness expo. I loved the country, and I loved the people, and I was incredibly surprised when a young girl about 22 years old came to me and showed me my name tattooed on her ankles. I couldn't believe it, and to this day, I still can't. I'm honored to be an inspiration. I never set out to do it, but it's great to see that I have.

A lot of the time, people ask me why I haven't boasted more about my wins and my victories. I don't know what to say about that. I guess I was just born humble and modest. I grew up in a tiny town, and it was never polite to talk about one's achievements. Aside from that, I never thought of myself as anything special. I never thought that I had any unique talents. The reason I managed to succeed in life is that I fought hard and worked my ass off every day. I was also lucky enough to find a lot of great people along the way to help me in my journey.

That being said, this is the story of my life, and I can't tell the story of my life without mentioning what I have achieved. My football coach

at Grambling State University, Eddie Robinson, who is the third most victorious coach in the history of College Football and one of the most successful sports coaches ever used to say that it was always important to give credit where credit is due. He turned Grambling State University from a small football program into a real NCAA powerhouse. Of course, his words are very common in football and they are typically used to praise a part of the team or an individual player from either side on his accomplishments, efforts, or achievements. My coach used to say it all the time.

Right now, I think that it's important to highlight that phrase, not because I want to brag, but because this is a book about my life and achievements, and it's essential to give credit where credit is due. And let's be serious and real; there is a lot of credit to be given here. To me and to the people around me that helped me achieve what I could.

So, here it goes!

A WORLD OF MUSCLE

We are surrounded by a world of muscle. We live in a world of muscle. Today, more than at any other time in the past, there are muscular men and muscular women everywhere. Bodybuilders, powerlifters, strongmen, weightlifters, weight trainers are now everywhere. All these sports have become more popular, and these athletes are no longer relegated to small dungeons in obscure parts of the world like in the past. Now, these guys are world-class celebrities.

You've got people like my man Hafthor Bjornsson who became the world's strongest man and a star in a major TV show. We got powerlifter Ray Williams who is famous around the world. There's Arnold Schwarzenegger who's pretty much done everything, and the four-time fittest man on Earth Rich Froning, who is now a household name. You've also got guys like my good friend Dwayne "The Rock"

Johnson who is the highest paid star in Hollywood and has the physique of a competitive bodybuilder.

There are also women like Sara Sigmundsdottir, one of the fittest people on the planet and now a worldwide celebrity. The entertainment industry has also changed with mainstream actors and actresses like beautiful Zoe Saldana, Gal Gadot, Jessica Biel, and Linda Hamilton or my boys Terry Crews, Tom Hardy, Ben Affleck and many others who are now ripped. This hasn't just spread into show business. Stars and athletes that have nothing to do with bodybuilding now use weights to become stronger and more muscular in order to improve their game.

Sports like tennis, basketball, soccer, swimming, track and field, skiing, surfing, gymnastics, golf, martial arts, boxing, baseball, volleyball, race car driving, and everything in between are now pushing their athletes to use weight training. A logical consequence is that today, athletes are stronger and more muscular than ever before. In women, fit is the new sexy. A few years ago, the standard of feminine beauty was being lean. Today the most beautiful women are now muscular, toned, and chiseled. Now you see models who are muscular, fit, and sexy.

A few years ago, this would have been impossible and inconceivable. Muscular people were an anomaly and even considered weirdos, yet today they are everywhere. Today, being muscular is considered cool, and as I said, there are more muscular men and women than there have ever been at any point in the past. We are in the midst of a muscle revolution. We are in the only point in the history of the world where being muscular is a priority. This change and this revolution in building muscle started, in many ways, thanks to my good friend Joe Weider and his brother Ben, his wife Betty, and to his protégé Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Together, they worked to bring muscle to the mainstream, and they

succeeded. During the 1970s, gyms began to pop up everywhere, and slowly but surely, being muscular became a desire for everyone in the world. Before Weider and Arnold, weightlifters, bodybuilders, and strongmen were unknown. They still won championships, but these occurred in the middle of absolute obscurity.

Of course, some of them became famous as circus freaks at the beginning of the 20th century and at the end of the 19th century, but they weren't real celebrities like they are today. Eugen Sandow, the father of bodybuilding and from whom the Mr. Olympia trophy holds its name; Louis Cyr, a circus strongman about whom some even say he was the strongest man ever; Angus MacAskill, another circus strongman, in fact, the biggest man in history without suffering from gigantism; Herman Gorner, master of grip strength who, 100 years later, still holds the one-handed deadlift world record of 734 pounds. There are many others who were known as freaks and oddities instead of real celebrities.

Today muscle guys are celebrities. Real celebrities. Today, muscle resides in the mainstream. There are more muscular men than there have ever been before. Aside from Joe Weider and Arnold's push to bring muscle into the mainstream, there is also an instinctual and evolutionary appeal to powerful muscular physiques. The quote by Eddie Hall with which I opened this chapter, clearly explains it. It's about finding the alpha male. It's about finding who is the strongest. During the Stone Age, being strong was a necessary component for survival. Only the strongest survived, and women actively looked for the strongest men to father their children. After being asleep for centuries, those instincts have reemerged, and we are more muscular than ever before.

Today we have more gyms, gym chains, workout methods, and styles of working out than ever before. We got bodybuilding, powerlifting, strongman, cross-training, weight training, Olympic

weightlifting, high-intensity interval training, spinning, boot camps, and everything in between. The world is full of choices and options to become fit and strong. This, of course, started back in the 70s and 80s with the golden age of bodybuilding, but the revolution is so gigantic now that practically everyone wants to work out and build muscle.

We are in an era of muscular enlightenment. We have the strongest, most muscular, biggest, fittest, and toughest, men and women in the history of our planet. With so much competition today, becoming the best is increasingly demanding. When building muscle, you have to do things that were simply not done in the past. Today, genetics isn't enough. Work ethic isn't enough. Luck isn't enough. Dedication isn't enough. Hard work isn't enough. Discipline isn't enough. Today you must have the best of everything to reach the top.

You have to have the best genes combined with the best work ethic, the best discipline, the best training, the best diets, the best luck, and the best dedication. Nothing short of that will do. This is why we have the best athletes in the history of the world, breaking records that were once considered unbreakable. Now, you need the best nature and the best nurture.

BECOMING THE BEST AMONG THE BEST

As a warning to my readers and hoping not to sound annoying, I don't like to say that I am the best, but like I said before, it is important to give credit to myself and make something very clear to everybody: In a world where muscle is everything, I was the best. Surrounded by the most muscular men who have the highest work ethic, the best genes, and the greatest determination, all looking to become the best, I became the best. I was above the competition, blew them away, and fought to become the best of all time. It was no accident. It was no coincidence.

It was a combination of working my ass off, using my genes, and

using my determination. There's no other way around. Not only did I become the best, but I also became the most muscular man ever. At 5 feet 11 inches in height, weighing 325 pounds at 2% fat during the offseason and 296 pounds at .33% in a season, I became the most muscular man in the history of the planet. There has never been a bodybuilder or another man who was bigger than me, with more muscle and less fat percentage than me.

As comparison, let me just illustrate this. In the 1970s, bodybuilder Lou Ferrigno, who was 6 foot 5 inches tall and weighed 275 pounds, was the biggest bodybuilder ever. I'm six inches shorter, 50 pounds heavier, and with a lot less body fat. I'm the most muscular man ever, and I achieved that in an era where being muscular was the goal of a large part of the planet and of every single athlete in the world. And nothing in the world makes me prouder than knowing this.

I am incredibly proud to say that I became the best in an era where the competition was at the highest level ever.

PART ONE

MY EARLY YEARS



CHAPTER ONE

BORN TO BE STRONG

“One of the luckiest things that can happen to you in life is, I think, to have a happy childhood.”

— Agatha Christie, English author, world’s best-selling author of all time.

BORN IN TROUBLED TIMES

I was born in 1964, a year of change in American History. It was a sensitive time back then. The wind of change was blowing, the civil rights movement was at its peak, racism was rampant, demonstrations for racial equality were happening every day, and the country seemed like it couldn’t find its own identity or rhythm.

President Kennedy had been assassinated the year before. President Lyndon B. Johnson was struggling to gain control of the country. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had just delivered his famous “I have a dream” speech the year before and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. In addition, Jim Crow laws of racial segregation, which separated blacks from whites, were still being enforced in the South. Race riots occurred in Rochester, Philadelphia, and Harlem killing hundreds. The Mississippi Burning murders had just taken place.

Poverty was so rampant the government had just declared war on it. Mohammed Ali, with his controversy against the government, had just been crowned as heavyweight champion of the world after beating

Sonny Liston, and Malcolm X had just formed the Black Nationalist Party.

This wasn't a great time for the country, and the world was starting to believe that America was falling behind other great nations. In 1964 we officially entered the Vietnam War. The United States was also falling behind in the space race against the Soviet Union.

People were angry, full of resentment and living in stress and ambiguity. The nation was in a mix of mourning, happiness, and fear. It may certainly have seemed like a terrible time to grow up, especially in the Deep South, in the state of Louisiana. But for me, being born on May 13 of that year and growing up in the small town of Bastrop, things were much different.

People often ask me if I was a victim of poverty, or racism, or abuse, or of the negative political atmosphere the country was living in back then. The answer I always give them is the same "No." In my small town of only 15,000 people, there wasn't really any crime or any political unrest. In a way, we were isolated from everything that was happening in the nation and the world. It seemed we were millions of miles away from all this. None of these problems crossed the minds of the people living in our community. We were pretty much immune to it.

In many ways, we were isolated from the rest of the world. And if you ask me, it was better. Life was simpler and people were happier. No one was afraid, everyone was friendly, helped each other, and worked for the common good of the community. No one even locked their doors at night or when leaving the house. We used to walk to and from school home or took public transportation ever since the first grade. No one even thought anything of it. It was just the way life worked. The air we breathed in those days was of trust, and not anguish like today.

Racism, which was the theme at the time, was nonexistent even in

a rural state with enforced Jim Crow Laws. No one talked about it, and no one was afraid of it. In fact, the first time I ever even realized that racism existed was when I saw the TV miniseries Roots. I was about 13 years old at the time, and it struck me with awe. I didn't even know that there was such a thing as separation and hatred between whites and blacks, and that feeling didn't even last in me. I just thought about it as something that happened on TV. Some of my black classmates were angry at the white kids after seeing Roots even though the series only lasted for a couple of days. Some may call this part of my childhood naive, but looking back, I find that it was much better for me in the long run.

Racism only causes sadness and anger no matter if you are a victim or a perpetrator, and I am neither of them. I consider myself a happy person, and living in such a small town was one of the ingredients that lead me to this emotional contentment.

This was the America I grew up in; the small-town America that had been forgotten in those times.

SAYING HI TO PLANET EARTH

My mom, Jesse, was a hardworking woman. She was only 16 years old when I was born. My dad was almost as young as she was. My mom met my dad a few months before and they had a very brief affair. It was nothing serious or meant to be a long term relationship. In fact, I don't even think I was a planned child. I think my parents just liked each other and I became the fruit of their passion.

Soon after they found out my mom was pregnant, my dad left town for Michigan, saying that he wanted to find a better life for himself. I don't know if he left her because she was pregnant, but I don't think my mom ever saw him again or was ever in contact with him in any way. But his family stayed in Bastrop and I always knew who they were. Later on, I would become friends with his brother, my uncle, and

he would eventually take me to meet him.

When I was born, my mom registered me with her last name, which was Coleman, not Austin like my daddy. This may seem a bit weird today, but it was quite common back in those days. Young women had children fathered by young men with whom they had very brief affairs. The children that came out of those relationships were raised by their mothers, and most often took their last names.

Of course, as soon as I was born, my mom dropped out of high school and found a job to take care of me. We lived with my grandmother and had a very good life. My mom worked at a car wash that was right across the street from us. She labored in 7-8 hour shifts five days, and I spent most of the day with my grandma. She was the nicest woman one could ever meet. She was always positive, happy, loving, and gentle with me. We had a great connection and a great way of living together.

My grandma's house was a basic tent home with simple furniture, a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen, and an outhouse. It was nothing fancy, but it wasn't just a simple tent, either. It was a small wooden structure that was partially covered by a canvas, kind of like those in permanent camping structures. It wasn't a luxury house but we had running water, electricity, and all the warmth and comfort in the world. That's really all we needed.

I always knew what time my mom got off from work because her shift ended at the same time he bell that ended the working shift at the nearby paper mill. Every time that I heard that whistle, I got excited because I knew that my mom was coming home to shelter me with all her love.

Life was stable and simple during the first four years of my life.

MY BROTHER ALEX IS BORN

I don't remember it all very well, but around 1967 when I was about three years old, my mom met a man with whom she had another brief affair. I never knew his name. I don't think they saw each other after the fling, but from that short relationship my brother Alex was born.

My mom became pregnant and had her second child in 1968, at the age of 20. My brother was probably not planned either, but he sure was welcomed into our family. The more, the merrier, and we lived together in peace. My mom still worked at the car wash and made enough money to support the whole family and give us everything we wanted.

I often wonder how she managed to do this, especially considering that she was probably not making more than minimum wage, which must have been at around \$1.60 an hour, or around 13 bucks a day. I don't know how she did it, but she worked magic. She paid for our clothes, school supplies, food, and even the toys that she gave us from time to time. I always admired that from her. To this day, that is something that I am eternally grateful for; that and her love, of course.

Eventually, my mom quit the car wash and started working as a seamstress at a nearby clothing factory. This was an excellent job for her, not only because she made better money, but because it gave her the possibility to save by making our clothes instead of buying them. She would buy the fabric and cloth at the factory at a low price or get it for free and then she would make shirts, pants, or even Sunday suits for my brother and I. She was really good at it.

The clothes she made were so good, they were even better than those selling at the stores. I remember we had a beautiful wardrobe made of wonderful fabrics that were each patterned in various different ways. It was all handmade with total love and dedication.

In many ways, my mom was an example of what working hard and making the best of your dollar can do to improve your life. This is

something that I learned well. It was the main reason of my success in life. Watching my mom work hard to support a family inspired me to also work hard and achieve my dreams in life.

MY SISTER TINA

A couple of years after my brother Alex was born, my mom finally had the chance to meet a good man. I guess she felt lonely in many ways and wanted to find someone who could make her happier and help her raise her kids.

She found LeRoy. LeRoy was a kindhearted, hardworking man from Bastrop who assumed full responsibility. He took the role of head of the house and helped a lot with money and emotional support. LeRoy already had two daughters from a previous marriage, and after he married my mom, they all moved into our house. Of course, spaces became tighter, but we were all one big happy family.

We had it all, man! A great life, time to play, time to shop, time to study, and time to be together. Of course, it wasn't all sunshine and rainbows. In general, life wasn't as easy for children back then as it is now. Parents were very fond of disciplining their children, and they'd whoop your ass for any little thing. And it wasn't just a small whooping, it was severe.

LeRoy would discipline us, my mother would discipline us, teachers would discipline us, uncles would discipline us, and even the neighbors would sometimes discipline us. We didn't complain. We saw it as normal. Everyone went through the same thing, it was just the way life worked.

About a year or two into their marriage, LeRoy and my mom decided they wanted to have a kid. My mom was ecstatic about this, as she would finally get the chance to have a kid with a man she was in a serious relationship with. It happened, and when I was six years

old, my sister Tina came into our lives. That was my earliest clear memory. She was beautiful, and I remember I loved spending time with her. She was like my little best friend, and she remained like that for many, many years.

Sadly, the relationship between my mom and LeRoy became bitter and I never knew why. They divorced a couple of years later. LeRoy and his daughters left the house. I never saw them again, which was kind of sad.

One day you live with a person who's like your dad and the next day he's gone, never to return again. But I guess that's the way life works, even though I couldn't understand it at the time. My mom, of course, was terribly unhappy, but being the hardworking woman that she had always been, she didn't give up. She decided to look for another man to keep her company.

ALONZO, A GREAT FATHER FIGURE

A Couple of years later my mother found another man. This time, she hit the jackpot. The man's name was Alonzo, and he was also from Bastrop. They married when I was about 10 and it changed our whole lives for the better. Alonzo was a hardworking man with a heart of gold; a great man that brought even more joy into our beautiful house.

Alonzo made my mom smile a lot, and he was the only man whose name she took for life. To me, Alonzo was like a father. He taught me many things. He showed me how to drive, how to hunt, and how to fish. Fishing became one of the most enjoyable activities in my life, which is fishing.

Out of the many things that we did together, fishing was by far the best. We lived near the Bayou which is an area filled with shallow, slow-moving rivers surrounded by marsh and swamps. It was perfect

for fishing and for relaxing. Every single weekend Alonzo and I would drive over to the nearby bayou, took out our cooler, our chairs, and sat down fishing for hours. Most of the time we didn't catch anything, but that didn't really matter. We were bonded and spent some time as father and son as we contemplated the beautiful Louisiana landscape around us.

I don't know if some of you have been or have seen the beautiful Bayou, but if you haven't, I recommend you to go one day. It's so beautiful, so peaceful, and so relaxing that just sitting there is a spiritual experience.

I liked doing that so much that sometimes I went fishing every single day, even when Alonzo couldn't go. I remember I took my bike, my pole and rode for 10 minutes to reach the bayou. There I sat on the edge of the lake, relaxing and just looking at the beautiful landscape around me. I never really caught anything when I was by myself, except a big bass once, but that was it. To me, more than fishing, this was like meditating and relaxing in the middle of God's country. I absolutely loved it.

Life in the house was really great. We had everything we could possibly want, and we were all working very hard to make our dreams come true. We lived in true harmony. We never fought. Disagreements were always worked out. We made an effort to spend a lot of time together although we all had jobs. We always had the most fabulous food, the most magnificent clothes, and truly spent amazing times together. At times, mom even struggled to give us all the luxuries we wanted from time to time.

In fact, I've got a great story of just how great my life was at that time and how much my mom made an effort to help me out. It was the mid-70s, and 8-track players were all the rage. I remember spotting them for the first time on TV one day and then seeing the tapes for sale at the general store where I worked. I really wanted one, but I

knew that they were too expensive for my mom, for me, and for Alonzo. Still, I wanted it so bad that I asked my mom for one anyway. She told me that it was impossible.

“I ain’t got any money for that,” she said.

The next day, however, when I was home from school, I saw my 8-track player sitting there, gift-wrapped just for me. This was amazing. I couldn’t believe it. Now I could listen to my favorite music right in my own room instead of having to go to a friend’s house or be in the car. It was a symbol of what a great mother she really was. And it didn’t end there.

A few weeks later, I told my mom that I wanted an 8-track tape recorder to record all the songs that I wanted to hear. She said the very same thing. “I ain’t got no money for that.” But the next day she brought it home for me to enjoy. We weren’t rich, but my mother and Alonzo always managed to buy us everything we could possibly want. We felt very fortunate and happy, and this is the attitude I have carried with me my entire life.

GETTING TO MEET MY DAD

Despite the great times we had together as a family, I always wanted to meet my dad. I was already a teen and had never even seen him or talked to him on the phone. I had never seen a picture of him. At times I imagined what he might look like. I always wondered if we had similar personality or physique. I dreamed about him, and I always looked forward to the day when I would meet him. One day, it happened.

As I mentioned before, my dad left town shortly after my mom had become pregnant with me, and he moved to Michigan to find a better life. The word on the street was that in Detroit, there were a ton of jobs in the auto industry that paid really well, and he made the transition

soon after. He never came back, not even to visit his brothers and sisters, but his family still lived in Bastrop, and my mother knew who they were.

My dad, in fact, had a brother who ran a transportation service from Bastrop to Arkansas, which was right across the border. The central hub of this business was only a few hundred feet from my house. I used to see that man almost every day without knowing who he was until finally, my mom told me he was my uncle. So, wanting to meet my dad, I approached him and told him who I was. He was very cool about it and told me that one day he would take me to meet my dad. I was ecstatic with joy. I didn't know when or how it was going to happen, but I knew that I would eventually meet him.

For months and weeks, I went to see my uncle almost every day. We became good friends, and he sometimes took me in rides in his vehicle. I asked him about my dad every single time, until one day he told me that he had already talked to him and that he was ready to meet me.

I was really excited. I was in 7th grade, but to me, it was imperative for my dad to see me as a strong, hardworking man. My dad was going to come from Detroit all the way to Bastrop to visit, and he was going to meet me. My uncle told me to go to his house in the evening.

I remember that Friday night vividly. I walked from my house to my uncle's. My heart was beating fast as I knocked on the door. My uncle opened and invited me in. There he was in the living room. I finally saw dad. He was short, skinny, and had a beautiful smile. He looked a lot like me. I felt so honored to be standing right there next to him, proud to be his son. He was very nice about it. He gave me an enormous hug and told me, "It's great to see you, son."

I stayed there the whole evening, having some great bonding time with him. I didn't really know what we were supposed to talk about. I

don't think he did either, so we just went with the flow. But it was awesome. To me, it was like a dream come true. We laughed, hugged, told stories, and had dinner. I enjoyed it very much and felt so grateful.

After a couple of days, he went back home to Detroit. I was never in contact with him again, but I did get to see him once more when I became Mr. Olympia. A lot of people ask me if I feel sad because of this, but I don't. I actually feel very fortunate. Many people don't even get to experience what I experienced.

A TRULY BEAUTIFUL CHILDHOOD

I am very proud to say that my childhood in rural Louisiana was the best a child could ask for. Sure, we weren't rich, and we didn't have a ton of luxuries, but we worked hard and had everything we could possibly want. As kids, you don't really focus on what you don't have, but you are rather grateful for what you do have. At least that's the way it was with me, and it was indeed a beautiful experience.

I am so fortunate to have had such a wonderfully hardworking and loving mother, a grandma that would spoil me rotten with love, and a group of good men who taught me the meaning of life and how to live a peaceful existence while becoming a man of goodness and hard work.

If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't change anything. My upbringing gave me a perfect combination of teaching me the discipline to work hard, as well as the importance of love, gratefulness, and having a positive attitude. This is something I have carried with me over my entire life and something that has helped me tremendously during the hard times.

CHAPTER TWO

LEARNING HOW TO BE A HARD WORKER

“Good things come to those who work their asses off and never give up.”

— Anonymous

THE BEST ROLE MODEL IN THE WORLD

I’ve been very fortunate to have led a life of success. I consider myself to be an overachiever who has done every single thing I have ever wanted to do in my life. Looking back at my triumphs and achievements, I feel blessed.

Through the years, one of the most common questions I hear people ask me is “How? How did you manage to rise from a small town in the Bayou to become the best bodybuilder ever, a highly decorated police officer, a highly successful entrepreneur, one of the strongest men who’s ever lived, and a symbol of what fitness is all about?”

Well, my dear friends, my answer is always the same: “Through intense hard work.” One of my rules for achieving success in life is working hard. There is no other way around it. There are no quick fixes, and there are no shortcuts. This chapter is dedicated to how I became a hard worker and paved the path for my own success.

THE BEST ROLE MODEL IN THE WORLD

There is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. Every single person who has achieved success, no matter how alone they may have felt, was helped by someone along the way. That's just a fact of life.

A lot of the time, people tell me that they admire me because I am a self-made man; a young kid who rose from poverty to glory.

Of course, I am very honored to hear this, but what I tell them is that I am no self-made man and not by a long shot. I owe my success to many people, but mainly to one person, my mother, the hardest worker I ever knew.

My mom, Jesse, was the finest example of hard work and discipline in the world. Like I said before, she became a single mom at age 16. She had no formal education and didn't have a trade she could fall back on. But boy, was she a hard worker.

She sometimes had two or three jobs at the same time to support us. And she succeeded. She would work at the paper mill and do odd jobs for the neighbors to bring in some extra cash. Then she would come home, cook dinner, and take care of us. On top of that, she always gave us everything we wanted.

She was so smart, disciplined, and determined that she stretched the money or worked harder to give us school, housing, clothes, luxuries, education, good food, toys, and everything we could possibly want.

Today, I see many people complaining that they can't make ends meet with the job they have. And while I certainly empathize with their situation, I believe that everyone can make more money and achieve their goals simply by working hard and working with direction. That's what my mom did, and I am incredibly grateful for that.

If it weren't for my mom, God knows what would have happened to me. She was the best mother one could ever have, and her example

was what drove me towards the success I went on to achieve in life.

Thank you, Mom. If it weren't for you, I would have never been a goal setter or a goal getter.

MY WORK LIFE STARTED EARLY

Because I grew up watching my mom work all the time, I saw hard work not only as something normal but necessary. Therefore, I started working at a very early age.

When I was nine years old, I decided that I wanted to get some type of employment and make my own money. I wanted to help out around the house and pay for my own stuff. My mom didn't force me to bring money into the house, but I felt it was the right thing to do.

I couldn't wait to make my very first penny and show my mom how much I'd been paid. I wanted her to be very proud of me. Of course, I knew that kids my age don't really apply for jobs and that my skill set was pretty limited, so I thought about getting a job somewhere I could help out without needing to have any type of experience or special skills.

The first place that popped into my head was the general store. It was only a couple of blocks away from my house, and I used to go there all the time to buy candy, ice cream, and junk food. I knew the owner well, and he knew me by name. Maybe it wasn't going to be so difficult to get a job there. So, I walked over and knocked on the door. My heart was pumping fast, but I didn't want it to show.

"Come in," I heard a voice say. It was Mr. Anderson, the owner, a nice man in his 40s who had been working at that store ever since my mom was a teenager.

I looked at him straight in the eye. I wanted him to see that I was very serious.

“Hey, Ronnie. What will it be today? Chocolates?” He said in his amiable tone.

“No, Mr. Anderson, I’m actually here because I want to ask you for a job at the store,” I told him with determination.

“Oh, really, Ronnie?” He smiled and looked at me with a funny face. “And why do you think I want to hire someone here at the store?”

“Well, I see you doing many things all by yourself. Maybe someone can help you do these things so you won’t get so tired.” I wasn’t really prepared for a job interview, so I answered the first thing that came to mind.

Mr. Anderson laughed amiably. I could tell he wasn’t really prepared for that sort of answer.

“Okay, okay,” He said. “You can help me. Why don’t you come in for an hour or two every day. You can help me clean, put the soda and the food in the refrigerators and some other things that may come up.”

I couldn’t believe it. I had been hired. The only thing was that I wanted to make some money out of it, but I didn’t know what to tell him. I stood there, silent.

“I can pay you 25 cents a day,” he said.

I jumped up with joy. I was going to get paid something. I thanked him and ran home to tell my mom. She was so proud of me, and I was so honored to see that pride in her eyes. I know that 25 cents a day doesn’t sound like a lot of money, not even back in 1973, but you have to remember that this was a small town. A quarter could go a very long way.

I could buy a lot of stuff with it, and a lot of it I actually spent it right then and there. I usually got a soda for five cents, another five cents for a Snickers bar, and the remaining 15 cents I saved up to buy shoes or spend them on toys, or just fun.

I was making my own money, and I was no longer asking my mom for anything. It was the best feeling in the world, and I wanted to get more of it.

So, I started to do more things to get more jobs and make more money.

A HUSTLER IS BORN

From the moment I made my first quarter while working at the general store, I became hooked on money. I loved working and making a lot of money. Of course, Mr. Anderson could only give me a quarter a day, and I only spent one or two hours at a time, so I needed to find something else on the side.

I remember I was going to school for about 6 hours a day, I slept about eight, worked at the store for two, played baseball for nearly an hour or two a day, did homework for another hour, and spent time with my family for another two hours a day. That meant that I had about three or four hours more each day in which I could get another job to get more money.

So, I did. Soon, I was working different jobs for different people, hustling all around town. I did everything I could. I mowed lawns, did yard work, worked at basketball intramural games keeping score, operating the clock, and calling out fouls --the jobs of three people, mind you-- and anything else that made me money.

Every cent that I made I gladly spent. I got myself food, clothes, toys, comic books, and everything else I could possibly want. I was making a lot more money that I could spend, and this was a trend that followed me for the rest of my life.

I know that some people out there may think that this schedule may have been a little bit too much for a young kid, but I absolutely loved it. In fact, I loved it so much that I never missed a day on the job or

missed school. In fact, I got perfect attendance at school every single year and was on the honor roll for my good grades.

I loved going to work, I loved doing the job, and I loved earning my own money. And that paid off, big time.

Early discipline not only paved the way for the success I would have later on in life, but it also helped me appreciate the value of hard work, of earning one's living, of being tough, being grateful, and of never complaining about anything. It was a blessing I am thankful for every single day of my life.

CHOPPING COTTON, THE HARDEST JOB IN THE WORLD

By the time I became a teenager, I realized that there was a ton of other things I could do that could pay even better. I was now stronger and bigger, and jobs for adults were now an option for me. Of course, I kept working at the general store for two hours a day every single day of the week, including Sunday until I left town for college, but many other jobs could pay me a lot more.

The first job I got was chopping cotton, and I gotta tell you, it was the hardest job I've ever had. Many times people love to talk about how their job is harder than everyone else's. One time I was watching a documentary on TV that talked about the 10 toughest jobs in the world. I don't remember the order, but a couple of them were ranching, sewage disposal, working on an oil platform, and logging.

I haven't worked in any of these, but I seriously doubt that they could be any harder than chopping cotton, which was the next job I took.

I was about 12 years old, and I saw an ad on the paper that said the local cotton farm was looking for people to chop cotton. The job paid a lot more than any of the other full-time jobs, and the hours

weren't that bad. I only had to be there for about six hours a day, which still gave me time to mow lawns, work at the store, play sports, go to school, do my homework, and more.

But there was a reason why they paid so well. No one wanted to do that job, and soon enough, I would learn why.

I remember when I first arrived at the farm. It was 6:00 a.m. and I saw a field that was about twice the size of a football field. The intense scorch of the Louisiana summer heat and intense humidity became unbearable. The sun was just beginning to rise, but one felt as if being inside an oven.

It was so wet and sticky that only a couple of minutes after I walked outside, my shirt was already soaked. My job hadn't even started, and I was already dehydrated.

The owner of the farm was very clear about what I needed to do. "You have to chop all the plants that grow around the cotton," he said as he handed me a hoe. "You can take water breaks as much as you want, just make sure you're done by noon. No one can work in the afternoon. The sun will kill you."

It sounded relatively simple. All I had to do was swing the hoe and chop away. My job wasn't to pick it, that would be done the next day by another guy. All I had to do was cut the plants off the cotton. It couldn't be that hard, right?

Wrong!

I started chopping away. At first it wasn't that hard. But by the 10th plant, my back began to burn from muscle ache. I had to lean down to sever each and every plant. It was like doing deadlifts over and over again with every single swing of the hoe. My back wasn't prepared for that type of work, so I had to stand up and take a break.

I looked up and saw the early morning sun shine directly on me.

There was no shade, and I could clearly see the 700 by 200 or so feet that I had to cover that single day. I hadn't even cut 15 linear feet worth of plants, and I still had about 140,000 square feet to go. It was as if the field never ended.

Of course, I had no choice. I wasn't a quitter, so I kept going. I worked hard, chopping each and every plant as the hours passed by. I didn't finish on that first day. Just like the owner said, we couldn't work past noon. The sun was so intense that we simply had to stop. The very next day, I was going to have to come back and continue the job.

I was beyond exhausted. I was drained of all life force or energy. As soon as I finished, I fell to the ground. Yet, it wasn't pain that I was feeling, but deep satisfaction. I completed the biggest chore I had ever faced in my entire life and possibly the most challenging job in the whole world.

I felt very proud. Sure, many would have felt so tired after a job like this. But not me. I had always been taught that there was nothing greater in life than seeing your work through to the end. In many ways, discomfort after victory was the greatest feeling one could have.

I sincerely think that it was this mentality which allowed me to train so incredibly hard and be extremely disciplined when it came to bodybuilding. And this is the main reason as to why I became a champion. Many would have quit chopping cotton after the first hour. But not me. The satisfaction was great, and the money was even better.

The next day I came right back and worked at it again. And the day after that I did the same. I did the job until the entire farm, which was hundreds of acres in size, was chopped. It took the whole summer. Hard work, but great pay.

WORKING AT HUSH PUPPY

By the time I was a sophomore in high school I had become so used to working hard, combining after-school sports activities with the general store, and my side businesses that I felt like I was ready to get an additional job. I was busy throughout the day, but when the afternoon came along, I had a lot of free time. I figured I could get some sort of additional full-time job.

There was an opening for work as a busboy in a nearby restaurant called the Hush Puppy. I had already been there many times with my family, and I absolutely loved the food they served there.

It was a traditional Cajun restaurant, and the house specialty was—yeah, you guessed it—hush puppies. Hush puppies are one of my favorite foods, and in case you've never tried it or don't know what it is, I suggest you go eat one now. It's like a ball of deep-fried cornmeal served with seafood. It's something very, very special. My mouth waters by just thinking about it. Aside from hush puppies, the restaurant served fried catfish, which I could also die for, frog legs, and many other Cajun delicacies.

When I went to my interview, I was so eager to work there that I got hired on the spot. Not only was the pay really good, but I also had the chance to take home all the food that was left in the kitchen. In order to save time, the restaurant prepared the food all at once, and most of the time it wasn't all sold. To avoid any waste, the food was given to the employees, and there was always enough to go around. This was by far the best part of the job. Every single day I took home fried catfish, frog legs, fries, bread and, of course, hush puppies. It was beyond amazing. Not only was the taste amazing but now I was making money and saving a lot on food. It was the best of both worlds.

BUYING MY FIRST CAR

Working at the Hush Puppy as a busboy, at the general store, as a cotton chopper, and as a hustler here and there gave me the chance

to buy my first car. I was only 15 years old and the only kid in town who could afford one. I remember that day like it was yesterday. I had saved 100 dollars. I knew that I wanted to get a car to show my mom and my family how successful I really was. I also wanted to drive around town and save time getting to my jobs quicker.

I went to the local car dealer and told him that I had 100 dollars to spend and that I wanted a car. I was only 15, but I already had a legal driver's license, as Louisiana had very lenient policies towards driving at a young age.

The man, who was quite the salesman and a hustler in his own right, told me that this was my lucky day. "I actually have a beautiful car for exactly that price." He took me around the lot and showed me an old 1959 Ford Fairlane. Looking back at it now, it was probably not the best buy, as it looked extremely worn down and in total disrepair, but to me, it looked like a brand-new Rolls Royce. I didn't think of it twice, and I bought it on the spot.

I was so happy and so proud. It had never felt anything like that before. That was one of the greatest moments of my life. Sadly, however, it didn't last. After about a month, the engine blew up. But I didn't mind. I kept on working on getting myself a new and better vehicle. I continued hustling, but I knew that eventually, I needed to get a more steady job that could pay even more.

WORKING AT THE PAPER MILL

After I graduated from high school, the summer before I took off for college, I took a job at the local paper mill. The paper mill was the main employer in town. Many of the guys I knew were already working there, so it wasn't hard to get hired. The job they gave me was tough, really tough.

My task was to remove all the asbestos from the factory with a

jackhammer. I had to wear a filtered mask to protect me from inhaling the toxic materials and carried the heavy jackhammer with me everywhere around the factory.

A lot of people since then have asked me if I wasn't worried about breathing in the extremely toxic asbestos, which is known to cause cancer and other health problems. But I really wasn't. In fact, I didn't think anything of it. All that went through my head was the money that was going to come pouring in.

WORKING SAVED MY LIFE

To me, working was more than a way of life. It was a blessing. It was the greatest thing that could ever happen to me. A lot of the time, young kids get into trouble when they enter their teenage years because they have nothing to do. They go to school, do their homework and spend the afternoon either playing, doing nothing, or hanging out with friends. Most of the time, they don't have a lot of stuff to do, and this, more often than not, results in trouble.

According to government experts in teenage and young adult crime, kids who don't have a job are a lot more prone to join gangs, become victims of violence, or getting involved in criminal activity and dangerous behavior. This never happened to me because I never had a choice. However, if I hadn't had a job, who knows what may have happened to me. I might have gotten in trouble. I can't say for sure, but I do know it would have definitely prevented me from achieving all I could in my life.

PART TWO

THE GOLDEN YEARS OF YOUTH



CHAPTER THREE

MY FIRST MUSCLES

“Blood, sweat, and respect: The first two you give; the last one you earn.”

— Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, American Wrestler, Actor, Fitness Icon, and Entrepreneur.

HOW I DISCOVERED WEIGHTS

Monday, 3:03 PM

It's the third week of my 10th grade in high school. The schedule is tight, complicated, and very demanding. I am barely able to keep up with my jobs and my school duties, but the time has come to try a new activity. I am naturally muscular and naturally big. I don't know why that is, but I look like the hulk. Maybe it's all that work I've been doing.

People ask me all the time if I lift weights, but I always tell them that I don't even know what that is. I've never even been to a gym.

One time, a guy on the street tells me something that pushes me to get even better. “If you look like that and haven't even lifted a weight, imagine how you would look when you start lifting weights.” I take his word for it and decide to start pumping some iron. I know where I can find a gym. There's one at the school. I just need to try it out and see how it feels.

I walk down the school hall and take a left. I arrive at a large pair of heavy-duty metal doors, which are difficult to move. I open them and

immediately get sucked in by the smell of humidity, raw iron, chalk, and sweat. To me, it's a new smell, but it would become the scent I would love most in my entire life. The smell, although different from anything I have ever sensed before, draws me into the gym. I don't quite realize it yet, but a part of me knows that this is the smell of hard work, of training like a champion, and of becoming the best version of yourself.

As I walk into the gym, I realize that it's empty. I turn on the lights and glance around. I've never in my life seen a place like this. It's not very big, about 40 feet by 40 feet, but it's filled with equipment. There are no fancy machines like you see in gyms today, but rather old school benches, barbells, kettlebells, pull up bars, fat bars, and everything needed for hardcore training.

It's basically all a pile of iron, with a dust-covered floor of raw cement and bare walls of white brick; all lit by several industrial-grade fluorescent light bulbs. I really don't know what to make of it. To me, it's something unknown and completely new, but there's something within me that absolutely loves it. It just seems like a place for hard work. You know how much I love that.

I look around, and I see a rack of rusty barbells that range in weight from 5 to 50 pounds. I don't know which one to pick up. I know I'm strong from all that work I've done. I have even picked up a 60-gallon barrel of beer at the store. I don't know how much that weighs, but I know it's not very light.

I feel pretty confident, so without even thinking, I walk to the rack and try to pick up a 50 pounder. There's no space on the handle for two hands, so I have to give it a go with one. I wrap my hand around it and use all my strength to lift it, but something bizarre happens. I can barely even move the weight. I try again, but I can't lift it without effort. I can only pick it up from the rack, but I can't perform a curl nor a shoulder press. A thought of defeat comes to my head, but I don't take

failure for an answer. Maybe I can't use that weight now. But I will one day! I can promise you that.

I was in love. I became hooked on weight lifting for life.

MY SPORTS ERA IN HIGH SCHOOL

Ever since I was a little kid I always played sports. I loved them. My day basically consisted of going to school, working, and playing sports. I did that every single day of my life from a very young age. Part of me knew that I was going to be a professional athlete one day, so I took it very seriously. When I was in high school, sports became, in many ways, the most important part of my life, and I enjoyed every second of them.

THE POWERLIFTING TEAM

Throughout my years as a professional bodybuilder, one of the things that attracted the most attention from the people out there was how strong I was.

To put this into perspective, back in the 1970s, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Lou Ferrigno, and Franco Columbu were the most muscular bodybuilders around. I remember watching videos of Franco deadlifting around 700 pounds, Lou Ferrigno pressing 245 pounds overhead for reps, and Arnold doing bench press with 400 pounds and squats with 500 pounds. Those were impressive numbers back then, and they still are even for a bodybuilder, strongman, or weight-lifter. Those guys were powerful, and they were some of the strongest bodybuilders ever.

When I was in my prime, my lifts were much, much more than that. I was deadlifting 800 pounds for reps, squatting 800 pounds for reps, leg pressing over 2,300 pounds for reps, overhead pressing 315 pounds for reps, and bench pressing 500. I was very, very strong, and

I wasn't even training for strength.

A couple of strongmen, including Benedikt Magnusson, who holds the record for the heaviest 1,015-pound raw deadlift ever without any straps, wraps, suit, or anything, once told me that if I trained for strength I would possibly become one of the strongest men in the world and in history. Despite the strength I would achieve later in life, I wasn't really that strong when I was young.

Sure, I was very muscular, but I wasn't as strong as people may think. When I started lifting weights in 10th grade, I had a hard time moving the barbells. I didn't have the proper techniques or the equipment, and my abilities were somewhat limited. Still, I did have the potential and the right work ethic, and I knew that I could do good. A couple of weeks after I started working out, I decided to raise the stakes. My school had a powerlifting team, and I thought that I could become strong enough to make the roster.

Sure enough, the coach let me in with a big smile. I guess he saw my potential. Powerlifting turned out to be a lot of fun. Benching, squatting, and deadlifting for strength turned me into a real beast, and it eventually helped me out a lot in football, too. I got a lot stronger than I thought I could become. Pretty soon I was benching around 300 pounds, squatting 450, and deadlifting 455. Those numbers may not sound very impressive compared to what I was able to accomplish later on in life, but I was pretty proud of them.

I remember when I was finally able to break into the 1,000-pound club. That was quite an accomplishment. I did that when I was in the 10th grade. I felt very proud to become one of the few men who could have that honor. 1,000 pounds in three lifts was a lot for me, even though later on I would become one of the very, very few to be part of the 2,000-pound club.

Despite my strength, I was nowhere near the best in my

powerlifting team. Of all the competitions we entered, I only managed once to be in the top five. Our school and other schools had some guys that were incredibly strong, not only for their age but strong for international standards. We had guys that could squat and deadlift 600 pounds and bench press 400 or 450 like it was nothing. I felt super weak next to them but was still very honored to share the gym with them.

I remember one time when I was working out after school, and this very short guy with very lean muscle mass walked into the gym. I had never seen him before. I assumed that, despite his apparent fitness, he wasn't really a strong guy. I was mind blown to see him put 5 plates on each side of the squat rack. It was 500 pounds, and it was a weight that I hadn't yet been able to pull from the floor in deadlift, much less go down and lift it back up successfully. I was a lot bigger than him, so I doubted he would be able to do it.

Imagine my surprise when this tiny little guy puts the bar on his back and drops down and gets back up like it was nothing. I couldn't believe it. That blew my mind. A small guy was a lot stronger than me. I had to work harder to become as strong as I could be. Sure, I didn't get to accomplish that in high school, but it would eventually happen.

TRACK AND FIELD

Track and field was one of my favorite sports. I really loved doing it because it allowed me to practice many activities at the same time. I could run long distances, sprint, jump, throw the discus, throw the javelin, throw shot put and a lot more. It was like becoming fit in many different areas.

My best activities were the ones related to strength, of course. I threw discus and javelin pretty well, but my gold standard was the shot put. I was pretty good at it. I remember I could throw the ball about 52 feet, although I think that I could have thrown it even further because

my spin technique wasn't the best, I must admit. This, of course, may not seem a lot compared to the Olympic records in which they throw 70 feet with a 16-pound ball. We used the 12 pounders, but that was pretty good for a high school kid. In many ways, I can say that track and field prepared me for the life of a genuine athlete and gave me abilities I didn't have.

FOOTBALL

Football also became one of the most important activities I practiced. It was really an overall fitness challenge, and I think it helped me a lot in learning how to keep on playing and continuing to lift despite the pain.

From the moment the coach saw me, he told me I was going to play offensive and defensive lines. He told me I was going to be playing the nose guard and pulling guard positions. I didn't know why, but that's just what he said.

Later on, I learned why this was the case.

I was pretty strong, very fast, and I wasn't as tall as other linemen; only 5 ft 11 inches. This made me very hard to move, very hard to block, and extremely hard to avoid when I was running towards the other guys as an offensive guard. The coach was very right about this, and in a matter of a few short weeks, I became really good. In fact, I was so good that the coach never took me out of the game. I played offense, defense, and special teams, about two and a half hours straight, without a single break. During the games, I remember I used to ask the coach for a break from all the intensity. He would never let me get off the field, but he used to trick me into thinking that he would. "Coach I need I break."

I used to tell him while I was sweating heavily. "Oh yeah, Ronnie. Don't worry, you're gonna get a break really soon," he would say in a

motivating tone of voice. I was very relaxed. I could definitely use the break.

“Yeah, coach?” I asked him with the eagerness of a newborn puppy. “Oh, yeah! Halftime is right around the corner. There you’ll get your break.”

I can laugh at this now, but back then, it wasn’t funny at all. Coach never gave me a break. Not a single break. In four years of playing high school football, I never went off the field, not for a second, not even once.

It was so exhausting that when I came home after the game, I couldn’t even sleep. But I didn’t mind that. I loved it. I loved hard work, and it felt incredibly good to be this much of a hard worker in so many different areas.

Besides, it paid off big time. I was one of the few players on the team who was all-state and all-district. All this went on as I was also working full-time in several jobs, going to school, getting perfect attendance, being on the honor roll, and spending time with my family. Just like my mom found a way to stretch her dollar, I found a way to stretch time as no one else could.

THE ROLE MY GENES PLAYED

Over the years, a lot of people have asked me about the role my genes played in sports and specifically in bodybuilding. When people saw me in my prime, with my gigantic size, definition, muscular density, and superhuman strength, people ask me all the time whether that was because of my genes.

A lot of guys who became champions did have amazing genes, but I wasn’t one of them. I am not a geneticist or scientist, so I can’t really elaborate on what types of genes I have, but I do know that genes and DNA have to do with family history.

Except for my mom who was stocky and muscular, my family background had nothing to do with muscles, fitness, or with being big. Two of my uncles on my mother's side were both really skinny, and my dad was thin, short, and had no muscle. The rest of his family was the same.

To be honest, I don't really know where I got the ability to build such strong muscle and get so big and strong. Logically, there was really no reason for someone who came from such a physically weak family to become so robust, muscular, and defined. Through the years, I've come up with two answers. One is that I outworked my genes. Genes are like blueprints of what you can become, but if you don't follow through to turn these blueprints into reality, your genes will play a limited role. You can become someone much better than your genes. I think this is what happened to me. I simply outworked my genes.

The second and most important reason is God. God made me strong and made me special. People talk about God breaking the mold when he makes certain people. In my case, I think he really did break this mold. God always played favorites with me, and every single victory I had, every single thing I did, every single thing I achieved, and everything I am proud of accomplishing, I did thanks to his support, guidance, and help.

I don't know why he picked me. Maybe he saw something in me to turn it into an inspiration and guidance for people to become better in their lives and in fitness. I know is that he pushed me to be someone special, and he really helped me achieve that.

I am incredibly grateful to have been one of his favorite sons, and not once did he ever give up on me. There were some difficult moments, of course, like being face-to-face with death when I was working on the police, but he always came to my rescue. I remember when I had already retired from the police force and was now a

reserve officer. I was driving in the Dallas metropolitan area when an officer pulled me over for speeding. Just as he approached my car, I identified myself as a police officer, and instead of letting me go, he arrested me for what he called “impersonating a police officer.”

He took me into the station, where he was planning to book me. Fortunately, the other officers at the precinct knew who I was and let me go on the spot. To this day, I don’t know what that guy wanted from me, but I was fortunate because this man was as nasty and as awful as it gets. He turned out to actually be a criminal who used to rape young homeless girls for fun. He was a real predator, and God knows what would have happened if the other officers weren’t there to recognize me. God was there for me and helped me in a situation where my life could have spiraled down to the worst possible scenario.

To clarify any doubts you may have about my genes, the answer is, no. I didn’t have the greatest genes, but I did have the greatest being ever on my side, and he helped me achieve everything I ever wanted.

SPORTS DEFINED MY LIFE

I think that one of the most important parts of life is realizing who you truly are and what you want to do with your life. We are all born with a purpose, with a reason for living. I personally believe that this reason is chosen and given to us by God. But it’s not given easy. It’s really up to you to see the hints and find out for yourself.

We all have two paths in life. One is our calling, and the other is our career. They may seem the same, but they aren’t. Our calling is something that comes in almost effortlessly with the talent that God gave you. The second one, the career, is something that takes a lot more work and gives you less reward but exists because it allows you to help a lot of people. We all have this, it’s just a matter of finding it.

Sport was my calling, and police work was my career. Many people

find their calling and their career early in life, many find out later in life, and unfortunately, many never find them at all. I was fortunate to find them both. For me, my future, and my future was in sports, and specifically in weightlifting related sports, although it would still take me many years to get to where I really wanted and needed to be.

CHAPTER FOUR

MY COLLEGE YEARS

“Nothing so good as a university education, nor worse than a university without its education.”

— Edward Bulwer Lytton, English Writer and Politician

GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY

Despite living in a rural part of the country, with a generally difficult economic situation, I had a very happy childhood and a remarkable adolescence. My teen years were truly amazing, and I enjoyed every minute of them.

My mom taught me the do's and don'ts of life. Thanks to her, I managed to work my ass off, earn money, save money, get good grades in school, make good friendships, and play sports at a high level.

Those first 18 years of my life living in Bastrop were unforgettable, formative, and defining in my life. However, just as everything else, I knew that eventually good times were going to come to an end.

In 1982, a couple of months after I turned 18, I graduated from high school. I didn't have big plans for what I would do next. My idea was to work at the paper mill like my uncle, get married to the girl I was dating, and live a good life in my hometown. Everything seemed great, but one day, it all came crashing down.

It turned out that my girlfriend, Patricia, wasn't as serious about the

relationship as I was. I really loved her. She was my whole world, but to her, I was just a disposable toy. She cheated on me and told me she didn't want to be with me anymore. I couldn't believe it. I was completely heartbroken and in total despair. I tried to convince her to reconsider, but she wanted nothing of it. I was so in love with her that for three whole months I couldn't really eat or sleep. I really don't want to go into the whys and wherefores of our breakup, but I have to tell you it wasn't pleasant.

Suddenly, my entire world was destroyed. Staying in my hometown and working in the paper mill was no longer an option. She was a year younger than me and was still going to stay in Bastrop for at least another year, so I wanted to leave as soon as possible. I asked my buddies and the guys I grew up with what their plans were. Every single one of them said that they were going to go to Grambling State University.

I had been to Grambling a couple of times before, and I had even watched their football games on TV. It was pretty good in academics and sports. It was only about an hour driving distance to the east from where we lived, so it was definitely a good option. The only problem was that I didn't know if I was going to get admitted and I didn't know if I could even pay for it. Yet, my friends were going, and Patricia was going to stay in Bastrop, so I had to go.

APPLYING

The day after I graduated from high school, I talked to the guidance counselor at the school to ask about applying to Grambling or maybe to some other college. She told me it was way too late and that many of my classmates had applied since the beginning of the school year, so my choices were really limited. Grambling was the only place I could aspire to apply.

Luckily, I had gotten a pretty good ACT score a few months before,

and my grades were reasonably high, so getting accepted was no issue. I remember I wrote the essay and got the recommendations in less than a day. I handed delivered the application myself, and a week later, I was accepted. The only problem now was the tuition. Grambling wasn't an expensive school, especially considering that I was a resident of Louisiana, but I was still a long way from being able to afford the several thousand dollars a year that studying there would cost.

Athletic scholarships were long past their deadlines, and I didn't have the 4.0 required for an academic scholarship, so I had to find the money somewhere else. My guidance counselor suggested me to apply for a government poverty education grant, which was designed to give underprivileged youths the money necessary to go to college. Of course, I never considered myself underprivileged or poor, but the fact that we only had one salary in the house and that I had no dad present qualified me to apply. So I did, and a few days later, I received notice that my grant had been approved. Man, I was so happy to receive this, but there was still another challenge. The grant covered all my expenses, but it fell short by 300 dollars of tuition.

I didn't have 300 dollars which back then was a lot of money, and I wasn't about to ask my mom for more money after all she had done for me, so I had to find another way to get it. I thought about working for a month and paying for those 300, but there wasn't enough time. If I didn't pay the tuition in time, I was going to have to withdraw from the school. I had to find those 300 bucks fast. I looked around, but I couldn't find anything. I was so close to losing my chance to go to college until my mom's friend told me to go ask for the money at a place called the Grambling Foundation.

I wasn't sure what this place was, but I wasn't about to quit my plans to go to Grambling. So, I walked over, knocked on the door, and went in. It turns out this whole place was dedicated to helping people

who had no money to go to school. They didn't give the money away, but they did lend it to you with no interest at all, just as long as you paid for it after graduation. Almost without hesitation, they gave me the 300 dollars. I was relieved. In almost no time at all, I had applied, been accepted, got a small loan and a government grant. I couldn't believe it. All the pieces were set, and now I could start studying.

MY ARRIVAL AT GRAMBLING STATE

Grambling State University was a small school for the African American community. It was founded about 80 years before I my time by black people who wanted their kids and families to have an education. It prospered well because when it was founded, blacks weren't allowed to go to school with whites. So, Grambling became a university exclusively for the black community of Louisiana. Many people sent their kids there. Academics were pretty good. It had great faculty, and great alumni graduated from there, but sports was always the university's stronghold. In fact, the head coach of our football team, Eddie G. Robinson is the third coach in college football history with the most victories. He was one of the guys who put our university on the map. Thanks to him, everyone knows about our great university.

So, for obvious reasons, when I left home in the autumn of 1982, I was naturally very excited to be part of the Grambling family. I didn't need to see Patricia ever again, my best friends were there, a lot of people I knew from school were also attending, and I was only about an hour from home. Any time I wanted to see my mom, all I had to do was take a short bus ride, and I'd be there. Everything seemed to be perfect, but it was really far from it.

My housing situation was pretty terrible, mostly as a consequence of applying so late. The housing director assigned me to a small room to share with three other guys, and yes, it was as unpleasant as it

sounds. I didn't know any of them, the room didn't even have enough space for four beds, so we had to use bunks. The desks were so small my textbooks couldn't even fit in.

It was terrible. I couldn't wait to get out of that dorm. Only a couple of days after moving in I went to the housing director and asked her to move me somewhere else where I could have decent living conditions.

"It's not gonna be easy," she said in a dull manner. "We have a full house here, and you're gonna have to get incredibly lucky for this to happen." I didn't think anything of that. Luck's my middle name, and as it turned out, it was true.

Only a couple of days later, the director called me and told me that she had found a new room for me.

"I managed to book you a new place in Drew Hall with a guy from your hometown, his name is Raymond." I couldn't believe it. Raymond was a good friend of mine, and he had arrived in Grambling a year before. The change suited me perfectly. I now shared a much bigger room, with only one guy; a guy I knew very well. Things were starting to turn around.

CHOOSING A MAJOR

Because I had basically fled Bastrop due to my broken heart at the hands of Patricia, I hadn't even considered a major in college. No one in my family had ever gone to college, so I had never even considered that possibility. Naturally, I didn't know what my area of study was going to be.

I asked everyone I met at the school, and I have to say that most of them said they were majoring in management. That suited me well. I was all about business and working hard, so that was the perfect fit.

I enrolled in the management program and did really, really well. I studied hard every single day, reading textbooks, analyzing required and optional reading, and doing my homework. I studied for about four hours a day during my entire time at Grambling. It was hard, but I knew that to become successful, I had to dominate my profession.

I became really good at it, and most of that knowledge served me really well when I opened my supplement business many years later.

I majored in management for three years, until one day, my accounting professor told me that my skills in accounting were really amazing.

“What are you majoring in?” He asked me one day after class.

“Management, sir,” I told him with the utmost respect.

“Well, you need to switch that to accounting. You are really, really good at it, and I guarantee that if you switch, you’ll make a lot more money as an accountant than as a businessman.” He said with determination.

I was all about money. So, I inquired a bit more. “You sure I can make a lot more money?”

“Of course, you can. Everyone is majoring in management, but no one is doing it in accounting because it’s a lot harder and it requires a lot more effort, so if you do it your work opportunities will be a lot, a lot better.”

That’s all I needed to hear. The very next day, I switched to accounting. The only problem was that I had already taken three full years of management, and to graduate as an accountant, I would need to take several extra classes. I didn’t really want that, because I wanted to graduate in time, but the school gave me an additional option.

“You can take summer school and graduate on time.” The guidance

counselor said. "It will be har, but you can do it."

I had never even considered summer school. I usually avoided it like the plague because I loved to come back home, visit my mom, and make money doing summer jobs. But this time, I had no choice. I enrolled in summer school, took the necessary accounting classes, and graduated right on time with a degree in accounting, ready to face the world.

LIFE AT GRAMBLING

The funniest thing about going in Grambling was the fact that by the time my second year came, Patricia, my ex-girlfriend, the very reason as to why I had moved to Grambling, enrolled at the University.

I was beyond horrified. The school was a lot smaller than our hometown, and avoiding her was going to be a lot harder. But I had no choice. I wasn't going to drop out or transfer, so I decided to bury myself in work and continue my normal life at the University.

So, I did. I took my classes really seriously, worked my ass off to get good grades, and joined the football team as a walk-on.

My life at school was hectic. I had to wake up every day at 530 am to go to the gym from 6-7 (which was the only hour of the day the gym was open). I then had to join the football team at the cafeteria at 7 am for breakfast and then for a three-hour practice. After that, I had to go to class and then to study.

I studied for four hours a day, took six classes a week (when the average course load is four or five classes), went to football practice for three hours a day, worked out for another hour and slept for around six hours (if I was lucky).

I was working around the clock, and at times, everything was so hard that I didn't even have time to sleep. I remember that many times

after I got home from football practice, I studied all through the night without a single minute of sleep. It was hard, but I always enjoyed it. As you know, I love hard work.

HARD TIMES AT GRAMBLING

My experience at Grambling was simply unforgettable; truly awesome, but like everything else in life, it had its hard times. The government grant I received to attend Grambling was not working as well as I had thought because the tuition went up every year and the grant didn't.

Every single cycle I was running shorter and shorter on cash, so I had to apply for a student loan. That was no biggie, but I wasn't too excited about starting my work life with a couple thousand dollars in the red numbers. Still, I had no choice.

Eventually, to make matters worse, I made the decision to live off campus. This sounded really great, as I could live on my own and have the freedom to bring in girls to my house, drink booze in my own room and get home at whichever hour I wanted (which were things that weren't allowed in the dorms), but it also made my situation a whole lot harder.

By living outside of campus, I had to pay 150 dollars a month for living in a trailer with a roommate and I also had to pay for groceries since I was no longer entitled to having a cafeteria meal card.

Of course, I had no job and no income whatsoever, so I couldn't afford rent and I couldn't even pay for food. What did I do? I tried to talk to the coach about getting a football scholarship, but it simply wasn't possible. So, my chances pretty much boiled down to two things.

First, I had to call home and begged my mom for a few dollars a month to pay rent. She was very generous and helped me out with

150 every 30 days. But it wasn't enough. I still needed money for groceries, and I had no time to get a job, not even a part time one.

I applied for food stamps from the government. Of course, it wasn't really an easy thing, mainly because there are specific qualifications one must have to receive them. Believe it or not, I covered each and every one of them. I didn't have a job, I was in debt, and I was in danger of losing my place at the school. They gave them to me in no time, and I lived off them for the rest of my time at Grambling.

FOOTBALL AT GRAMBLING

One of the highlights of my time at Grambling was playing in the football team under legendary football coach Eddie G. Robinson. The school was undoubtedly small, but it became one of the biggest football powerhouses in history due to Coach Robinson's legendary skills in recruiting and strategy.

I was fortunate to have played under him, and it taught me a lot about life and the sport of football.

Even though I was an outstanding player in high school, no schools recruited me for a scholarship, and I was forced to walk on to the team when I arrived in Grambling. In Division 1 football, making the team as a walk-on is a tough thing to do, and reaching first string is a near impossibility. Yet, as always, my hard work paid off.

I became the starting middle linebacker, which was a very hard change from playing offensive and defensive linemen in high school, but I made the transition fairly quickly. I memorized all the plays, learned how to read offenses, and basically became the quarterback of the defense. I called every play of every game from the defensive huddle, and I was generally very good at it.

I was powerful, and at 225 pounds in body weight, I was one of the fastest players on the team. My 40-yard dash was 4.55 seconds,

which is unheard of for a linebacker at that level, and I was a smart player and a fierce tackler.

My abilities and work ethic allowed me to jump from a fifth string all the way up to the first string. I worked so hard that I outplayed guys who had received scholarships to play there. This was a tremendous accomplishment, and if it weren't for a couple of injuries I got on my last year at Grambling, I would have most likely become a player in the NFL. In fact, the Philadelphia Eagles were very close to drafting me but didn't do so in the end. I'll elaborate on this more in the next chapter, but it's important to let you guys know how big college football was for me at that stage of my life.

GRADUATION

By the summer of 1986, I had all the credits required to graduate with a major in accounting. I had finished just in time despite switching majors, taking extra classes, being first string in the football team, and struggling financially.

The time for graduation and facing the real world had come, and I was more than ready for the challenge.

I left Grambling with a huge smile on my face, as life during those four years was really amazing. I learned so much about hard work, business, accounting, and being disciplined that I will forever be grateful.

Many people remember their college years for the fun they had or the people they met during that time. Not me. It wasn't an era of socializing, but rather a time of learning how to be disciplined, working hard, achieving dreams, surpassing challenges, and becoming the best person I could be. This is what I loved the most about Grambling, and I am very, very happy to have studied there.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LEAN YEARS

“A diamond is a chunk of coal that did well under pressure.”

— Henry Kissinger, American politician, former secretary of state
and national security advisor.

FACING THE REAL WORLD

Everybody faces difficult times at some point in their existence. That's just one of the rules of life. You're not going to go and win at everything all the time. Eventually, no matter how good things are apparently going, one day, you are going to face a crisis. After college, it became my turn.

Life is a funny thing. Many times, no matter how many plans you have or how many great things you have in mind, things don't work.

When I graduated high school in 1982, for example, I had no idea what I was going to do with my life. I had no plan, but I ended up playing Division I football at Grambling State University under one of the greatest coaches in the history of the sport. All out of a combination of backbreaking work and a little bit of luck.

On the other hand, when I graduated from college in 1986, I had an incredibly solid plan that led to basically nowhere. To this day, I don't understand why either thing happened, but looking back, I'm kind of glad that it did.

MY GENERAL OUTLINE

By 1985, during my junior year in college, I had a pretty good idea of what I was going to do with my life. I had already switched majors in college from management to accounting, and I was the starting middle linebacker on one of the greatest football teams in the nation.

I was studying around four hours a day, practicing three hours a day, and training at the gym for one hour a day. Everything was flowing smoothly, in perfect tranquility.

I figured that I was going to play in the NFL, as my speed, play calling abilities in the defensive huddle, and my strength was enough to land me a contract in the big leagues.

In fact, I was so good that a couple of scouts from the Philadelphia Eagles had even paid me a visit after a game. I was so nervous to see them in the stands of our stadium during a Saturday morning game that I played one of the best games of my life.

With the spotlights shining bright, I performed impressively. I made 14 solo tackles, two sacks and an interception in a game we won decisively against our archrivals the Southern University Jaguars 35-10. I was sure I had made quite an impression, and I was more than right. Soon after the game ended, the two Eagles scouts came over to me.

"We were very impressed by your performance, son." They said as my heart palpitated like a double bass drum.

"You played your heart out there today."

"Thank you very much," I told them.

"You think I got a chance at playing with you guys?" Maybe I was a little bit too forward with my questions, but I'd rather be overeager than apathetic.

“You keep playing like this, you can be sure you’re gonna be playing for the Eagles. And we’re gonna draft you in the higher rounds.”

Man, that was exciting to hear. I was going to play in the NFL for sure, all I had to do was back it up on the field... and I had no problem doing that.

Aside from my football career prospects, I was also pretty excited about my job possibilities in accounting. Just like I said before, I had switched to accounting from management when I was a junior in college because I was surely going to make a lot more money as an accounting major.

I was so good in school that I graduated Cum Laude, which is like a 90-percentile average in my grades. So, as you can see, I was pretty much riding the ninth cloud of heaven. Nothing could go wrong. I was sure I was going to live a comfortable, carefree life of massive success. Right after college, things were going to flow as easy as a Hawaiian surf wave. How wrong I was!

MY INJURY

My prospects for a life as a professional athlete went down the drain in two separate instances that may as well have been a single one.

The first one was in a game in my senior year in college. I remember the season was just getting started and we were rolling as great as I was with my life. We were playing Mississippi Valley State University at our Eddie Robinson Stadium. We were doing really, really well and by the time we got to halftime, we were really hammering them.

Their quarterback had been sacked so many times by our defensive line that he was psyched out. The third quarter rolled

around, I decided to start our first defensive series with a full-on blitz. I was going to rush the passer and was going to sack him again. I still remember the play vividly. The quarterback was lined up in a standard I formation. He was looking around, reading our defense. I could see the pain and extreme fear in his eyes. I was ready to rush him like a bull and plant him on the ground.

He signaled the center to hike the ball. Immediately I pounced on him like a panther ready to eat its prey. I swerved through the defensive line like they were not even there and attacked him directly.

The quarterback was looking around to pass the ball and saw me coming. He knew I was going to lay him on the ground and put himself on a protective stance. I rammed him with the crown on my helmet directly on the chest.

Crack!

The QB was laid out flat on the field. I was so proud of my hit and sack. Yet, I suddenly realized that the crack hadn't come from the QB laying on the ground in front of me. It was actually coming from my neck.

Suddenly, the pain came swerving right in. It was hurting and hurting bad. A sharp, throbbing agony invaded ran through my neck, and I dropped to the ground, ready to be carried out.

It turned out that I had not only injured my neck severely, but I had also hurt my lower back. It was a hell of a hit, and I knocked out the quarterback, but I hit myself just as hard.

That was the beginning of the end of my football career, but I wasn't about to give up.

I ignored the pain and discomfort and went back to practice the very next day like it was nothing. The pain was still there, but I couldn't afford to let it hurt my chances of becoming a professional athlete, so I

showed up to training ready to get even better... what a mistake that turned out to be.

On the third play at full speed in that very first practice, I tried getting to the running back who was catching a pass on the flat. I was running towards him when a pulling guard blindsided me from the side, laying me out directly on the ground.

Suddenly, I felt how the pain on my neck and my back grew exponentially. Game over. I don't remember anything else after that practice except for the pain.

All I do know was that I was out for at least four weeks to nurse back the injury. It was a difficult time. My rear side was hurting like nothing I had ever felt before, almost as if I was getting stabbed multiple times in the same place with a red-hot blade over and over again. At the same time, while I was going to the chiropractor every day, the guy who played under me, the one in second string, jumped immediately into first string.

By the time I returned to playing shape, I was nowhere near the level of play that I was before the injury. I never got back to first string ever again.

By the time the season ended in January of 1986, I knew within me that my prospects to go to the NFL were long gone. I still had the hope that somehow, I was going to be drafted by those Philadelphia Eagles' scouts that saw me play. When the draft happened, I saw my possibilities of playing in the NFL drop like a pair of dead birds from the sky.

Every single round of the draft passed, and I saw the Eagles draft 16 players, including middle linebacker Alonzo Johnson in the second round. That was supposed to be my position and my pick, but it was long gone. No draft, no position, no job as a professional football player.

Of course, many players still make it to the NFL even after missing out on the draft. There have been some great ones that have also made it to the hall of fame and won super bowls, but I wasn't going to be one of them.

An agent approached me soon after and suggested I hire him to get me a job with some other team. I was tempted to accept, but my back injury was so severe that I didn't know if I could ever play at any type of high level again. And even if I was hired, I was going to be kicked out as soon as they realized how I was only a shadow of the player I once was.

Besides, I knew that I had a lot of possible prospects as an accountant, so I turned him down.

I don't regret it, but the year that followed tested my decision on every single level.

MY MOVE TO DALLAS

By the time graduation came along the draft had been over for a couple of months. My plan was now to move to Dallas with the same guys I moved to Grambling and get a high paying job as an accountant.

These two guys, Mike and Oscar, had been my friends ever since we were little kids. We grew up playing sports, we supported each other emotionally, and we all wanted to see each other grow.

These guys wanted to score jobs in a town where there was money flowing, the rent was cheap, and there was a lot of opportunities to start a family. They chose Dallas, and I followed them as soon as they left.

Both of them had some money saved up and already had jobs by the time we arrived in the big city. I had nothing. No money, no

savings. Nothing. I had spent my entire college years playing football and studying, and I hadn't worked a job in four years, so I had nothing with which to pay the rent.

But my buddies had my back, and they let me live in their apartment indefinitely, rent-free. Of course, I had no bed, so I slept on the floor, but things were looking bright.

I knew that as soon as I arrived in Dallas, I was going to score a job as an accountant, so I knew everything was going to work out perfectly. Yet, again, how wrong I was.

I remember the very first morning I got to Dallas I checked the classified ads in the newspaper and found that the most prominent accounting firm in the city was looking for new accountants I picked up the phone and made a call. They offered me an interview that very same day. I wasn't expecting that so soon. I was happy because everything was coming together. I thought of myself as a big-time accountant working for that big firm.

With a big smile, I ironed my only suit very carefully and put it on to look my best.

I drove my recently purchased brand new Pontiac Sunbird (which I had just got thanks to a student no-interest loan) and arrived at the office building about half an hour before schedule. I didn't want them to think that I was desperate, so I hung around the area for a little while. It was a fancy neighborhood and the building looked as high class as could be.

I waited until it was about 5 minutes till crunch time and walked into the building. The floor was all made out of solid marble, and the couches in the meeting room where I was brought to were all of expensive high-end leather. There were also some impressive oil paintings hanging from the walls, and the office had a full view of Downtown Dallas.

“Man.” I thought to myself. “This is going to be amazing. I’m going to afford my own place really soon.”

A couple of seconds later, a young lady, maybe in her 40s, walked into the room dressed in a full-on business suit.

“Mr. Coleman?” She asked.

Introduced myself immediately after and shook her hand firmly, trying to convey my professionalism. I gave her a folder with my resumé on it.

“Take a seat, please.” She said while she glanced over at my curriculum with full detail.

“Wow, 3.5 GPA, graduation with honors while majoring in accounting from Grambling State University. That’s very good.”

“Thanks,” I answered. I knew that I was going to get the job.

“Oh, but we have a problem.” Her tone turned serious and my heart stopped. “It doesn’t say you have any experience at all working as an accountant.”

“No, that’s because I’m fresh out of college. I was in the football team, so I didn’t have a chance to work as an accountant, but I’m looking into getting some great experience here, learning more about the trade and helping the firm.” I was trying to be as persistent as possible without showing any degree of extreme hunger (although I certainly was hungry).

“I definitely congratulate you for your efforts, but we have a company policy, and we can’t hire anyone without any experience. I’m sorry. I wish you better luck somewhere else.” She stood up and showed me to the door.

Man, I was very disappointed. I was sure I was going to get the job. But she was right. I had no experience. But this wasn’t going to stop

me. I was going to keep looking and finding another job.

SEARCHING...

I went back to the house and opened the classified ads immediately. I looked for more jobs in accounting and found more than 15 different firms. I called up each and every one of them and landed interviews.

I knew I had to land at least one job. The interviews were scheduled to take place during that week, which was good. I only had about 50 bucks in my pocket, and I had to make them last for that whole seven days until I got my first paycheck as an accountant.

I went to every single interview with the greatest disposition and determination to get the job. But I heard the same story over and over again. "We need someone with experience." It was like listening to a broken record.

By the end of the week, I was so angry at hearing this phrase that I finally had the guts to give one of the interviewers a piece of my mind. "How the hell am I going to get experience if no one wants to hire me?"

I, of course, got kicked out of that office and rejected from all the rest, but I wasn't going to give up on my dream and my plan to become an accountant.

In the meantime, however, I had to land some sort of job. My 50 bucks ran out by the 5th day, and I had nothing. No job, zero money, and no food. I had somewhere to crash every night thanks Mike and Oscar (God bless them both), but that wasn't enough to live.

DOMINO'S PIZZA SAVED MY LIFE

I needed to find something immediately, so I took the first thing I

could find. While looking at the classifieds in the newspaper again, I found advertising for a job at a nearby Domino's Pizza Restaurant. It was only a couple of blocks from the house.

That was all I needed to see. I drove to the place, walked right in, and asked for the manager. A couple of minutes later, I was hired. The pay wasn't much. It was minimum wage, (about 3.35 an hour, adding up to about 30 dollars a day, or 800 dollars a month) but was more than I had ever made in my life.

Still, I had to pay about 250 bucks a month in rent, and the 550 I had left over weren't enough for groceries. I could pay for breakfast, but I couldn't afford anything else. I needed more food.

I couldn't make any more money at the time, so my level of poverty was pretty high. I often thought about my mom and how she stretched a dollar while we lived in Bastrop. To this day, I don't know how she did it, and when I lived on minimum wage, I couldn't even fathom it.

I was so poor that I was actually glad I was working at Domino's Pizza because Pizza was free. I could eat all the pizza I wanted and never go hungry. That was a great, great feeling, and I felt truly awesome about that.

I was very grateful that I could eat pizza and have a full stomach while at the same time making a little bit of money. Sure, I was only surviving, but at least I had something.

In the meantime, I took up a paper route that way paying me 50 bucks a week and was still pursuing some jobs in accounting, but the answers were always the same: No experience meant no job. Nevertheless, I was not going to give up, no matter what.

I worked at Domino's Pizza for about two and a half years, living that exact same life. However, by the time the third year rolled around I started to get sick of eating pizza every single day (I still can't eat it today), so I called the Burger King that was right next door to us.

I knew that they must have been tired of eating burgers and fries, so I offered to trade pizza for burgers. They accepted the trade gladly. Every day, they'd send me five or six burgers, and I'd send them a big pizza.

It was like breathing fresh air for the first time. I was finally eating something different.

After a couple of months, however, I got sick of the burgers too, so I called up the Kentucky Fried Chicken that was right next to them. I offered them the same deal, and they accepted.

So now I had the chance to eat that precious fried chicken I loved so, so much. But again, after a couple of months, I also got sick of that. Thankfully, Taco Bell was right next door to them, so I offered them the same deal. They, too, said yes, and now I could eat tacos. That was my life for a couple of years. Grinding, earning enough to survive, and eating junk food. It wasn't the best times, but it set things in perspective until I was finally able to land the job of my dreams.

As a side note, many people ask me if I got fat during my time at Domino's Pizza. The answer, amazingly, is no. Yes, I ate only the lousiest of food, and I had no time and no money to work out. But I gained no weight and didn't even lose my abs.

I remember going to a water theme park one weekend and taking a picture with my friends and a girl I had invited along. When they gave me the picture, I couldn't believe I still had abs. Eating the worst food in the world, sleeping the least amount of time per night I had in my entire life, and exercising 0 minutes a week, and I was still in great shape. Many people find that amazing, but I have to thank God for that.

THE BEST JOB AD IN THE WORLD

Like I said before, even while I was working in Domino's Pizza, I was still looking for jobs in accounting. I had probably gone to 100 interviews and heard the exact same phrase: "We need someone with experience." But I wasn't ready to quit. I knew there were many more firms in the city, and I wasn't going to stop until I applied for each and every one of them. I knew that eventually, something was going to come up... and it did, in an entirely different way.

One morning, while I was searching in the classified ads, I found a full page ad that said "Arlington Police Department Looking for Recruits. Good Salary. Good Benefits. No Experience Needed."

Those last words were magical... beyond magical. They were all that I needed to hear. I didn't even care what the job was. All I needed to see was that it was high paying and that no experience was required.

God had finally answered my prayers.

TOUGH TIMES DON'T LAST... TOUGH PEOPLE DO

Life can be hard, my friends. No matter how good things seem to be going, sometimes reality catches up to us and brings us right down to the ground.

That's precisely what happened to me when my prospects of becoming a football player and an accountant all vanished in a matter of months.

Of course, it was painful, degrading, and challenging, but I don't regret living through those times. They allowed me to put things in perspective and see life as it is.

Sure, it wasn't the best of times, but I made a great effort to keep a positive mind, keep my chin up and wait and work for better times. Thank God, they did arrive, but the bad times always allowed me to be

humble, grateful, and hard working.

Good times mean nothing without the hard times, and I thank myself and life for bringing them to me. Without them, I would have been nothing.

CHAPTER SIX

TO PROTECT AND SERVE

“Being a good police officer is one of the most difficult, dangerous, idealistic jobs in the world.”

— Thomas Hauser, American Author

MY WONDERFUL YEARS ON THE POLICE FORCE

No experience required. Those were the best words I could hear. I had been waiting to listen to those words for over two years, ever since I graduated from college.

For two full years, I searched for jobs in accounting and suffered rejection after rejection because I had no experience. I was working at Domino's Pizza in full desperation mode, and seeing that newspaper advertisement about joining the police force was a blessing from the sky.

It wasn't the first time I had thought about becoming a police officer. In fact, a friend of mine had already suggested I join the police force. I was a little bit wary of being an officer because I didn't want to be killed or shot at, but by this point, my finances were so bad that I really had no choice.

STARTING THE APPLICATION

Becoming a police officer was an extremely difficult procedure. It's designed to keep only those who really want to be officers and filter

out the rest. And for a while, I thought I wasn't going to make it past the first filters.

The first police department I applied to was the Richardson Police Department, which is a small city right next to Arlington, where I live now. The steps were long and arduous, but the first one was a standardized aptitude test. I took it the very next day after I asked for information. I thought I did really well, but I failed it by a single point. I had to get a 43, and I got a 42.

I was bummed out, but I wasn't about to quit that easy. I decided to ask for another shot for the test. Regretfully, however, the next test wasn't scheduled for another two weeks, and I wasn't about to wait that long.

So, I went to the next city, Irving (which was right where I lived), and applied to take the test there. Luckily, I only had to wait another day until I had to take it. I reviewed all the material and prepared myself as much as I could with only a 24-hour notice.

I felt ready, and for the first hour or so, I felt like I was doing really well. Suddenly, I felt an intense need to go to the bathroom. I had had a lot of water before the test because I didn't want to be thirsty while I took the exam, and now, it was backfiring.

At first, I thought nothing of it and simply held it in. But after about another half an hour, I started feeling the urge more and more. I tried holding it in, but I got to the point where I was just about to pee myself.

I thought about finishing the test quickly or letting it flow right there in the classroom, but neither option seemed right. I got up and asked the police officer who was supervising the exams if I could go to the bathroom.

"You can go if you want. But if you leave the room before the test is over, you are instantly disqualified." He said in a severe tone.

I didn't know what to think. My bladder was just about to blow up, and I wasn't about to begin my career in that department while wetting myself. I left the room and ran to the bathroom. Failed test, empty bladder.

THE ARLINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

I had, of course, blown all of my chances of being a Police Officer in the city of Irving, so I decided to try the closest one. Right next to it was the city of Arlington, so I tried that one. The very next day I went to that department, took the test and aced it. I got a 97 on it, scoring a near perfect on it.

Up next was an interview with a couple of police officers. They basically just wanted to get to know me and see what kind of person I was. The most important question they asked me was why I wanted to become a cop. The real reason, of course, was that I was desperate, but my only choice was to lie to them and say that I wanted to make a living out of helping people.

It worked wonders because I aced that too, but I still had many steps to go before I could even go to the academy.

Next up was the physical ability test, where I was placed in a military-style obstacle course. I needed to climb a couple of walls with a rope, jump through hurdles, crawl across a small field of barb wire, and other things like that. After that, I had to drag a 200-pound dummy across a field, bench press my weight for reps and leg press the same amount. These last feats of strength were the easiest tests I had to do, especially with how strong I was. The obstacle course was straightforward, too. I was more than prepared. My career as a football player in Grambling State has turned me into a real fitness beast, and this part of the procedure was incredibly easy.

Next up was a psychological interview. This was also a relatively

easy thing. The psychologist just wanted to make sure you weren't a psychopath looking to do anything weird as an officer. I wasn't, of course, so I aced it too.

I wasn't sure what was going to come after that, but I figured that there couldn't be much else. How wrong I was, again.

I approached the commanding officer in charge of recruiting and asked him how long it was going to be till I was a full-fledged police officer.

"Oh, son... this is going to take time. The next step is the background check." He said amiably.

Background check didn't sound so bad. That could be done in a couple of days.

"Oh, okay. I'll be back in a couple of days, then." I answered.

"Oh, no, you won't. This is a comprehensive background check, and it takes about three months. We're going to talk to your neighbors, bosses, coworkers, fellow students at your college, professors, people in your hometown... everyone. It's going to take about three months."

I couldn't believe it. Three months? "What the hell are they going to do in three months?" I thought to myself. "This is insane."

The officer didn't hear my thoughts, but I could tell he knew what I was thinking. "See you in three months then." He said with coldness.

I left for home a bit bummed. I had already visualized myself working as a police officer in a week at the most... and now I had to wait three long months while still working at Domino's Pizza.

THE BACKGROUND CHECK

I had no choice but to continue working and eating pizza until the background check was over. I didn't know exactly what they were

referring to with a comprehensive background check. I thought that maybe the officer was overstating a bit when he said they were going to talk to everyone I knew... boy was I wrong.

A couple of days later, while serving Pizza at Domino's, I spotted a few guys from the Arlington Police Department asking questions about me in the pizzeria, and then I saw them in my apartment complex talking to everyone.

They were more than serious with this background check deal. Still, I wasn't worried about anything. I had never done anything bad to anyone, I had never done drugs, never gotten drunk and stupid, never committed a crime nor anything like that, so I knew I was golden.

Sure enough, after three months, they called me and told me I had been accepted at the police academy. That was the best phone call I had ever received. Finally, I could leave Domino's Pizza and have a job I could enjoy.

THE WORST INTERVIEW OF MY LIFE

My assumption after being accepted at the academy was that I was going to start studying right away. That was my plan, but before that happened, the department wanted to have one last interview with me to make sure I was ready.

This was no ordinary interview. It was a full-on live evaluation with the Captain of the Police Department, a lieutenant, a psychologist, and two members of the city council.

I was summoned a couple of days later for that final evaluation. I didn't know how long it was going to last, but it turned out to be another hazing style initiation thing for the police.

I walked into this big room where the six evaluators were sitting down in a high table looking down on me like a panel of judges.

“Ronald Coleman.” They said with a deadpan.

“You have passed the background check; you have passed the entry exam, and you have passed the qualifying exam. You are almost ready to attend the academy, now we must evaluate your real-life skills.

“Yes, sir,” I told them with humility.

“The process is simple. We are going to ask you a bunch of questions. Your answers will help us decide if you have what it takes to be a police officer.”

I couldn’t believe it. I thought I already had the job. “Now I have to take another test?” I said to myself. “That sucks.” But I had to go along with it. I had no other choice.

“Tell us, Mr. Coleman.” The Captain said. “You are driving down the road, and you see a car running a red light. You stop them, and upon approaching the window, you realize that it is your mother that’s driving the vehicle. What do you do?”

Man, that was a hard question. I didn’t know what to answer. If I responded that I’d let her go, they’d probably get angry at breaking the law. So, I went the other way.

“I’d give her a ticket, sir.”

The entire panel of judges exploded in anger.

“You’re gonna give a ticket to your momma? What kind of son are you? You’d trade in your mother for a measly red light? That’s not the type of police officer we’re looking for.”

My heart started racing. “I’m dead in the water.” I thought to myself. “I’m gonna have to go back to Domino’s, there’s no way I’m going to make it as an officer.”

“Question number 2, Mr. Coleman.” The Psychologist spoke in a

softer, more empathetic tone. “Let’s say you are patrolling a street when you hear a bomb exploding in a nearby building. Dozens of people run out soaked in blood and panicked, and you see the perpetrator fleeing from the scene. What do you do? Do you go after the perpetrator or do you help the people who have been victims?”

Man, that was even a harder question. I didn’t want to answer because I didn’t want to get screamed at again. So, I tried a different strategy. I wanted to make the best of both worlds.

“I’d Radio in for assistance and then pursue the perp...”

“No radio, Mr. Coleman.” They said with determination. “You have to make the decision in a split second. You either help or you go after the suspect. What do you do?”

I stood there, in silence, for several eternal seconds. I thought that as a police officer, the best answer would probably be catching the criminal. If I were a paramedic, the best solution would be helping, but as a police officer and given the dangerous circumstances, I reasoned that the best option was catching the killer.

“I’d go after the suspect,” I answered calmly.

“What?” One of the members of the city council answered with anger. “You’re gonna leave all those people alone while you search for a criminal? What kind of cop are you?”

I was overwhelmed. I had answered both questions wrong, and now the only thing I was doing was getting yelled at.

The questions went on and on, and every single one of them involved an ethical dilemma that ended with the same result: I’d give a logical answer and then I’d be yelled at, repeatedly.

This lasted for two more hours until they finally told me to go home because my final evaluation was over.

“We will call you in a couple of weeks to let you know you’re accepted at the academy.”

Man, I felt devastated. I drove home with tears going down my eyes. I had most likely failed and was going to have to find another dead-end job.

I got home and opened the door to a ringing phone, so naturally, I picked it up.

“Hello,” I answered with apathy.

“This is the Arlington Police Department. You passed the final test. Welcome to the academy, you start in two weeks.”

I jumped with joy. I couldn’t believe it. After nearly months of applying, I was finally going to be one of the men in blue.

THE POLICE ACADEMY

Training at the police academy lasted for three months, and it was a great experience. People often ask me if it has anything to do with what we see in the movies, particularly in the Police Academy movie franchise. The answer is a big and definite no.

The police academy is no joke. They teach you a lot of things for you to survive in the real world, make real-life decisions that affect the lives of people, how to shoot, know the law, how to respond in crises, how to stay calm in stressful situations, how to save a person’s life (first aid and such), and a lot more.

I learned a lot about life and a lot about death. One of the biggest lessons I remember was when they brought in a preacher to talk to us about death. He was an older man, maybe in his 70s, and he was dressed like a priest. He didn’t work in the church anymore; his job was to counsel police officers who had faced death and inform families when one of their loved ones had been killed either in the line

of duty or as a victim of a crime.

He stood up to talk to the entire auditorium. There must have been around 300 of us young recruits that day. We were strong, we were full of life, and we felt immortal. But boy were we stunned by the words of that preacher.

“Death. Think about it for a second. What does it mean to you? You’re all very young. Perhaps you haven’t witnessed death firsthand. Perhaps you have. But what I can tell you is that you will never witness it as you will as a police officer. Death is everywhere. In no more than 70 years, which is nothing in the cosmic context, every single one of us in this room will have died... think about that for a second. And in 100 years, pretty much every single person living on the planet right now, including those born this very second, will have died. And in 200 years, all the people born in the next 100 years will have died too.”

He spoke with such a passion and determination that I simply couldn’t stop listening. I was glued to his words. And I wasn’t the only one. Everyone was listening as though their life depended on it... because let’s face it, it really did.

“Life can disappear in a microsecond. One minute you’re enjoying everything your existence has to offer and the next you are gone, never to return again. Checked out. Erased. Bye, bye forever.” He paused for a second.

“Think about what that means. Really think about it. In the line of duty, you will see people killed on a daily basis. You will see people shot. You will fear for your own life, and many times you won’t know if you’ll be coming home for dinner to see your family. Most of the time you will, but some of you, about 30% of you, which is 90 out of the 300 people in here, won’t. You will be killed in the line of duty, and someone like me will have to notify your family of your demise.”

The auditorium was shocked to hear him say this.

“But to those that won’t be killed in the line of duty, you will learn to become accustomed to death. At first, it will scare you, but gradually you will see it as something normal, and you will live a life of serenity despite being surrounded by death. This is a blessing. I know it doesn’t sound like one right now, but it really is. Your life will change for the better, you will appreciate the great things in life, and you won’t suffer when a loved one passes away. You will be grateful that death exists because you will learn to live a good life. Thank you.”

The entire auditorium applauded for several minutes with a standing ovation. Many things happened in the Police Academy, but nothing was as life-changing as that.

After three months in the Police Academy, they sent each and every one of us for an additional three months to another academy. This was a school that focused on learning city law (aside from other subjects), while the first one was more about state law.

It worked wonders. Here you learned the basics of how to negotiate with people who had hostages, how to read body language, how to analyze samples in a crime scene, how to interrogate a suspect, and one the most important lessons I ever learned as a police officer, which was the triage.

The triage, as we were told, is an ability you need to cultivate while on the line of duty. It basically entails making decisions that affect the very lives of other people. With a triage, you have to decide between rescuing a toddler or an older man, and you have to do it in tenths of a second.

The triage explained that some people hold more value to society and to the world at that very moment than others. This doesn’t mean that we aren’t all equal, but that there are people who provide greater benefit to the world than others. For example, if I were in a situation in

which I had to rescue or save a man who employs thousands of people and feeds thousands of families, or the life of a student who is just going to college, I would probably have to pick the life of the older gentleman. This doesn't mean that he is better than the other one, but in terms of only picking one for survival, one has to choose the person who does better for the planet.

This is the way the triage works, and people who work in emergency management, hospitals (the emergency room in particular), the fire department, and as first responders and police officers are trained in it extensively in order to make these decisions on a daily basis.

That was why it was so important to learn the triage. Fortunately, however, I never had to apply it in a real-life situation as a police officer. I was blessed to never had to choose between one person or the other.

After those second three months passed, I graduated from the police academy fully, but I still had to take a test to prove to the state of Texas that I was ready to become a police officer.

I thought nothing of it. This was probably going to be an easy test. The hardest parts had already passed... or so I thought.

I showed up on a Saturday morning to take the test. The entire graduating class was there. It was a 200-question multiple choice test, and it was supposed to last for eight hours.

Personally, I thought I'd be done with it very quickly, as I had studied intensely, and I knew everything I was taught at the academy by heart. Just as I did in college, I spent many, many days studying the textbooks and the information they gave us, so I was pretty sure I knew almost everything.

This was, like I mentioned before, a state level test. It didn't mean that it was an exam for the state police, but rather that it was designed

by the government of Texas so that all the officers in the state would know the same information and reach the same level of knowledge.

The only problem was that the information on the test didn't cover a single thing we learned while at the academy. I felt very prepared, but I didn't know the answers to any of the questions in the test. They simply hadn't taught us anything that was placed on that exam. When I read the first question, which was about a particular clause in Texas State Law, I was beyond overwhelmed. Not only did I not know the adequate response, but every single possible choice on the test was kind of right.

I know this sounds confusing, and it was. No one was more confused than me. Every question on that test was a trick question, and the academy had taught me absolutely nothing about what was on those questions. Basically, I was done.

I didn't know what would happen to me if I didn't ace that test. Would I have to retake the entire six months at the academy? Would I be expelled from the department and go back to working at Domino's? I sure hoped not. But as I sat there in the classroom, with my hands on my number 2 pencil, while staring blankly at an exam, I had no idea how to fill out, everything seemed possible.

But again, I wasn't about to give up. Not after how much I had been working to reach that point of my life. I decided that the best way was to guess every single question. I figured that educated guesses were better than random chance, so I did just that.

When the test was over, after eight grueling hours, I felt horrible. Despite doing my best, I knew that I had failed the test. There was no way that educated guesses had brought me to a triumphant victory.

Anguish started to go through my head. I thought about Domino's Pizza again and what my job possibilities were. Thankfully, however, my anxiety didn't last long.

After about half an hour, a Police Sargent came back into the classroom and announced the names of those who had passed and who had failed. Thank the Lord, I was one of the names in the “pass” list.

Now, I was ready to become a Police Officer. Little did I know that I was one step away from the real thing.

“Before you start celebrating, recruits, I’ve got some news for you.” The Sergeant said with a dead serious tone. “You are not police officers yet. Next up you need you will be in the streets for three months with a training officer that will evaluate every step you take. If you screw up just once, your career as an officer is over.”

You could see as the faces of every single one us in the room dropped. We still had three more months to go.

TRAINING OFFICER

My months as riding in the cop car with the field training officer were nothing like those at the academy. They were much easier and relaxed, primarily due to the officer I was assigned to.

His name was Jim, and he was a 15-year veteran and a sergeant of the Arlington Police Department. He was a big guy, with broad shoulders, big arms, a shaved head, and a very particular set of skills. He was an expert marksman who could shoot anything with absolute precision, and he had the most important qualification that a police officer needs to have: street smarts.

Jim could read the streets without any problem. He knew when a situation was dangerous even before we got into it, and this saved him and me from a lot of heartaches in those first few months on the force.

I remember when we got a call to attend a domestic disturbance in an apartment complex in Arlington. From the moment we got the call,

Jim knew there was something wrong.

“This doesn’t sound like a normal domestic disturbance.” He said. “We will proceed with caution.”

We drove over to the location and heard no noises. No screaming, no hitting. Nothing. It was way too quiet. It was nighttime, and we couldn’t see very well. Still, by law, we had to proceed towards the building to respond to the 911 call.

Jim took out his gun (unheard of in a regular domestic disturbance call) and instructed me to take the shotgun out of the car. I did, and we both walked towards the building. Just as we were doing so, we heard a single word being uttered from inside the house.

“Cops!” Someone screamed.

Jim held back. He took out his radio and called in for backup. He turned over to me and said: “This is no domestic disturbance. We’re not going in.”

We waited out the minutes, hiding behind a large tree. I don’t know how long we were there for, but it seemed like an eternity.

Eventually, four cop cars arrived at the scene, and the more experienced officers proceeded to walk into the house, armed with bullet-resistant vests. It turned out this was, indeed, no domestic disturbance. It was a fight between several armed drug dealers who were ready to fire at will. Jim’s intuition had saved my life.

In addition to saving my ass many different times, Jim taught me a lot about police work. I learned the theory in the academy, but thanks to Jim, I learned how to become a real officer. He taught me how to make proper arrests, fill out forms, how to size up a situation, how to talk to suspects, how to calm down victims, and how to save lives.

He was a really good man, and I am fortunate to have served under him.

Still, I don't want to make him out to be a saint, as he was also a little bit of a bully. Many times, he sent me out alone to investigate a situation even if I was scared out of my mind. On other occasions, he left me with the work alone and even pushed me into my limits to the point where I even doubted if I wanted to continue being a police officer.

Later I learned that this was all part of a hazing process that training officers are supposed to employ with the recently graduated recruits. They are meant to scare us, push our limits, and question our commitment to the force. I don't blame him for that. In fact, I am grateful. He taught me how to be an officer and showed me that real life in a cop car isn't as hard as he made it out to be. I feel blessed to have served under him.

On one occasion, we were both praised as heroes for saving an old man's life. We were riding through Arlington on a typical Tuesday morning when we got a call that a man was having a heart attack while mowing his lawn. The location was only a couple of blocks away, so we arrived before the ambulance did.

When we got there, we saw an older gentleman, maybe 77 years of age, laying on the ground, unconscious. Jim and I rushed to the scene. We looked at him, and we saw that his face was turning purple from asphyxiation. We had to perform CPR and fast. Without even asking me, Jim went for the heart, which means that I was going to give him mouth to mouth.

Of course, I was honored to be able to save a man's life, but the fact that I had to do it by giving him mouth to mouth wasn't the most pleasant thing in the world, I must say. Still, I did it with a smile.

We held on together, working in unison while a crowd watched. We stood there for about five minutes until the paramedics arrived and took over.

They transported him to the hospital, where he was eventually stabilized. Jim and I had saved his life, albeit, temporarily. He died only two days later, as the damage to his heart had been too much. It was a great honor to save his life, even it was only for a short amount of time.

FIRST DAY ON THE JOB

My first day on the job was one of the hardest days in my entire career as a police officer. I woke up that first morning with a big bright smile on my face. My days working minimum wage were over, I was now making 50,000 dollars a year, I had my own patrol car, my own gun, and I worked the hours I wanted to. I felt on top of the world, and in many ways, I really was... all except for that very first day.

I drove to the station, which was just a couple of minutes away from my house and I sat in the debriefing room for the announcements of the day. After that, we were all supposed to go our own ways, patrolling, investigating, and protecting, and serving.

I remember I was listening to the Police Captain say a few announcements when we suddenly heard a loud gunshot followed.

Boom!

The sound was coming from right outside the station. We all took our guns out and rushed outside, fearing a shooting taking place right there. But what we found was not exactly something better.

Just as we walked into the street, we saw a parked car with quite the terrible sight inside: a gigantic pool of blood mixed with destroyed brain tissue and skull bones.

From outside the windows, we saw the body of a man, dressed in a suit, with a .357 magnum in his hand. He had just blown his brains out.

I was in deep shock. I had worked through two different police academies, brutal entrance exams, intense interviews, and strong studying, but nothing could have prepared me for that scene.

It was, by far, the hardest thing I had ever seen in my entire life. What type of desperation does a man have to reach to blow his brains outside a police station, soaking his car with blood, and traumatizing every single person there.

I didn't have the answer to that, but as I looked at his drenched corpse, I started reflecting on my decision to be a police officer. If it was going to be like this every day, I had to toughen up a lot more or leave. There was no other choice.

Welcome to the force, rookie.

THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD

It turned out that my first day was my hardest day on the force. Of course, I didn't know it at the time, but after a couple more weeks I realized that being a police officer wasn't going to be as tough as that first day, not in a city like Arlington, anyway. Many officers who live in rough places do, in fact, face situations like this every day, but I wasn't one of them, and I feel extremely lucky and fortunate for that.

For me, being a police officer was like heaven. I was making more money than I ever did, I had security, lots of free time, time for myself, and the privilege of serving the community I lived in.

Furthermore, I never shot anyone, and I never got shot at or involved in any type of firefight (although I made about three arrests per day). I was a police officer for 15 years, and I didn't get a single scratch.

It was the best job I ever had, even better than being a bodybuilder. I enjoyed every single aspect of it and loved every minute of it. That's

why I continued working as an officer even after winning Mr. Olympia.

I was so happy about being a police officer that I looked forward to going to work every single evening. I couldn't wait to go to the gym every morning and go to the station to report for duty and go out there to clean up the streets. I was tremendously excited all of the time, and this enthusiasm never left me, not even while I was on the top of the mountain in bodybuilding.

Being an officer gave me a lot of opportunities in life. It brought me into bodybuilding (as you will learn later on), it helped me buy the house I still live into this day, it gave me money to live on comfortably and, more than anything else, it helped me become a better person.

Police Officers are one of the most underappreciated people in the world today. We lay out our lives on the line every single day of the week, and we are often criticized for what we do and how to execute our jobs. We aren't, of course, perfect, but we do our best, and we work hard for the safety of you and everyone in our community, most of the time disregarding our own. It's a job filled with honor, and I feel fortunate to have worn the badge for so long.

THE CLOSEST CALL

In my entire career as a police officer, I only had two separate unfortunate incidents. One was, of course, the one that occurred on my first day, which I already mentioned. The second one was pretty hard too, and it happened when I was already an eight-year veteran and a champion, Mr. Olympia.

I was patrolling the street on my cop car one beautiful morning when I received a call that shots had been fired in a nearby apartment building.

I wasn't really alarmed, as whenever these types of calls are emitted, they usually refer to people shooting in the air, and by the

time we get there they're long gone.

Nevertheless, I still had to go to the scene because someone had made the 911 call. When I climbed out of my car, a stress-out old man walked over to me and told me that shots had been fired and that someone had run out the door of the apartment where the noises came from. Furthermore, he also told me the person who ran out didn't look like he was actually a tenant, which probably meant that a murder or robbery had taken place.

I wasn't prepared for that sort of response, as I thought that this was little more than random shooting at the air.

"A homeless man about 5 foot 7, fat, white, with long hair, walked out of that apartment after I heard the shots." He said while he pointed towards a door.

I immediately got on the radio and gave in the exact description the old man had given me. I also asked for back up and took my gun out.

I wasn't sure if I had to walk into the apartment or not. The guy who fired the weapon was gone (according to the witness), but I didn't know if this was a crack house nor if anyone else was still in there, ready to shoot.

"What the hell have I gotten myself into?" I thought to myself. I thought about the possibility of getting killed, but my job was to uphold the law, and I made the decision to walk into the apartment.

What I saw next was one of the hardest things I have ever witnessed. A young guy and a young girl, maybe about my age, were lying on the floor in a pool of blood. The white carpet accentuated the marks of the vivid redness, and both bodies were lying face down, drowned by the liquid.

I was shocked, to say the least. I started hyperventilating but made an effort to keep my composure. I searched the apartment with my

gun drawn, but I didn't find anyone else.

A few minutes later, backup arrived, and in less than a quarter of an hour, they had arrested the suspect thanks to the description the old man gave me.

It turns out this murderer was actually a homeless man who had been taken in by the couple lying dead on the floor. They found him on the streets and offered to help him by giving him food and lodging while he got back up on his feet. Both the man and the woman worked at a Mexican restaurant next door to the apartment building where they were killed.

Upon returning home from work, the homeless man surprised them with a gun. He had taken it from the closet inside the house and threatened them to kill them if they didn't give him any money.

The man and the woman had no money, and they told him so. He insisted, repeating to them that if they didn't give them the money, they would shoot him. Again, they told him they didn't have any.

He didn't hesitate for a single second, and he shot them both in the face, killing them instantly.

The man wasn't married to the woman he was killed with. They worked together, but it turned out she was only his lover and, to make matters worse, his wife didn't know of the affair. She lived in the exact same building and was completely unaware that he was killed.

Someone had to notify her of what happened... and that someone was going to be me.

Usually, this is a job for the chaplain who works at the station, but that day he didn't show up for work, so I had to do his work.

It was the toughest thing I ever had to do in my entire life. Obviously, I didn't want to do it because I didn't have the training to give that type of bad news and I wasn't really prepared to deliver such

information to the wife and kids of a man who had just been killed.

But I had no choice. After the body had been identified by his coworkers, and the apartment had been closed off by the forensic department, I went over and knocked on the door of the apartment.

My blood started pumping faster as the door was opened. A young, Hispanic woman, maybe 30 years old, answered. She looked oblivious to everything that was going on.

I told her everything as best as I could. Just as you would expect in a situation like this, she emotionally collapsed. I helped her up and comforted her. It was tough to watch and witness such an event, but on that day, I learned that this was the very burden and privilege of being a lawman. It was honor in its highest manifestation, even though it was never going to be easy.

BODYBUILDER AND POLICE OFFICER

A lot of people, including some of my fellow professional bodybuilders, asked me how I managed to be a full-time police officer and a full-time bodybuilder at the same time. After all, both jobs are extremely demanding in so many ways, and taking them both to the limit sounds like something almost impossible.

To me, it really wasn't. I had become accustomed to working excessively ever since I was a kid, and I felt empty if I didn't burn the candle on both ends. Besides, I was extremely passionate about both, and I loved doing both more than anything else.

Of course, it was, at times, very hard. I had to work as an officer around 10 hours a day, lift weights for one hour, do cardio for another two hours, and eat 6-8 precise meals a day. It took a lot of energy, dedication, discipline, desire, determination, and diligence, but I enjoyed every second of it. It was more than worth it, and I managed to work both professions almost to perfection.

THE END OF THE LINE OF DUTY

I was a police officer for 15 years, and for many of those years, I was one of the most admired and respected lawmen in the city. Eventually, however, when my bodybuilding career really took off, my job as a lawman started to suffer.

It wasn't really a question of dedication, but of time. Every year, when the Olympia was approaching, I had no choice but to take time off from the police department (unpaid leave, I may add) to train extensively for one or two months.

This didn't really sit well with my superior or with my fellow officers, who didn't get those privileges of taking time off. However, because I was winning, they tolerated those few weeks off every year.

By the time I had become a repeat Mr. Olympia, my sponsors, who were paying me hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, required me to do shows and appearances all over the world, sometimes for weeks at a time.

I couldn't cancel those big-time appearances, as they paid exceptionally well, so I had to ask for more time off in the police department.

At first, they allowed me to give my tours and appearances. But eventually, it got to the point where I was taking too much time off from my work as an officer. Many of my colleagues were complaining about my lenient schedule, and one fine day in 2004, the captain called me to his office, to deliver some bad news.

"Officer Coleman. Take a seat." He said with all seriousness. "You've been a wonderful asset to this police department and one of the best officers I have ever had the privilege of knowing."

"Thank you," I told him with sincerity.

“But the fact of the matter is that this job requires a certain number of hours a week and weeks out of the year. And the fact is that you haven’t fulfilled those duties.”

I knew what was coming, but I didn’t want to face it.

“That’s why, Officer Coleman, you have to make a choice. You have to decide between being a bodybuilder and being a police officer. For now, you can’t do both.”

My heart dropped to my knees. I couldn’t believe it. The captain was all but letting me go from the best job I ever had. Of course, theoretically, I had a choice, but in reality, I didn’t really have one. I loved being a police officer, but the money I was making in bodybuilding was something I couldn’t let go, no matter what.

I left the station and walked into my car, where I cried for the entire day. I felt so empty, so rejected, and so hollow on the inside.

The sadness lasted for several weeks, but eventually, I came to realize how fortunate I truly was despite my less than adequate departure from the police force. I shifted my mind to being thankful for having served instead of being angry for leaving. In the end, I became a reserve police officer, and I worked as such for several more years. This was a much better fit for my schedule, but it wasn’t at all, like being a full-time officer.

Regardless of what happened, to this day, I feel honored to have worn the uniform and the badge for such a long time. It was the best job I ever had, and I still love it.

PART THREE

THE ROAD TO OLYMPIA



CHAPTER SEVEN

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP

“At the peak of tremendous and victorious effort, while the blood is pounding in your head, all suddenly become quiet within you. Everything seems clearer and whiter than ever before as if great spotlights have been turned on. At that moment, you have the conviction that you contain all the power in the world, that you are capable of everything, that you have wings. There is no more precious moment in life than this, the white moment, and you will work very hard for years just to taste it again.”

—Yuri Vlasov, Soviet Weightlifter, Olympic Gold Medalist and the first man ever to weightlift 440 pounds in the Clean and Jerk.

MY START AT THE METROFLEX GYM

Around the world, there are many gyms. You’ve got big-time chains, you’ve got health spas, high-class facilities, functional training classes, strongman gyms, bodybuilding gyms, CrossFit gyms (or boxes, as they call them), and fitness centers... and then, you’ve got the hardcore training facilities for the serious bodybuilders.

Around the world, I’ve seen many of these. The two most popular ones are, of course, Muscle Beach, in Venice Beach, California, (which is where the muscle revolution started), and Gold’s Gym – The Mecca of Bodybuilding, also in Venice, California (just a couple of blocks away from Muscle Beach). However, beyond these two, there exists a relatively small, raw, dungeonesque piece of paradise and

nirvana of raw iron. It is located in a bus garage turned fitness facility in the small city of Arlington, Texas.

This is the Metroflex Gym, the most hardcore training facility in the world.

Owned by my friend, trainer, and angel-on-earth Brian Dobson, the Metroflex gym is a temple to bodybuilding. It doesn't have the cachet or fame of Gold's or Muscle Beach, but it was a vibe of ultimate hardcore-ness, hard work, and dedication that no other place in the world has. It has the heaviest dumbbells of all (up to 300 pounds), has equipment for every imaginable muscle group, and is the smallest gym ever to have eight Olympia titles under its belt.

This is my piece of paradise, my cloud nine, my heaven, and my happy place.

This is the story of how I got started at Metroflex.

TRAINING AT THE POLICE ACADEMY

I graduated from the police academy in the summer of 1989, but I wasn't let loose on the streets until November of that same year (I had to spend three months with my training officer).

From the moment I graduated from the academy, I was allowed to workout at the police station gym. It wasn't the best gym in the world, but it had its fair share of free weights, a couple of punching bags, dumbbells up to around 50 pounds, and a squat rack. It was more than enough for me at the time.

I wasn't yet aware of bodybuilding workouts, and most of my lifting was more or less powerlifting oriented. I worked out 4-5 days a week, mostly training squats, deadlifts, bench presses, and exercises that could aid me in becoming stronger as a powerlifter.

I loved working out at the police station for one very simple reason:

it was free.

Back in those days, I wanted to save as much money as possible, so I hustled non-stop to save money, even as a police officer. I didn't pay rent because I became the handyman at the building I lived at, didn't pay for gas at the gas station because I did odd jobs there on weekends, and saved on a ton of other expenses doing work that allowed me to avoid paying.

Therefore, the police station gym was right up my alley. I knew that there were a lot of other gyms around, but I wasn't about to spend any money on any gym membership or anything like that.

One day, however, I received the offer of a lifetime at the Metroflex gym.

VISITING METROFLEX FOR THE FIRST TIME

By the time I became a full-fledged police officer I had already spent the better part of the last decade working out really hard. By then, I was already big and very muscular. My fat percentage was at around 5% or less, my bodyweight was 215, and I had 22-inch arms. I looked very huge and very ripped.

I didn't know it at the time, but my body was so massive that I had a natural inclination to become a big-time professional bodybuilder.

One day, on a routine call as a police officer, I arrived at a house that looked very suspicious. I didn't want to go inside it alone, so I called for backup. Several officers arrived within minutes, one of which was a man named John Morgan, whom I knew from the station but hadn't really talked to before.

From the moment he saw me up close, John seemed pretty blown away with me. He looked at my arms and thighs with admiration and awe.

“Man, you are pretty big, Ronnie. It’s amazing. Where do you work out?” He asked.

“I work out at the police station.” I didn’t want to talk too much because we were still waiting to go into the house where the 911 call had been emitted from.

A few seconds later, however, the suspect walked out and turned himself in.

Problem solved. Now I could talk and listen to John.

“You should come to work out with me at the Metroflex Gym.” He told me.

“The price is low, and the gym has all the equipment in the world. If you want to get bigger, that’s the place for you.”

It sounded tempting, but I didn’t want to pay for no gym.

“Tell you what.” He said in all seriousness. “Come in for one day. If you don’t like it, you don’t have to go back ever again. What you got to lose man?”

He had a point.

THE GYM

The very next day, John picked me up at my house, and we drove to the Metroflex.

We pulled over at this strip mall/collection of giant warehouses, right next to a sign that read “Metroflex – Harcore Training Facility.”

We walked in and saw a small desk surrounded by posters and newspaper cutouts of famous bodybuilders and bodybuilding contests. Sitting at the office was a very muscular man with an incredibly defined body. He was about 6 feet tall, with a big bright smile on his

face.

John introduced me to him.

“Hey Brian, this is the big guy I was talking about. He’s Ronnie Coleman, and he works with me at the Police Station.” He told him.

Brian looked at me like he couldn’t believe I was real.

“Oh, My God.” He said. “This is the guy who’s never done bodybuilding?”

We all laughed. John answered: “Yup, that’s him.”

“That’s amazing, man,” Brian said. “You like a professional bodybuilder. What do you train?”

I explained to him how I had spent the last 10 or so years working out as a powerlifter and just generally exercising, but that I’ve never actually tried bodybuilding.

“I’m gonna teach you bodybuilding.” He said. “Let’s see what you’ve got.”

Brian took me into the gym and showed me his facility. It was, indeed, a beautiful place. It was as old school, as raw, as hardcore and as gorgeous as it gets. It wasn’t that big, but it was full of free weights, from barbells, to leg press machines, axle bars, trap bars, dumbbells of every imaginable weight size, atlas stones, squat racks, bench presses, incline presses, decline presses and everything in between. It was an iron-pumping paradise.

I had been to hardcore gyms before, but I’d never seen anything like this... ever.

MY FIRST WORKOUT

Like I said before, I had been working out for about 10 years, but I

had never done an actual bodybuilding workout, so this was pretty new to me. Brian told me we were going to do chest, so my best guess was that we were going to bench press, but that precisely it.

We did do bench press, but we also did incline press, decline press, flat dumbbell flies, incline dumbbell flies, pull over, flat dumbbell press, and decline dumbbell press.

We did each exercise for 4 or 5 sets each, 10-15 reps for each set, with only about 30 seconds of rest between each set. The weight was chosen by Brian. I guess he wanted to see how strong I was, and I was happy I didn't disappoint him.

I ended up doing reps on the bench press with 315 pounds, dumbbell presses with 120 pounds on each hand, and pullovers with a 100-pound dumbbell. I was really impressed by my strength, but I don't think I was more impressed than Brian.

Right after the workout ended, he approached me and said.

"Ronnie, I gotta tell you, man, that's one of the most impressive workouts I've ever seen. You've got the strength, you've got the muscle, you've got the genetics. If you work hard and let me train you, you can become a much better bodybuilder and one-day turn pro."

Brian spoke with a lot of passion and determination, but I thought he was nuts. Back in those days, I was working out just for health and to become fitter as a police officer. I had no aspirations of being a professional bodybuilder or anything like that.

So, I thanked him but said I wasn't really interested in competing or anything like that. I told him that I was happy working out at the station, but that I really enjoyed working out with him at his gym.

Brian, however, didn't give up.

"Think it over, man. And I'll tell you what. Come back tomorrow and for the rest of the week, for free, and we will talk it over again." He told

me.

That was all I needed to hear. I loved that first work out at Metroflex, but I wasn't going to pay anything to workout anywhere else if the gym at the Police Station was free. Therefore, I took this chance of working out for free for another week at this beautiful gym.

Of course, I still didn't have any intention of competing at the Olympia no matter how much Brian insisted.

MY FREE MEMBERSHIP

I showed up the next day, and we worked out legs. It was again, another great workout. And just like the previous day, Brian told me that I could become the best at bodybuilding and win a ton of money.

This definitely sounded interesting, but I didn't think Brian's predictions could ever be right. Regardless, I decided to keep going back there.

Every single day, Brian insisted on helping me become a better bodybuilder.

As the days went by, I started to become stronger, fitter, more ripped, leaner, and more massive. I looked better, worked out better, and felt better. Brian saw my progress and never stopped asking me if he could train me to become a professional bodybuilder. He was so insistent (and I was so stubborn) that one day, he made me an offer I couldn't refuse.

"I tell you what, Ronnie." He said with his deep voice and Texas drawl. "If you let me train you for the upcoming Mr. Texas competition in April, I'll give you a free membership to the gym."

"Really?" I asked him.

"Really. And not only will you compete, but you are also going to

win.”

That was it. I was hooked on Metroflex for life.

TRAINING FOR MR. TEXAS

I showed up for Metroflex training every single day, except for Sundays. And we worked out hard... very hard. Brian had me training every muscle group twice a week to bulk up. He was precise and methodical about it. And he was the best training partner and trainer I ever had.

He gave me the weights, showed me the exercises, and taught me how to grind out each rep to break the most muscle fibers and build my muscle in a way that they could grow back bigger than they ever were. Besides, he had me training at the stationary bike for an hour a day to cut as much body fat as possible and to eat rice and chicken five times a day.

The method was foolproof, and Brian guaranteed me that if we kept it up until April, I was going to win the contest for sure, no doubt about it. Brian was a unique human being, and I thank God every day for sending him my way. He was a man of virtue, righteousness, and morality that always did (and still does) what's right, no matter how difficult it may have been.

He was also as hard a worker as I've ever seen (and I've known some tremendously hard workers throughout the years), even more so than me. He was a God-loving man who was a genius in his own right, and I owe all my success in bodybuilding to him.

There is no such thing as a self-made man. We all need help along the way, and aside from my beautiful mother Jesse, no one in the world helped me more than Brian Dobson. God bless him.

Aside from training our asses off at the gym and eating healthy to

perfection, Brian took me every day to a hot box located the back yard of an acquaintance of his. The place was like a sauna, designed to make you sweat your fat off and prepare you for the intense cutting required to win a competition like Mr. Texas.

We used to spend 2-3 hours a day in there not only perspiring but training each and every pose I needed to showcase my muscles at the upcoming competition. Bodybuilding is a sport of show, much like competitive diving and gymnastics are. Building the muscles isn't enough. On the day of competition, you have to make sure your muscles look your best; they must be as defined as possible, as oily as possible, as tanned as possible, as vascular as possible, and as perfect as possible... all while you showcase them with a variety of innovative, classy, artsy poses that resemble the rhythm of a ballet dancer.

Many great bodybuilders out there have lost competitions because their posing sucks. They simply underestimate the importance of knowing how to display their muscles to the public in sync and harmony. Hence, when the time comes to pose, their routine simply doesn't match the greatness of their muscles, and they lose.

Legendary bodybuilder Sergio Oliva was like that. He had a body that matched no other, and although his posing routine was generally good, it was repetitive and predictable. In the 1970 Mr. Olympia, when trying to win his 4th title, his routine had been all but memorized by everyone who had ever seen him pose before. When Arnold Schwarzenegger walked onto the stage, he brought with him a collection of masterful poses that were unlike anything anyone had seen before. His three-quarter back pose, which later became his signature move, was so remarkable that sculptors still make works of art from it. Regardless of his physique (which was obviously outstanding), Arnold's posing was so impressive that he simply destroyed Oliva that day and annihilated the competition in every

single event he participated in.

Ed Corney was another excellent example of a majestic poser. He was an incredible bodybuilder with extraordinary muscles, but during his era, the category he competed in, which was the under 200 pounds, was saturated with bodies chiseled by the gods. You had Frank Zane and Franco Columbu (both Mr. Olympias), and a variety of Mr. Universes. However, Corney was so good at posing, making an art out of it to the point of turning it into a display of dancing perfection, that he became one of the top bodybuilders in the world despite not having the best physique of all. He even won the Mr. Universe title twice, mostly thanks to his posing.

For these reasons, Brian wanted to make sure I learned all there was to know about posing. He wanted me to practice the moves to perfection so that when the time came for me to participate in the Mr. Texas competition, I could blow the opposition away.

We did all of this every single day from December, when I signed up for Metroflex, up until April 7th, 1990, the day of the competition.

THE 1990 MR. TEXAS

April 7th, 1990. Mr. Texas Competition in Dallas, Texas.

Brian and I had signed up to compete that day, but we were not the only ones. There were many different bodybuilders from all over the state who had come up to claim the title. I don't know how many they were, but to me, it seemed like there were way too many. I never thought I stood a chance at winning.

The people around me, however, thought otherwise. Early in the morning, when we were summoned for the weigh-ins, we had to take our clothes off and stand on the scale.

I had worked out very hard those last few days to cut my body fat

as much as I could. I don't know how much I cut down to, but my weight was exactly the same as the day I had walked into the Metroflex Gym four months earlier: 215 pounds. Of course, I was a lot more muscular than I had ever been, and my body fat was lower than ever, but my weight was still the same, which was amazing.

Everyone looked at me like they were seeing an idol. They were stunned as they saw my muscles, my vascularity, and my size. I felt embarrassed, as many of these guys had already competed in bodybuilding competitions before, and this was my first. I thought of myself as an underdog that didn't stand a chance before them, but their eyes revealed a fear of me. In their mind, I was already the champion. In my head, however, I still had a lot to do and a lot to prove.

The contest was organized just like any other bodybuilding competition. It consisted of an individual posing routine in addition to a comparative posing of the top guys. Slowly, one by one, we were called up to the stage. I was the fifth in line, right after Brian. I watched as the first three competitors knocked their posing off and did a fantastic job.

I was pretty nervous because I didn't know if I could match them. They all seemed so experienced and professional that I didn't think I could stand a chance. In any case, I felt pretty good about myself and would have been satisfied, no matter what happened.

They finally called my name, and I walked up to the stage, jumping with confidence.

I stood up there on that platform, looking at the audience. There were about 5,000 people there, and they were all screaming vividly for the competitors. When I walked on the platform, however, the cheers intensified in loudness. People were going out of their minds with ecstasy when they saw me.

I really couldn't believe it. I never thought I could bring upon that reaction, so seeing it live gave me a lot more energy than I even think I had.

I looked up at the lights and opened the biggest smile I could procure, all while showing off my muscles with the precise posing routine that Brian had so diligently taught me. It wasn't as smooth as we had done it in practice, but the audience didn't seem to mind.

First, I showed off my chest with the front chest pose, then my back with a modified three quarters back pose, then my legs, then my biceps, and then my triceps. I felt in a total flow; in unison with everything around me.

I did my best to show the judges and the people what I was made off, and I gotta tell you, it was a weird feeling. For a few minutes, while you are showing off, time only and utterly stops. You cease to be a human being, and you turn into a piece of art. You become the object of everyone's admiration, and you genuinely feel like Superman.

That's who I was right then and there, and it was a moment that I will forever have ingrained in my memory.

After a couple of minutes, I was asked to step down. I thought I had done okay, but I didn't believe I could actually win.

BECOMING MR. TEXAS

After all the competitors were done in their individual posing, the judges had a small meeting to determine the three guys who would be called back to the stage for the comparative posing. One of these three was going to be the champion.

Of course, I didn't even think this would be possible, but I was the first one they called back to the stage. Soon after, two other guys with beautiful bodies were announced as well.

This time, the posing routine was a lot quicker. We had to showcase our muscles right next to each other, attempting to show to the judges how we, and not the other guys, deserved the title.

I didn't have a lot more moves to employ for this routine, so I simply repeated the ones I had already shown before. It wasn't meant to last for very long, so I had to repeat it twice before the judges asked us to relax while they made their final decision. The music stopped, and the auditorium turned deathly still with absolute, nearly frightening silence.

Seconds stretched into eternity as I tried to keep my cool while they made their final decision. My heart, ever witness to my achievements, trials, tribulations, troubles, and successes, was racing faster than my buddy Usain Bolt breaking the world record in the 100-meter dash. That was a sign that something good was about to happen.

To the left of us stood a giant trophy, about three feet tall, waiting for us at the hands of a beautiful model who had been hired to hand it to us. Then, suddenly, after what seemed like an eternity, the head judge picked up the microphone.

"And now... the winner for the 1990 Mr. Texas competition..."

To torture us even more, he decided to wait about another minute, which may as well have been a billion years.

Time, the ever-flowing river, was no longer streaming. I don't think I was even breathing anymore, either. Until they proclaimed a name, I wasn't even going to move a single inch.

Then, the head judge opened his mouth. I knew what he was going to say next.

"Ronnie Coleman."

The biggest smile of my life. Mr. Texas, 1990. Yeah, Buddy! Lightweight, Baby!

Ronnie Coleman had discovered the new love of his life.
Bodybuilding.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MR. OLYMPIA: THE CHAMPION OF THE GODS

“No man has the right to be an amateur in the matter of physical training. It is a shame for a man to grow old without seeing the beauty and strength of which his body is capable of.”

— Socrates, ancient Greek philosopher.

A VERY SHORT HISTORY

Every sport has its pinnacle. Football has the Super Bowl, Hockey has the Stanley Cup Finals, Baseball has the World Series, Basketball has the NBA Finals, Track and Field has the Olympics, Strongman has the World’s Strongest Man competition, Tennis has Wimbledon, Soccer has the World Cup, and bodybuilding has Mr. Olympia.

There is no greater honor for a bodybuilder than to qualify for and win the Mr. Olympia contest. It is the zenith, the peak, and the summit of what it means to be a bodybuilder. The greatest bodybuilders of all time have been ranked according to their wins at the Olympia. Me, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sergio Oliva, Frank Zane, Dorian Yates, Phil Heath, Jay Cutler, Lee Haney, and several others have all been blessed to receive the honor of being Mr. Olympia.

The Olympia judges the best, the top, the greatest, and the finest muscle builders in the world. Winning Mr. Olympia doesn’t just mean that you are the most muscular man on the planet, but that you also have the most excellent definition, proportion, muscular density, clarity, sharpness, and show it off with the best taste, poise, and

composure.

People underestimate what it takes to become Mr. Olympia. Everything has to be constant, and everything has to be perfect. There are no mistakes, and there are no coincidences. You have to train extremely hard, lifting hefty weights for multiple hours a day, every day of the week, for many, many years. To this, you must add 10+ hours of cardio a week, plus 6-8 daily meals, caloric intake of around 5,000 calories or more a day, all while sleeping the hours your body needs, getting enough rest, and drinking gallons of water every day.

When a competition is near you, have to be extra careful. You have to lower your body fat percentage to the limit your body can tolerate (sometimes below 1% - when the average “healthy” man has a body fat of about 12%), and you have to dehydrate to show the extreme muscularity of who you are. This means turning your body into a sculpture; into a piece of art; to be the sculptor of your own body.

Becoming a Mr. Olympia is one of the hardest things one can achieve in any area of life. Being the world’s most defined, toned, sculpted, chiseled, muscular man is truly a herculean achievement. There’s no other way around it.

Many people want to be bodybuilders or to have muscle tone. Yet very few have what it takes to work out. Out of those few, even less have what it takes to do so consistently through the years. Even less can do so with the required discipline in terms of eating, resting, and organizing yourself to be the best. Out of those, very few have the genetics to become a professional bodybuilder. Out of those, very few have the work ethic required to become one of the best. And out of those, only a very small handful have what it takes to become the best; to become Mr. Olympia. And out of those, an even small minuscule number can become the best of all Olympias. This is, my friends, what it takes to become Mr. Olympia. And I did it a record eight times.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Before the Olympia was created, there were several competitions to determine who was the best bodybuilder in the world: Two Mr. Universe contests, two Mr. World titles, and several other world-known shows. These all claimed to crown the best bodybuilder in the world, but the reality was that they essentially competed with one another. In order to be the top bodybuilder back in those days, one had to win all major championships.

However, this all changed when Mr. Olympia emerged back in 1966. Its creator was my good friend Joe Weider, his brother Ben, and Joe's Wife Betty. Joe was the greatest, most wonderful and delightful man one could ever meet. He was a very hard worker, was always in a good mood, and did his best in everything he did.

He came from very humble beginnings, working his way up from the slums of Montreal, Canada, to basically become the creator of bodybuilding. Before Joe, bodybuilding as a sport didn't exist. Of course, there were muscular men, but it was Joe who brought them together, launched contests, magazines, and publications and subsequently brought bodybuilding and the entire fitness industry to the mainstream.

Many credit my good friend Arnold Schwarzenegger with bringing bodybuilding to the mainstream. They are undoubtedly right, but this wouldn't have happened without Joe Weider. Joe not only discovered and financed Arnold's career (at least during his first years), but he also created the magazines that featured Arnold, hosted the contests that turned him into an idol, and helped him train to create his stunning physique.

In short, Joe Weider was the muscle, and I am proud, honored, and privileged to call him my friend.

When Joe Weider got started in the muscle world, many

federations were fighting simultaneously for control of the sport. The National Amateur Body-Builders Association (NABBA), founded in 1950, was one of them. NABBA was the creator of the first Mr. Universe competition. They ran it every single year and still do so to this day. Another association was the Amateur Athletic Union (the AAU), who created the Mr. America and Mr. World, (the Mr. World created to crown the planet's most muscular man). Joe's International Federation of Bodybuilders (The IFBB) came next. Joe wanted to create the biggest and most expensive bodybuilding tournament in the world. He tried to recruit the best bodybuilders and have them defend their title indefinitely.

For this, he created Mr. Olympia. The name was designed to showcase only the best of the best bodybuilders in the world. The idea was to crown not the best body in the Universe, but the best body of the Gods. Those who won the Olympia, it was said, had a body of divine powers that could only be equated with the bodies of the Greek Gods. The Greek Gods resided in Mount Olympus, in Greece, and hence, the name became Mr. Olympia. So, basically, winning the Olympia was like being a Greek God.

Competing at Mr. Olympia was by invitation only, and to compete you had to have won a major international tournament, mainly NABBA's Mr. Universe. There was simply no other way around it. This was designed to crown only the best of the best.

Eventually, Joe created his own Mr. Universe competition for it to be a steppingstone for athletes aspiring to become Mr. Olympia, but his main competition was always and will always be Mr. Olympia.

THE MR. OLYMPIAS

The first man to win Mr. Olympia was Larry Scott, back in 1965. Scott had already won the Mr. Universe and had a great body, unlike anything anyone had ever seen. He had twenty-inch biceps, an upper

body with a definition that was unheard of, and a posing routine that could still compete today. Scott was the first of the Greek gods, and he won the competition twice, repeating in 1966.

After Scott came, perhaps the man with the most magnificent body ever. He was the first Latino and the first person of African descent to win the Olympia. His name was Sergio Oliva, and he was a Cuban refugee who arrived in the United States in 1959. Oliva had such a terrific posing routine, combined with a 28-inch waist and 32 inch-thighs (a ratio that had never before been seen) and a 52-inch chest, that other bodybuilders started to call him "The Myth." His victory at the 1967 Mr. Olympia was of such dominance that the following year he contested unopposed. He won again in 1969, defeating legendary Arnold Schwarzenegger in a landslide, unanimous victory by the judges.

Oliva could have kept on winning and winning, but he was unlucky that he peaked at around the time when Austrian Oak, Arnold Schwarzenegger was just starting to get hungry. Arnold was bigger than life. He had terrific genetics, a one-of-a-kind work ethic, a tremendous hunger for success, and such determination that I don't think that the real Hercules himself could have defeated him.

Sergio may have had better genetics, but Arnold out-trained him, out-psyched him, out-did him, out-matched him and out-coached him. Arnold memorized Sergio's routine from top to bottom and found its weak points. He exploited them and beat him in the 1970, Mr. Olympia. This was the beginning of the Arnold era in bodybuilding.

Schwarzenegger successfully defended his title in 1971, beating Sergio Oliva again in 1972, and ran the table all the way to 1975, beating Lou Ferrigno, who would later go on to star as the Incredible Hulk in the world-famous TV Series. Schwarzenegger retired from bodybuilding in 1975, but he pretty much pushed the sport (along with Joe, of course), to its pinnacle in the years that followed. He brought

bodybuilding into the mainstream and turned it into a real spectator sport. His personality, combined with charming looks and a physique that no one had seen until that day (250 pounds of muscle, 22-inch biceps, a 57-inch chest, 32-inch waist, and possibly the best calves in the history of the sport) turned him into a real-life Superman.

Arnold won an unprecedented seven Mr. Olympia titles, including six in a row, but he could have won 10 or more if he had wanted to. He had won so much that he started to get hungry to achieve new goals in life, so he moved on. After Arnold came to his training partner Franco Columbu who, despite being under 200 pounds in weight and of small stature, had a level of definition, strength and muscle density like no one else. He won the Olympia twice, in 1976 and in 1981. In between Columbu first, win and Schwarzenegger's controversial, but still well-deserved 1980 victory, came Frank Zane with a three-peat championship, from 1977-1979.

Zane had a unique physique that hadn't been seen at any Olympia winner up until that point. He was a smaller guy, only 5 foot 9 in height and 184 pounds. Yet this doesn't fully illustrate his proportions. He didn't have a huge chest (only 51 inches), nor big arms (18 inches), nor giant lats like the other bodybuilders had. He looked a lot more like a surfer than a bodybuilder. But his definition was simply outstanding. He seemed truly chiseled, as though he were made out of solid marble... And this more than made up for his lack of size. Zane was a once in a lifetime bodybuilder, and physiques like his would never again be seen in the history of bodybuilding, except of course in the newer categories.

After Columbu and the 1980 victory by Arnold came Chris Dickerson, who won the title in 1982. Dickerson had a classic physique. Less gigantic than Arnold, but more voluminous than Zane, he was the perfect combination for the era and a great transition as to what was to come in the years that followed. Dickerson was

exceptionally proportioned, extremely well-defined, and looked lean enough resembling a sprinter or NFL running back. He only won once, but this was not due to his physique, but due to the extreme level of competitiveness of that era.

Next up was Samir Bannout, the only middle eastern champion in Mr. Olympia history. Samir holds several distinctions in bodybuilding. He was the last competitor to win while weighing under 200 pounds and he is the only one in history to have defeated legend Lee Haney, who shares the record with me for most Mr. Olympia titles (with eight in a row). Bannout only won once, but his tremendous abs will forever be remembered as one of the best in the history of the sport.

After Samir, came the eras of domination, starting with my dear friend Lee Haney, who, as I mentioned, won an unprecedented eight times to crown himself as the best bodybuilder ever up until that point. Lee was something exceptional. He had genetics like no other and a work-ethic that was only exceeded by his desire to win. He became one of the first “big” bodybuilders, like the ones we see today, and was the perfect transition from the old school of leanness and definition to the new school of mass and size. Lee had an incredible combination of both. He looked lean yet massive, and, at 250 pounds of muscle in competition weight, he was the most massive Mr. Olympia winner ever (bigger even than Arnold - and Lee was 3 inches shorter than Schwarzenegger).

But beyond his size, extreme definition and absolute corporal perfection, Lee had a personality like no other. He was a genuinely good human being; one of the best people I have ever had the pleasure to be acquainted with. Lee was a devout Christian and a very spiritual person. To him, bodybuilding was like a spiritual experience of being in absolute oneness with everything around you.

He was very interested in bringing fitness to everyone, and even served as the Chairman of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness

under Bill Clinton, a post held only by the most innovative and hard-working athletes and fitness gurus. He made an effort to bring fitness to the nation and was very successful in doing it.

Haney retired after his 1991, leaving the tunnel open for the next great champion, Dorian Yates. Yates was an innovator. He was the first champion to train with High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) methods to gain mass and definition, which was something entirely new. He was also the first to achieve a massive back and extreme muscle density. He was the first of the modern bodybuilders: gigantic, over the top, and with a never before seen level of muscular thickness. Touching him was like touching solid concrete.

Yates won six straight Mr. Olympias. During that period, from 1992 to 1997, he won every single competition he entered, and he did so in the most dominant manner possible. Yates could have dominated the sport for many more years, but severe injuries to his biceps and triceps severely limited his possibilities, and he was forced to retire. Despite this, he still won his last competition with both muscles severely torn.

After Yates, despite some serious doubts, I managed to become the champion. Just as you read in the introduction and as you will learn in the following chapters, I was surrounded by the best competitors on the planet and perhaps of all time. Guys like Flex Wheeler, Kevin Levrone, Nasser El Sonbaty, Shawn Ray, Chris Cormier, Lee Priest, Mike Matarazzo, and many others had not only the best work ethic and physiques but were also fiercely competitive. I was lucky to have won, but I kept on winning through the years, until my era finally came to an end in 2006, when Jay Cutler, one of the finest competitors of all time finally managed to beat me after placing second after me in four tournaments.

Cutler went on to win three more times for a total of four, which was a great reward for one of the most dedicated athletes I have ever met.

After him came Dexter Jackson with a lone victory in 2008. Jackson was a pitbull of a competitor, with unique body proportion, and a near-mystical posing routine. Dexter may have only won the Olympia just once, but he holds the distinction of being the bodybuilder with most professional wins in the history of the sport; more than even me, Schwarzenegger or Lee Haney.

After him came another era of domination, this time by Phil Heath, a natural-born athlete who played basketball at the college level and even worked as a successful professional wrestler. Heath won seven straight titles and could have been the third man to win eight or the first to win nine if it were not for his loss at the 2018 Olympia at the hands of the first Jamaican and second

SURROUNDED BY CHAMPIONS

I don't like to call myself the greatest of all time nor anything like that. Whenever someone calls me the GOAT, I always tell them that definitions are up to historians, journalists, and fans. I think that I was just lucky and that there are a ton of bodybuilders who were better than me. To this day I still believe that my good friends Flex Wheeler and Kevin Levrone, who never won the championship, had much better bodies than I ever did. But, at the end of the day, I didn't make the decisions. The judges did, and I am sure glad that they picked me.

What I want you to see my friends, with this history lesson in bodybuilding, is the level of competition that I was up against, as well as what it takes to become a real-life Greek God, or Mr. Olympia.

I was blessed to have won the tournament so many times, and I feel so fortunate, honored, and privileged to be standing next to these real-life deities and marble sculptures of human bodily perfection. I am honored to say that I am one of them.

Despite the many setbacks of my life, and despite the amount of

competition that I faced and endured, and despite the genuinely elite company that I was surrounded by, I still managed to work my ass off to win and become one the best bodybuilders in the history of the sport.

CHAPTER NINE

THE PRO-BODYBUILDER

“The important thing is not to win but to compete with honor.”

— Baron Pierre De Coubertin, educator, and creator of the Olympic Games.

PRO CARD AND FIRST YEARS AS A BODYBUILDER

One of the most important steps on the career and life path of a bodybuilder is to get the coveted pro card. The Pro Card is a certificate issued by the International Federation of Body Building, created by my good friend Joe Weider, stating that you are now a pro-bodybuilder. However, it's much more than a simple document saying that you are a professional. It's like a degree; a piece of paper that says you are one of the best in the world and you can compete for the right to be the best in the world.

Around the world, thousands of people work every day to get that pro card, but only a handful get to achieve it.

This chapter details the story of how I got my pro.

Many people are of the impression that because of my genetics or the fact that I won a ton of international championships in bodybuilding, I simply breezed through my bodybuilding career. They think that I never experienced defeat or that everything came along smoothly.

This wasn't the case at all. Not by a long shot. Getting my pro card

and becoming a champion bodybuilder was hard work. I never expected it to be otherwise. Granted, after having won the Mr. Texas competition with such ease, I thought that it may have been relatively easy, but it wasn't. Becoming a champion pro bodybuilder was harder than anything else I've done in my life, and this taught me one hell of a lesson.

Things seldom go how they seem, and an essential part of life is to be resilient towards our goals, no matter how difficult they may seem.

1990 – MY FIRST YEAR IN BODYBUILDING

A lot of people think that after I won the Mr. Texas competition, I immediately commenced a quest to get my pro card at all costs. This isn't the case, not by a long shot. Don't get me wrong, I loved bodybuilding, but despite winning my first show, I still only saw this as a hobby... as an awesome and beautiful one, but still just a pastime. My life was police work, and despite what Brian said, I never thought I could go all the way in bodybuilding or even turn pro. My mindset was to keep on competing for fun, and if by any chance, I ever won my pro card that would have been awesome. If I didn't win it, I'd still be thrilled just to compete.

Soon after that 1990, Mr. Texas, I signed up for a nationally ranked show that took place at the University of Texas at Arlington.

I was so well prepared and so much in the groove that I won that show by a landslide. No one even came close to me.

After that, because of the level, I was already at, the types of shows that I could compete in were national qualifying shows. If I won at any of these (or placed top two), I would then qualify for the nationals. If in turn, I placed high at those, I would then qualify for an international contest, which could eventually get me my pro card.

It seemed like a whole eternity to get to that point, but I wasn't

upset. Like I said, this was all a hobby for me. I loved doing it.

Soon, I did find a national qualifying show; a bodybuilding competition in El Paso, Texas. It was only a couple of months away, in the summer of 1990.

Therefore, Brian and I upped the ante with my training. I started to become stronger, trained harder, ate better, and started taking some supplements that Brian provided. He was awesome about it, and never even charged me a cent for anything single supplement. These helped a lot, and I was able to get bigger, stronger, leaner, thicker, and cut in a short amount of time; the combination of supplements and hard work was simply superb.

While we prepared for that show in El Paso, Texas, we signed up at a couple more local shows for me to get more experience. I won them all and got my confidence up pretty high.

It was so high, in fact, that by the time I got to El Paso for the national qualifying show, I was pretty sure I was going to win. I simply didn't see anyone beating me in that competition.

Boy, was I wrong. A big bodybuilder from Nevada wiped the floor with me and put me in second place. I was pretty disappointed. It was a really tough pill to swallow, but it taught me a valuable lesson in bodybuilding and in life: don't ever take anything for granted, never let victory defeat you, and always work as hard as you can.

Thankfully, however, I was good enough to land a spot in second place, which was good enough for the nationals. So, despite having suffered my first bodybuilding defeat, I was still sufficiently talented to move on to the next level of competition. I was getting better and better every day.

When I arrived at the nationals, my confidence wasn't as high as it was a few weeks before. But this helped me gain the right mindset. I knew I wasn't the best there. In fact, I don't think I was in the top ten.

Still, during the course of my life, I had always learned that the best way to become the best was to observe the best.

So, I did just that. I watched these talented bodybuilders perform. In the process, I learned how to improve my posing, how to look better in front of the stage and how to move my body in such a way that the judges could see it in its best form.

I only placed third in that competition, but it was a learning experience that taught me lessons that I would forever keep with me in bodybuilding.

THE 1991 OLYMPIA

The first Mr. Olympia I ever went to was the 1991 version, which was won by my good friend Lee Haney for a record-setting 8th victory. I didn't go, however, as a bodybuilder, but as a security guard.

After observing the great bodybuilders perform at the nationals, I reasoned that I would learn a lot if I went to see the champions at the highest level of the game while they competed for the crown of the best in the world. That year, the stage saw a bunch of legendary bodybuilders contesting for the title. There was, of course, Lee Haney, but in addition to him stood Lee Labrada, Dorian Yates, Shawn Ray, Rich Gaspari, and former Vince Taylor.

I remember watching those guys on stage and thinking, "Wow, that posing, that definition, that bodily perfection is beyond awesome." I knew that I was miles away from them, but I thought that one day if I worked hard, I was going to be able to stand next to them and maybe even win.

A couple of bodybuilders saw me in my security uniform backstage and told me I was big enough to compete. I laughed it off, of course, as I was nowhere near the shape I needed to be. But it was still very cool to hear that from my heroes.

The highlight of the night was getting to shake Lee Haney's hand and taking a picture with him. Sadly, the picture never came out, as my disposable camera was stopped working, but I will forever carry that memory with me.

Lee Haney became my hero, and all I ever wanted going forward was to be like him. Of course, there were other great bodybuilders aside from him, but I didn't know the history of the sport or anything like that, so I hadn't even heard the names Sergio Oliva, Frank Zane or Larry Scott.

1991 – GETTING MY PRO CARD

After placing third at the nationals in 1991, my goal that year was to keep on competing. Like I said before, my goal was not to win my pro card, but to keep on competing and enjoy the great experience that bodybuilding was for me.

The next show I signed for was another national qualifying show. This one was to be contested in Los Angeles in early March of 1991. I trained really hard, was very disciplined with my diet, and really worked on my posing. However, the competition was a lot tighter than the year before, and I only placed 14th.

I was truly disappointed, but quitting wasn't an option. I had never been a quitter, and the same resiliency that had allowed me to become a police officer, to land multiple jobs as a kid and as a teen, to become first string as a Division 1 player as a walk-on, and so on, pushed me to continue no matter what happened.

Even though at first, I had become hesitant to start bodybuilding, by now, I had fallen in love with it. I absolutely adored every aspect of it: Training, eating, dieting, posing, being disciplined and preparing for competition were all becoming the most positive aspects of my life, and I felt blessed to have the opportunity to compete in bodybuilding.

Even after suffering a 14th place loss at the national qualifying show, I still wanted to keep on competing. The year before I had reached the nationals and I thought that this year I could too... and wouldn't you know it, I certainly did.

THE 1991 NATIONALS

I spent the next few months living my life in Groundhog Day style. Working at the Police Department, eating my strict diet, working out six days a week, practicing posing for another hour and preparing myself mentally for the show.

Mentally, my focus was to win, but if that didn't happen, just being there was victory enough. Nevertheless, I've always been a winner, and I often thought about the championship, visualized myself as a victor, and employed a method of motivation that I still use to this day.

Every morning, while going to the gym, I would take a stroll down memory lane. I'd remember the lean years while working at Domino's Pizza, vividly recalling the details of what it meant to be poor, to eat pizza every day because I had nothing else to eat, of being humiliated by customers at the register, or having no money to spend, and of feeling that my life was going nowhere.

These were feelings I never wanted to have again in my life and remembering them instilled a drive in me that pushed me to become better and improve my skills as a bodybuilder.

By the time the nationals rolled around, I felt very focused and ready for the championship.

It turned out, however, that I wasn't really as ready as I needed to be. Standing on that stage, I had to watch, in disgust, as the judges called in the winners and placed me only at 4th.

I was heartbroken. I felt that I was never going to be able to

compete at a high level in bodybuilding. As luck would have it, however, the Nationals had a small rule modification that year that really helped me out.

In competitive bodybuilding, a ton of substances that aren't allowed in other sports are very much legal. Steroids are one of them, human growth hormone is another, and testosterone is another. However, other substances are not allowed and are sometimes tested for. Some of these are diuretics, which help the body get rid of water in order to look more defined, clenbuterol, which decreases the amount of fat in the system, cocaine, which pushes the body to burn more fat, as well as other substances I am not even familiar with.

Luckily, that year, the Nationals decided to implement a drug testing regime. By that point, I had never taken a single performance-enhancing drug, not even steroids. I had, of course, taken supplements, like proteins, amino acids, creatine, creatinine, and testosterone booster, but that was it. I hadn't taken anabolic steroids or nothing like that, and I didn't feel that I needed them, yet. That eventually needed to change, of course, because I was going to be at a disadvantage with the other competitors, but I never broke any rule nor took anything that was banned.

Anyway, the drug testing that the nationals implemented pretty much saved my life. That year, as part of the new policy, all contestants were required to submit urine and blood tests immediately after the competition. For unknown reasons, the three guys ahead of me (who had been first, second and third) didn't show up for the drug tests. As a consequence, I was moved to first place and qualified for the nationals. The guys ahead of me weren't disqualified or anything like that, but because they didn't take the tests, I was automatically placed in front of them.

THE 1991 MR. UNIVERSE

Winning the Nationals allowed me to qualify for the IFBB Mr. Universe competition, which would land me the opportunity to get my pro card.

The Mr. Universe was, once upon a time, the most important competition in all of bodybuilding until they created Mr. Olympia, so qualifying for it was a huge deal.

The only problem was that this Mr. Universe wasn't going to be hosted in the United States, but rather in Katowice, Poland... and the date of the competition was only three weeks away.

The fact that it was in Poland wasn't really the issue, as I was pretty excited to leave the United States for the first time and visit a foreign country. The situation was that I didn't even have a passport, and I only had three weeks to get one.

Fortunately, getting a passport wasn't as difficult as I'd imagined, and I finally received mine in the mail two days before I was due to depart for Poland.

POLAND 1991

The IFBB paid for every bodybuilder to travel to the Mr. Universe competition, but being that I was still a nobody, my ticket was not a first class one. Still, I was very, very happy to be given the opportunity to go to Europe to compete.

I had no idea what to expect, as I hadn't had the chance to read a lot about the place I was going to visit, but I was pretty excited.

My flight was Dallas to Warsaw with a short stop in Paris. From Warsaw, we took a bus to Katowice, which was a couple of hours drive.

The flight to Paris was full of Americans, so I felt right at home. But by the time I boarded the Paris to Warsaw plane, things seemed a bit

different. The airplane was pretty old, and I felt like a complete outsider. No one spoke English, and security was very tight to board the plane towards eastern Europe.

You have to picture the context in which this was all happening. This was late 1991. The Berlin wall had fallen only two years before, and the communist governments of this part of the world were collapsing. Many of them had already formally declared democratic governments which had not been fully recognized, and the Soviet Union itself was in a transitional period. The atmosphere was very tense, and experts predicted that a war could break out at any minute.

I didn't think a lot of that until the moment I arrived in Poland. Everywhere you looked, there were enraged soldiers with AK-47s, worried citizens, military personnel, and young men who looked at you like they wanted to rob you of your every possession.

I've been to some rough places before, especially as a police officer, but I had never been anywhere like Poland. A combination of political unrest, crime, worry, anxiety, stress, delinquency, and general uneasiness plagued the atmosphere.

I had learned to become accustomed to tension in the police department, but I had never felt anything like this. Thankfully, however, I had been trained to deal with situations like this, so I opted to keep my mouth shut, my eyes open and focus on the competition coming ahead.

But I'm not going to lie. It was tough to remain focused, especially considering that the competition was fierce, with hundreds of bodybuilders from over 64 countries staying in a single hotel that didn't have enough food for all of us.

In fact, I don't think that the establishment was even prepared for our arrival. I mean, don't get me wrong, it was a beautifully luxurious hotel (30 floors of stunningly decorated rooms), but they were short

staffed (and those that did work there didn't really like to work), and all they had for us to eat was rice and cold cuts.

We didn't have any fish, or meat, or chicken, or eggs, or grits, or vegetables, or fruits, or oatmeal nor anything else except for cold cuts and rice. That was it.

Needless to say, it wasn't the best diet for a bodybuilder, but we had to make do with what we had. At the end of the day, I had actually spent two full years eating pizza, burgers, fried chicken, and tacos. A couple of days of cold cuts and rice weren't that big of a deal... for me. The other bodybuilders were a whole different story. They weren't exactly pleased with the menu, and their anger didn't help their chances in the competition.

THE COMPETITION

There were five weight classes for the show: Bantamweight, Lightweight (not baby... lol), Middleweight, Light-heavyweight, and Heavyweight. I was 215 pounds and in the heavyweight category, which was over 200 pounds.

To my luck, my category had the lowest number of bodybuilders, with only about thirty guys, comparatively less than the other groups. Middleweight, for example, had about 60 guys, so I instantly knew that I had an edge.

The show went amazingly well. The level of the other competitors was pretty low; much lower than I had faced even at the nationals or at any of the national qualifying shows. By the time I hit the stage, I knew that it was over. Nobody stood a chance next to me. I was in the best shape of my life up until that point. I had prepared so well, eaten so well, and created such a smooth posing routine that I simply blew everyone away. It was basically a no contest for me, and I won that show by unanimous decision by the judges.

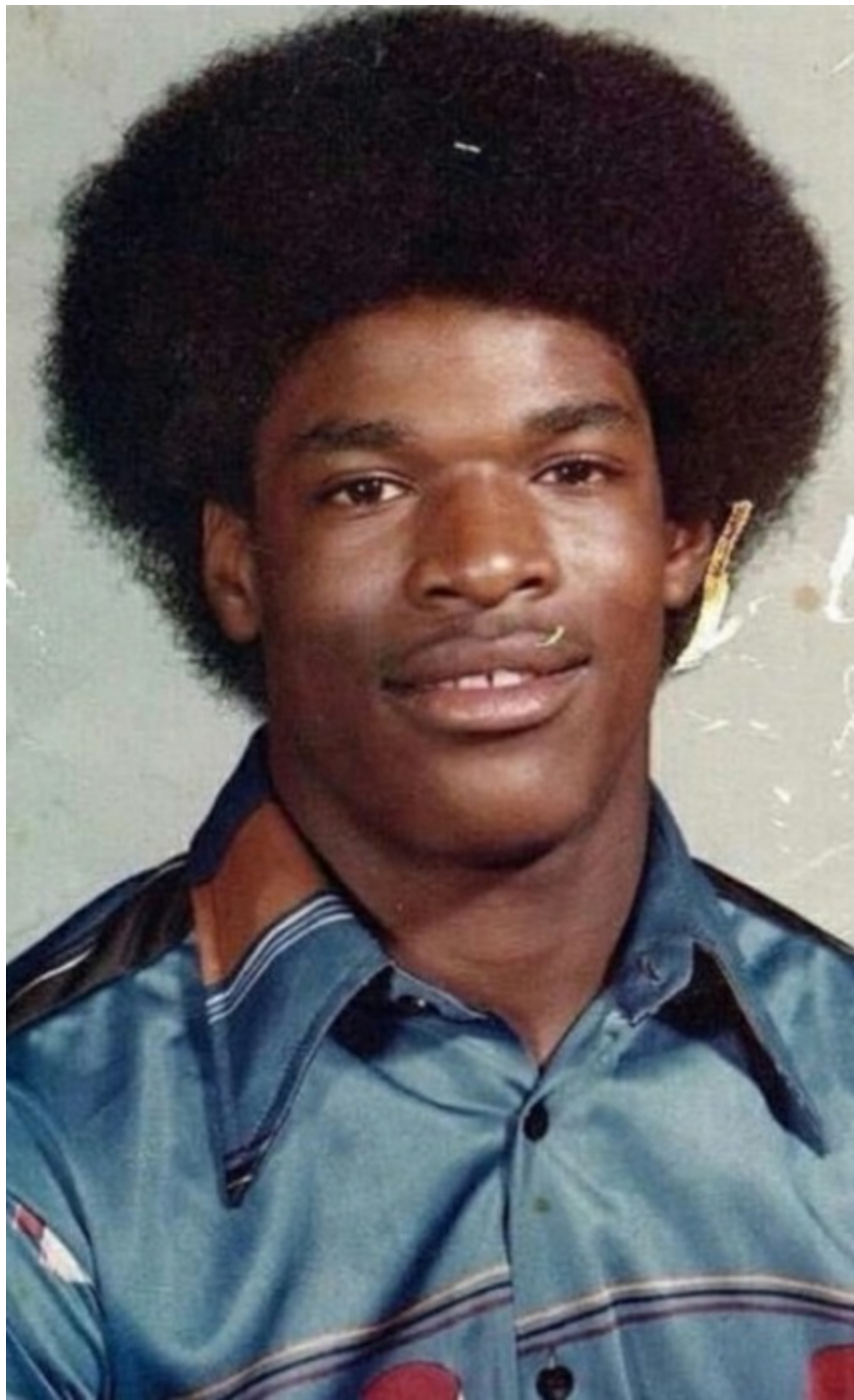
Just like that, in a single second, I got my pro card. Joe Weider wasn't there that day to hand the pro cards out, but a representative from the IFBB stood there, gave me and every champion from every weight class a medal and a card.

Now, I was a professional bodybuilder. Now, my chances in this sport were turning very serious. It was no longer going to be just a hobby. It was going to be like a second job; a true calling.

Up next was my quest for a world championship.



High School football player.



That's me as a young kid with the world in front of him. Man, I looked good!



Thats me when I was just getting started.



One word... Badass!



Training legs in the Texas heat with me H1 Hummer in the back.
Nothing better in the world.



You can tell I've always liked cars. Not quite the Rolls Royce yet, but to me it was a beauty.



The Metroflex Gym gang. That's Brian on the left.



Lighweight baby!



705 pounds for reps. No biggie. Yeah Buddy.



Leg press, nothing but a peanut!



1990 Mr. Texas... 'nuff said.



To Protect and Serve. My smile didn't make me look as menacing as I normally did in that police uniform.



My proudest muscle, my back.



A most muscular pose.



My good friend Kevin Levrone and me at a show.



The King.



Me and Joe Weider, the legend.



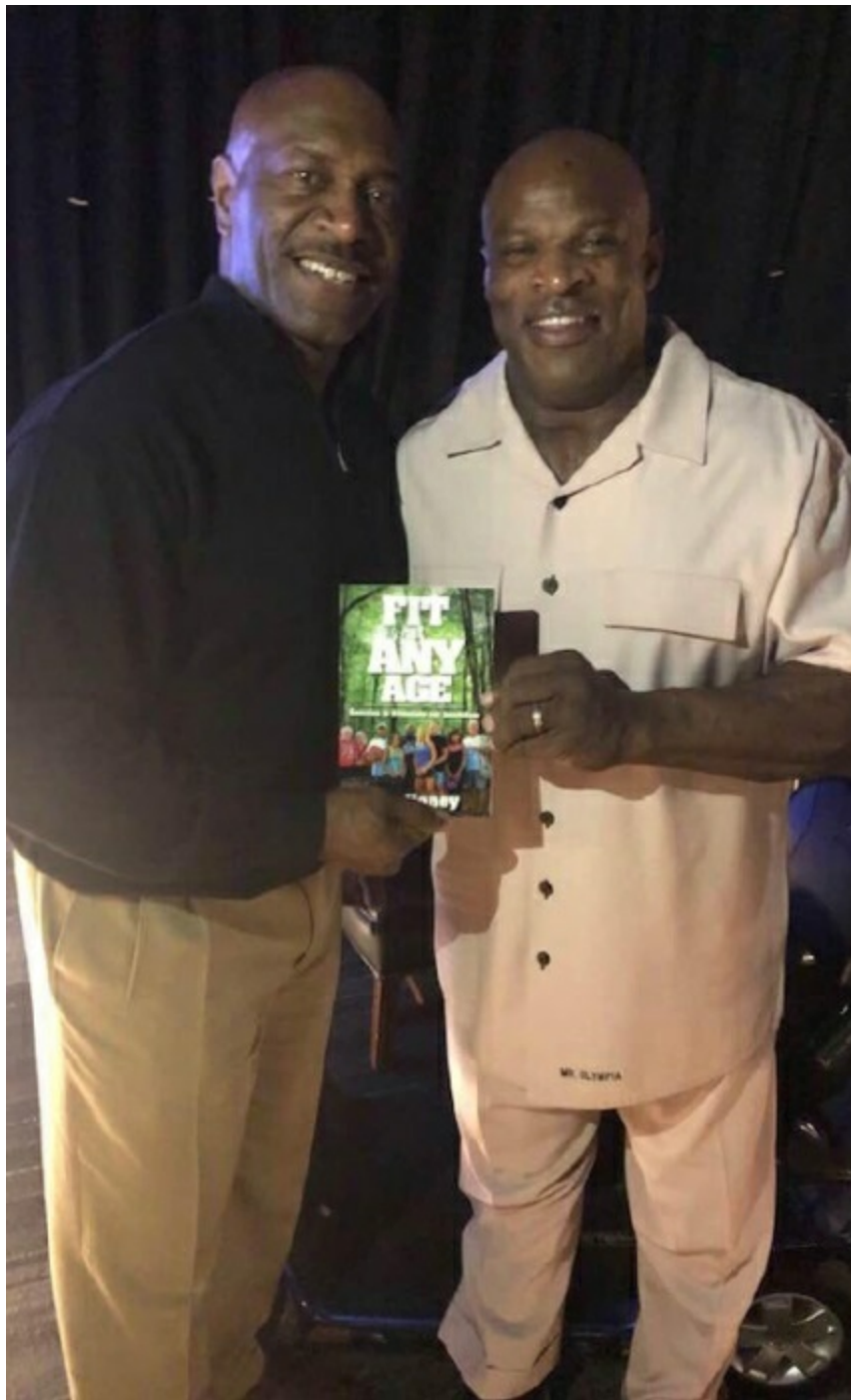
Texas Rangers Baseball Game.



Big doesnt even begin to describe it.



Most muscular pose at the Metroflex gym.



My hero Lee Haney and me at the 2019 Arnold Classic. What a great friend.



That's me right after my 1000th (lol) surgery. You can tell I'm ready to lift weights.



My beautiful family.



My wife Susan and I at our home in Arlington.



My beautiful girls and my beautiful wife and I on a regular sunday at my favorite restaurant... IHOP.

CHAPTER TEN

TRAINING LIKE A CHAMPION

“Exercise to stimulate, not to annihilate. The world wasn’t formed in a day, and neither were we. Set small goals and build upon them.”

— Lee Haney, Eight-time Mr. Olympia

HOW TO TRAIN AND EAT LIKE ME

Through the years, a lot (and I mean a lot) of people have approached me to ask me about how I train. I usually don’t have the time to explain my training methods in full detail, so I just tell them that I train hard and with a lot of effort.

Of course, there’s a lot more to it than that, but the basics of my training are exactly that.

I wasn’t originally going to include a full training and diet regime in this book, but I realized that it would be a disservice to my dear friends, fans, and readers not to talk about and illustrate how I took upon the activity that I became famous for.

That’s why I decided to include this exercise regime and diet program so that you guys out there can explore it and use it for your benefit.

WHY MY WORKOUT REGIME WORKS

Ask any bodybuilder out there why, aside from genetics, I was able to get the body I built. They will probably answer that it was due to

three things, hard work, intensity, and strength.

The last of the three was the most important of all. Aside from being a great bodybuilder, I was also known for my strength. My strength was probably the highest ever in the world of bodybuilding and one of the highest ever in the history of the planet. Period. I was a member of the 2000-pound club, squatting 800 pounds for reps, deadlifting 800 pounds for reps, and bench pressing 500 pounds for reps. And I think I was just scratching the surface of how strong I could have become.

I was so strong I could have easily competed in strongman and powerlifting competitions and maybe even won some of them at the highest level. And I wasn't even training for that. With the training, I'm sure I could have also been one of those big world's strongest men.

This strength helped me do repetitions and exercises that are common to the world of bodybuilding but with such heavyweights that they allowed me to create a density and size of the muscle which had never before been seen in professional bodybuilding.

Of course, your goal may not be to be that strong or to achieve a gigantic level of strength, but if you work to increase your strength and use bodybuilding exercises with much heavier weights than you've ever used, your mass, volume, muscular density and definition will go up. You will also become a much better athlete and a king of gains and mass.

A WORD TO THE WISE

I designed this workout routine myself, and I tailored it specifically for my personal needs, but it can be used freely by each and every one of you. My advice is to listen to your body but to push yourself at the same time. Don't overdo it, but don't be too easy on your body either.

This routine is meant for each muscle group to be trained two times

a week, but perhaps this may be too much or too little for you. You can modify it at your convenience. Modify it for your needs, vision, desire, and ability.

Same thing with the diet regime. Mine was designed by my nutritionist for mass gains and for cutting, depending on the season. I used it to compete and to become the best bodybuilder I could be. Your wishes may be different than that. Maybe you just want to train for mass, perhaps you want to train to get some muscle and feel better with your life, or maybe you want to lose weight and tone a little bit.

These are all valid reasons to work out. However, the important thing here is for you to use the method here to your advantage.

Adapt it to whatever you want to achieve.

Before I present my work out regime, I want to display a few of my rules for exercising at the gym and reaching your full potential.

RONNIE'S RULES FOR MUSCLE SUCCESS

Use free weights: There is no substitute for free weights. The amount of raw strength, stabilization, and force required to train in this manner will reap the most benefits. On average, aim for 75% of your workout to be with free weights. Machines can be a significant part of your regime, but there is nothing compared to free weights.

Use bilateral movements instead of unilateral movements: This refers to using two arms and legs at the same time instead of isolating each arm or each leg. Of course, unilateral movements have their place, but bilateral is much better.

Keep your workouts intense: This will provide the best benefits. Rest as often as needed but keep it to a minimum. Pick the heaviest weights you can handle and train as hard as you can. No pain, no

gain. This will provide the most benefits.

Make yourself stronger: The stronger you are, the more weight you can lift, the heavier you can go, and the bigger your muscles will be.

Train to fatigue, not to failure: Many athletes train every set until they can't lift their arms anymore. This may work for some, but I prefer to fatigue the muscles gradually through the workout. Muscle fatigue will provide much more benefits, even though both are closely related.

Variety is good, but complete revolution is not: The only way to make the most gains is to be consistent and always keep the same style of workouts. Of course, you can vary the machines you use or the exercises themselves from time to time (you can use cable flies instead of dumbbell flies occasionally), but the idea is for you to keep it consistent over time. This is what provides the most benefits and biggest muscles.

Keep your form very strict: Many bodybuilders do themselves a disservice when they prioritize lifting heavy over lifting with good form. There is nothing more important than keeping your form strict. This will provide the most hypertrophy, or muscle growth and will help you keep everything real and in perspective. If you cheat form, you are only cheating yourself.

Control your cardio: Cardio is incredibly beneficial for many reasons, including helping your heart pump more oxygen to your body. However, it may not be the best choice if what you are looking for is to gain mass. Cardio really depends on your goals. If you want to cut down, do it. If you want to become healthier, do it. If you want to become bigger, wait until you have reached your goals to employ it.

Drink a lot of water: This may be the most important part of all my advice not just for building muscle, but for overall health. Health is our wealth, and water may be the best ingredient for a healthy life. Bodybuilders drink a gallon or more of water a day. You don't need to

drink that much, but I suggest you drink enough so that it can sustain your activity level and keep you hydrated and healthy.

Eat Clean: Many bodybuilders like to cheat on their diet from time to time. I wasn't one of them. In fact, for the entirety of my career as a professional bodybuilder, I never had a single cheat meal. Nothing wrong with getting a good meal once and again, but there is always the risk of overdoing it and hurting your entire progress. As a rule, I think that cheat meals should be avoided if you want to get the best body you can. Eat clean and feel better. Still, some of you may desire to eat some junk once in a while to keep your sanity. That's fine too. It all depends on your goals.

Use the tools of the trade to your advantage: The gym is full of awesome tools to help you become better. There are also accessories you can employ to improve your performance. Some of these may be lifting shoes, wraps, straps, lifting suits, chalk, gloves, sleeves and much more. Use them to your advantage as often as you can. If they help you move and lift more weight, that's great. Some gyms may be against these, but my philosophy is that whatever works for you and improves your workout is perfectly fine. Use them and make the best of them.

Be consistent in your training: This is a ground rule for bodybuilding. If you don't train consistently, you aren't going to achieve anything. Most people don't have what it takes to be a bodybuilder, weightlifter, strongman, or professional athlete because they aren't consistent at anything. Don't be like the majority. If you want to be the best, you have to be consistent. This way, slowly but surely, you will achieve each and every one of your goals.

THE WORKOUT ROUTINE

As I said, the routine is based upon my own needs, and it is designed to train each muscle group twice during the week. This may

be a bit too much for some of you guys who are used to training each muscle group only once every seven days.

If that's the case, modify it to your needs. On the other hand, if you are one of those guys that likes to train each muscle group three times every week, up the ante and make my workout even harder.

These are the exercises I use and are the ones that work best for me. Other bodybuilders might pick their own exercises. If you wish to add your own exercises you can do that too.

Make it yours, make it fit your needs and use it to your advantage.

The exercises I employ individually for each muscle are described only by name. I am not going to include a detailed description of each one nor illustrations because the internet is full of them. If you have any doubts about any exercise, there are plenty of online videos that explain them much better than a couple of pictures can.

I will now go ahead and describe the workout routine, day by day.

Before I continue, however, it's important for me to remind you to check with your doctor so that he can give you the ok on the exercises you can or can't perform.

Note: All sets are performed in the 10-15 rep range unless specified otherwise.

Day 1 (Monday)

Back, Biceps, Shoulders

Muscle: Back

EXCERSICE	SETS
Deadlift	4
Bent-Over Barbell Row	4
T-Bar Row	4
One-arm Dumbbell row	4

Muscle: Biceps

EXCERSICE	SETS
Standing Barbell Curl	4
Seated Alternate Dumbbell Curl	3
EX-Bar Preacher Curl	3
Standing Cable Curl	3

Muscle: Shoulders

EXCERSICE	SETS
Seated barbell Press	4
Incline Lateral raise	4
Front Dumbbell Raise	4

Day 2 (Tuesday)

Legs

Muscle: Thighs

EXCERSICE	SETS
Leg Extension	5
Barbell Squat	5
Hack Squat or Leg Press	3
Lying Leg Curl	3
Walking Lunge	3

Muscle: Calves

EXCERSICE	SETS
Donkey Calf Raise	4

Day 3 (Wednesday)

Chest, Triceps

Muscle: Chest

EXCERSICE	SETS
Bench Press	4

Incline Press	3
Decline Press	3
Flat Dumbbell Flies	3

Muscle: Triceps

EXCERSICE	SETS
Cable Pressdown	4
Seated Overhead Dumbbell Extension	3
Dips	3
Reverse-Grip Cable Pressdown	3

Day 4 (Thursday)

Back, Biceps, Shoulders

Muscle: Back

EXCERSICE	SETS
T-Bar Row	4
One-Arm Dumbbell Row	4
Wide-Grip Pull-Up	3
Pulldown to Front or Narrow-Grip Row	3

Muscle: Biceps

EXCERSICE	SETS
Alternating Dumbbell Curl	4
EZ-Bar Preacher Curl	3
One-Arm Cable Curl	3
Dumbbell Concentration Curl	3

Muscle: Shoulders

EXCERSICE	SETS
Smith Machine Press	4
Dumbbell Lateral Raise*	2
Dumbbell Front Raise	3
Bent-Over Lateral Raise	3

*20/15/10/8 reps per set.

Drop weights temporarily between in-set reps

Day 5 (Friday)

Legs

Muscle: Thighs

EXCERSICE	SETS
Leg Extension	4
Front Barbell Squat	5
Hack Squat	3
Romanian Deadlift	3
Seated Leg Curl	3

Muscle: Calves

EXCERSICE	SETS
Standing Calf Raise	4
Seated Calf Raise	4

Day 6 (Saturday)

Chest, Triceps

Muscle: Chest

EXCERSICE	SETS
Incline Dumbbell Press	4
Bench Dumbbell Press	5
Decline Dumbbell Press	3
Bench Dumbbell Fly	3

Muscle: Shoulders

EXCERSICE	SETS
Close-Grip Bench Press	4
Lying French Press	3
Dumbbell Kickback	3

Four Times a Week

Abs (To be done at the end of the workout)

Muscle: Abs

EXCERSICE	SETS
Crunch	3 (to failure)

THE MOTIVATION

A lot of people have asked me how I stayed motivated while working out and how I stayed motivated to work out so hard for so many years.

Motivation is a very big part of working out, but it's not everything... not by a long shot. Motivation can be great to get you started and may push you through some plateaus. However, the only way to truly be consistent in your workouts and in anything that you need to do in life is discipline.

No person ever became successful by accident. No successful person has ever been undisciplined. Discipline is the key to success, and if you want to achieve anything, whether it be in bodybuilding or in business or in any other activity, you have to be disciplined and focused.

The question is, how do we stay disciplined? How do we become disciplined? To me, it's basically about two key things. The first one is to force yourself to do things even if you don't really feel like doing them. They're not going to be perfect, but if you don't do them, you will never achieve anything.

I've already told you that back when I was a kid growing up in the small town of Bastrop in rural Louisiana, I took a job chopping cotton. This is, by far, the hardest job on the planet. It was horrible. You had to work for hours in the grueling southern sun, at 100+ degree heat,

without shade, and leaning down.

Did I like it? Of course not. I hated it. And I hated it a lot. But I had no choice. If I wanted to make spending money, I had to work. In other words, I worked even if I didn't feel like it. I could've have quit any time. No one was forcing me to be there. But I stayed and finished. That's discipline.

Many times, at the Metroflex gym, working out in the heat, with no air conditioning, lifting hundreds of pounds at a same time, I got tired... very tired. Did quitting and going home to relax pass through my mind? Of course, it did. All the time. But I didn't do it. I stayed and finished the workout. And I felt tremendous satisfaction by doing it. It was awesome.

In my own words, discipline is summed up to a phrase I used to say in the gym a lot "Nothing to it but to do it". I also did it because I loved it and I never thought about quitting.

The second key to being disciplined is having a goal. Having a goal is necessary because it makes every session at the gym and every single workout have a direction and a deeper purpose.

If you train without a goal you have no purpose and ultimately no reason as to why to train and exert yourself like a berserk warrior while you lift weights. That's why it is very important to find a vision as to why you want to work out and then use every inch of your determination to make it happen.

Your vision doesn't have to be anything complicated. You don't have to want to be a Mr. Olympia or even a professional bodybuilder. Your goal may just be to become fitter, healthier, or to look good for the summer. Whatever it is, choose it and make it happen. I guarantee that it will make each and every rep easier and your time at the gym more enjoyable.

Of course, there will inevitably come days where we start to feel like

we don't have enough energy to go forward or occasions where we need to fire ourselves up to continue or to making big lifts.

When this happens, motivation is essential. How do we do this? To me, it was simple.

I had to fire myself up, and to do so I used some of my favorite phrases, which later became famous.

Some of these were "Yeah Buddy!", "Lightweight Baby", "Nothing but a peanut", "Nothing to it but to do it", and some more. People ask me all the time how I came up with these phrases and if they ever actually helped me. The answer to whether they helped me is obvious. They did, and a lot.

Shouting "Lightweight Baby" was a way for me to psych myself up to believe that the weights I was lifting were going to be very easy to push. The technique was so effective that a lot of the time they felt as though they were nothing.

I remember that when I squatted 800 pounds for two reps I was so psyched up by screaming "Lightweight Baby" that it felt incredibly easy... it was probably the easiest heavy lift of my career. I was so surprised at how effortless it was that I didn't realize I could have gotten 5-8 reps instead of the two I finally achieved.

"Yeah Buddy" has a funnier origin. There were times at the gym when I felt bored. I was working out hard but there was something missing, and I felt as though I needed extra motivation. So, I started to shout the first thing that came to my mind. What was that? Yeah Buddy. And it worked. Eventually I started to add more stuff to that phrase. And there came the "Yeah buddy, lightweight baby".

The "Nothing but a Peanut" was also a way for me to convince myself that the weight wasn't heavy at all, but rather extremely light... as light as a peanut. I've always been a fan of peanuts, and I love their taste. I ate them a lot, and I was very aware of how light they really

were.

That's why I decided to include them in my routine. And believe it or not, after saying that phrase, many of the weights did feel as light as a peanut, no matter how heavy they actually were.

EATING LIKE A CHAMPION

Eating is one of the most important things you can do in order to build muscle and gain mass. If you don't eat well, you won't amount to anything in muscle building, becoming stronger or even being healthy. It's as simple as that. Food is fuel. And without the adequate fuel your progress will be stagnated, and your effort will be of little use.

Eating healthy means eating a balanced diet rich in nutrients, fiber, lean and high-quality natural protein, fruits and vegetables, and high quality carbs. It also means drinking lots of water per your needs and requirements.

I am not a certified nutritionist, nor do I pretend to be, but I did use the services of one while I was a bodybuilder and it did wonders. He prescribed eating well for gaining mass; I ate tons of turkey, chicken and lean beef for protein, grits and baked potato for carbs, and because I am not really a fan of vegetables, I had to take a ton of supplements for the vitamins, but it helped really well. I became healthier, bigger, with great muscle quality and felt really, really great.

If you are serious about making some insane gains in the gym and with your health, I recommend you employ the services of a good nutritionist and ask him to tailor your diet to your individual needs and vision as an athlete.

SUPPLEMENTS

I own my own brand of supplements and I took a lot of supplements

during my bodybuilding career. They are an essential part of training, but they will never substitute a good diet nor dedication. There is no magic pill.

The supplements will only work if you do, and if you take them in the precise way you need to, they will enhance your workout and help you improve your body and give you more energy. But if you don't eat clean, drink lots of water, and exercise like you're supposed to, the supplements won't mean a thing and you will just be wasting your money.

As to what supplements work best, personally I recommend taking multivitamins, minerals, and enzymes for nutritional needs. For working out I recommend creatine, pre workout, post workout, amino acids and protein shakes. However, it's important, as always to check with your doctor first. It's very important to be sure that your body is ready for the supplements. If it isn't you will be doing yourself damage.

RESTING

Resting and recovering is a very important part of working out and muscle building. In fact, it is during rest when the muscles grow the most, as it is then where the muscle tissue repairs itself, becoming stronger and bigger.

I always gave adequate rest a priority, I never slept less than my body needed to and I always took one day off every week (Sunday). On average, I slept about 6 hours a day.

This regime may seem like a little bit too much for you. For many people it may not seem like any rest at all. Some of you out there may require more than one day of rest and more than six hours of sleep a day. That's completely up to you.

It all depends on how quickly your body recovers. Mine recovered very quickly, and I was fortunate to have that happen.

No matter how quick or slow yours is to recover, make an effort to adapt to your body's needs and make the best of it.

A FEW ADDITIONAL NOTES

In this chapter I have given you a short, but detailed course on how to become fitter, stronger, and build more muscle than you ever imagined. Still, there are some additional notes that I consider to be important to mention to all of you folks out there interested in improving your physique.

1. Go at your own pace: Many times, people get discouraged when they start a regime with someone and find that the other person grows more muscle than you or moves along a lot quicker than you. Don't get upset. There are many variables that affect this, from genetics, to rest, to nutrition, and alike. Many of these you are simply unable to control. Don't compare yourself to anyone else. Simply focus on you. Go at your own pace. Remember that determination and consistency are what gets you to the top.

2. Concentrate on you: This goes along with going at your own pace, but it has more to do with experienced lifters and bodybuilders. Many times, people who are new at the gym get discouraged when they watch fellow weightlifters and bodybuilders who've been working out for years outlift them 10 to 1 or look like unattainable figures of muscular perfection. Don't get discouraged. All of these guys have been there for many years and are ahead of you just because they started earlier. If you work just as hard as they do, eventually you will get to where they are. In any case, it doesn't really matter. Focus on you and what you can do.

3. Let go of ego lifting: This is a very big deal in all of bodybuilding and lifting. People often sacrifice good form and sacrifice correct lifting in an effort to pick up more weight than they really need to. When they

do, they cheat themselves out of perfect and ideal lifting form. This sacrifices the hypertrophy of the muscles and the capacity to build adequate muscular tissue. That is why it is so important to leave your ego at the door and lift according to your needs and abilities. Lift whatever you can with perfect form.

4. Set realistic Goals: This is a very important part of training. Many people get upset because they can't bench press 315 in the first month of training or because they still don't have 18-inch biceps despite a few months at the gym, or because their chest isn't yet in the 50-inch range. Why do these people get upset? Because their goals are not realistic. Nobody who hasn't trained intensely for years gets 18-inch biceps, a 55-inch chest, or a 315-pound bench press. In order to achieve that you have to work hard for months and years. That's why it is so important to set realistic goals and train according to your ability and dedication. This way you won't feel frustrated and you will be much more fulfilled.

A COMPLETE REGIME

This chapter has been dedicated to teaching you how to eat and train like me so that you can achieve your muscle goals, no matter what they may be.

I guarantee you that if you train hard like I did, eat correctly, rest correctly, use the right supplements and have the right attitude, you will become the best bodybuilder you can be.

Now, let's get to it. Nothing to it but to do it. Yeah buddy, light-weight baby!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE LONG ROAD TO 1998

“When it comes to Ronnie Coleman (in the early 90’s) he was so far back in the pack in my economy of a great bodybuilder... every time I looked at someone to measure where I stood it was never at Ronnie Coleman.” (1)

— Shawn Ray, hall of fame bodybuilder and 13-time Mr. Olympia Competitor.

MY MR. OLYMPIA LOSSES

During the course of my life, I visualized myself as many things. When I was a kid all I wanted to be was someone who made money, had a good family life, and lived a happy existence. When I was a teen all I wanted was to live a tranquil existence while making money. While in was college all I wanted was to be a big-time accountant and a professional football player. When I graduated college all I wanted was to secure a good job as an accountant. When I was a police officer all I wanted was to have a great life and be healthy.

Never, under any circumstances, nor in my wildest dreams as a kid, teen, college student, college graduate or police officer did I ever imagine myself as a bodybuilder, much less as a champion bodybuilder.

This is the story of how I found that championship.

MY PLAN AFTER 1991

Soon after I won my first major tournament, which was the 1991 Mr. Universe, in the heavyweight, at the championships in Katowice, Poland and got my Pro Card, I sat down to decide what my next step was.

I was pretty happy with what I had done up until that point. I knew I was good, but I knew that I could be beyond great; that I could be as good as or better than Lee Haney and be crowned as the best bodybuilder of all time.

Of course, I was still miles away from that, and I was going to have to work for years to reach the pinnacle, but I knew I was going to get there at some point.

All I had to do now was work my ass off, diet my ass off, do my best, and not take no for an answer no matter what it took. Sounds definitely easier said than done.

I was, of course, incredibly grateful for what was happening, and I was enjoying each and every step of the process, but I was sure I could do more with my career.

THE 1992 MR. OLYMPIA

The Mr. Olympia, like I mentioned before, was and still is the summit of the bodybuilding. It is the Super Bowl of the sport and winning it not only coronates you as the champion, but makes you a member of a very, very exclusive club to which only the best of all time belong to.

Once upon a time, Mr. Universe was that pinnacle in bodybuilding, but my friend Joe Weider decided to create a much better, much improved show only for those bodybuilders who were at an even higher level. I had, of course, already won the Mr. Universe, but now I had set my sights at the Olympia.

Originally, the Olympia was by invitation only, but now, in order to join the contest, you needed to qualify for it by placing in the top three in a major worldwide tournament, winning a pro bodybuilding show, or placing top five at the previous Mr. Olympia. Fortunately, however, my victory at the 1991 Mr. Universe had automatically qualified me for the Olympia. However, the victory was far from guaranteed.

All I had to do now was walk this road and get to my destination. Still, I didn't have any practice at any pro shows, so I had to sign up for as many competitions as possible in order for me to get more hours on stage.

Only a couple of months after I returned from Poland, in December of 1991, I signed up for my first Pro Show, which was the Chicago Pro. I didn't do too well in that one, placing only 11th, but I felt pretty good about it.

A little later I signed up for the Night of Champions in New York City, in which I got 14th. It wasn't an easy pill to swallow, as I felt that with the passing of each day, I was getting better. Still, I kept a positive attitude, knowing that it was just a matter of time before I got my first pro victory.

Meanwhile, I was still working full time at the Police Department at Arlington. I wasn't yet a veteran nor a big-time bodybuilder, so I couldn't take any days off from my job as an officer. I had to fly to the shows on the weekends. I flew the day of the competition and returned the very next day, making an effort to avoid missing any time at work.

My third professional show was the 1992 Mr. Olympia, which took place on September 12, 1992, in Helsinki, Finland. That was an important Olympia for the sport because this was the first year in almost a decade that Lee Haney wasn't competing, as he had retired a year before after his record breaking eight consecutive victories. He

could have kept on competing, as he was only 32 years old when he called it quits, but he had already achieved the all-time record and felt like he had nothing else to prove. He left it wide open for the next competitor.

I knew that this winner wasn't going to be me. I was very new, I was still learning the sport, and I was far from being in the shape of many of the guys around me.

There were about 25 of us that day in Finland when British bodybuilder Dorian Yates hit the stage with a mass and thickness that nobody else had ever seen before. His muscles were like boulders of granite: hard, defined and gigantic. He destroyed the competition, getting his first of six consecutive wins.

My good friend Kevin Levrone was the runner-up, followed by Lee Labrada, Shawn Ray and several other bodybuilders. I got dead last, placing 16th along with several other athletes, including Lou Ferrigno, who was competing in his last show ever.

In the Mr. Olympia, no matter how many competitors there are, every single one gets to hit the stage alone in front of the judges, posing solo, showing off his muscles trying to impress the audience. We all pass one by one, but only those ranked in the top 10 by said judges get what we, in the industry, call a "call back", where they are asked to pose with the other top bodybuilders for comparison.

Immediately after this comparison round, the judges start calling off one by one until they reach number one, who is the champion. That first year, in 1991, I didn't even get a call back.

I wasn't disappointed. I was pretty happy to be one of the top 16 bodybuilders in the world, and I knew that my career was just beginning. Besides, I won 1,200 dollars and a medal, which was a great bonus. However, the golden thing was that I was there.

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I could reach this

show that quickly. Only two years before I had been security there, and now I was one of them.

THE 1993 MR. OLYMPIA DROUGHT

1993 wasn't the best year for me. I kept on dieting, I kept working hard, I kept cutting, kept growing, kept getting better and I kept going to pro shows, but I didn't win a single one. Therefore, I didn't qualify to the 1993 Mr. Olympia, which was, again, won by Dorian Yates.

That year I did three major shows. I did the Niagara Falls Pro Show in Canada and got 6th place, which was not enough to qualify. Then I did the Chicago Pro Show again and got 6th place. Then I did the Night of Champions in New York, but placed 10th, which was not enough either.

I could have done other shows, but I didn't have any more time off from the Police department, so I had to face the fact that I wasn't going to go to the Olympia that year.

This wasn't, however, something bad in the long run. To me, victories aren't always something good. Losing is an important part of the process, and many times, a loss can teach you a lot more than a win ever will. That 1993 Mr. Olympia non-qualification was a blessing in disguise, because it inspired me to train harder and work on each and every weak point, from posing, to eating, to lifting, to everything in between to get back to the Olympia in 1994.

THE 1994 MR. OLYMPIA

When 1994 started all that I had in my mind was to go back to the Mr. Olympia. I was a lot better than I had been the previous two years. My body was a lot bigger, I was much more defined, and I felt like I was in the best shape of my life up until that point.

Still, I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to win a local show, so I

decided to take the same route I took in winning my pro card, which was the international circuit.

I signed up for the 1994 Paris Grand Prix show as well as the 1994 Germany Grand Prix. This was a really great idea because, for some reason, I felt that I had a much better chance to place top three in Europe. I don't know if this was something real or just an idea I had, but it actually helped.

I placed third in both Grand Prixes and qualified for the 1994 Olympia.

These two victories were absolutely amazing because they were my two first professional international podium finishes. They put my confidence at an all-time high and were a key step in my journey towards the ultimate victory.

That year the Olympia was held in Atlanta, Georgia. I felt I was in much better shape, and this time I was called back for comparison judging. I finished in 15th place, which was vastly better than I did the year before by not qualifying and slightly better than I did two years earlier.

The victor that year was, again, Dorian Yates, followed by Shawn Ray, and by Kevin Levrone. I wasn't anywhere close to them, but still relatively higher than my expectations.

I felt blessed. By this point I felt like my bodybuilding career was starting to take off. I was starting to make money from bodybuilding, traveling around the world for free (back in those days the IFBB paid for all your expenses), and getting into the best shape of my life. It was like a part time job from heaven.

THE 1995 MR. OLYMPIA

They say that winners travel the path to success slowly but surely.

They get better one step at a time, and even though they may take backward steps sometimes, the overall direction and tendency is that they are going up and forward.

This was definitely the case with me, and 1995 followed that trend graciously.

In 1995 I won my first major international professional contest, which was the Canada Pro Cup in Toronto. That was a great, awesome feeling.

Up until that point, despite climbing the road to success slowly, I had doubted myself multiple times. I began my bodybuilding career destroying the competition at my first show and got my pro card and to the Mr. Olympia incredibly fast.

But my journey as a professional bodybuilder hadn't gone that smoothly, and I was hitting snag after snag, severely doubting my possibilities of becoming the best in the sport. In the back of my mind I often thought that my career in the pros was going to be as easy as it was being an amateur, but it wasn't, not by far. Life is seldom this easy.

It was kind of like what happened to me after graduating from college. I took things for granted. I thought that right after graduation I was going to land a high paying job as an accountant. That, of course, didn't happen, and I had to wait a good couple of years before securing anything stable. The same thing happened in professional bodybuilding.

That victory in Canada took all doubts away and reminded me of how good I could really be.

That year the Olympia was held again in Atlanta, and again, the winner was Dorian Yates for his fourth consecutive victory, placing him third all-time up until that point, just behind Lee Haney's eight wins, Arnold's seven and ahead of Frank Zane's three.

Second place was my man Kevin Levrone, who was at the top of his game and easily could have beaten Dorian with a couple of votes going the other way. Third place was Nasser el Sonbaty, who was in the top shape of his career.

I finished 11th place, a substantial improvement from the previous years, putting me almost in the top ten bodybuilders in the world up until that time. I felt like I was doing really, really well.

THE 1996 MR. OLYMPIA

1996 was a great, great leap for me. By that time, I was already 32 years old, my strength was growing substantially. I was already deadlifting 700+ pounds for reps, squatting 700+ pounds for reps and Bench pressing nearly 500. I wasn't yet at my top form in strength and nowhere near where I was going to be in terms of size, definition, thickness, density and symmetry, but I was getting there.

The shape of the Ronnie Coleman that would come to dominate the bodybuilding scene for the better part of an entire decade was starting to emerge like a sculpture taking form from a solid piece of granite at the hands of a great artist. It wasn't yet finished, but it was taking form substantially.

The other big-time bodybuilders were starting to notice me, which was simply unthinkable just a year before.

My plan to qualify for the Olympia was basically to repeat what I did before. My philosophy of life has been to walk the roads to success that I am familiar with. Hence, I decided to sign up for the Canada Pro Cup in Toronto. And just as it had happened the year before, I won again, securing my spot at the 1996 Mr. Olympia.

That year, the competition was held in Chicago, Illinois, in the same arena where I had lost the Chicago Pro a couple of years before that.

It wasn't my favorite venue, but I felt that I was in a much, much better shape than I was just a couple of years earlier.

The guys competing alongside me were fierce. There was of course, Dorian Yates, who won his fifth straight title, followed by Shawn Ray and Kevin Levrone, both hitting the podium for another great but nevertheless frustrating year for them. Up and coming heir apparent Flex Wheeler, master of symmetry and definition, who I think had the best genetics in the planet, placed fourth.

In addition to them there were other amazing competitors, but this year the judges felt like I was better than a lot of them and granted me 7th place. However, this year drug testing was implemented at the Olympia for several banned substances, and Nasser el Sonbaty, who had originally been placed at 3rd, was disqualified for testing positive for a forbidden diuretic.

This moved me up from 7th to 6th, making me 12,000 dollars in the process, which was about about a three-month salary as a police officer for me. It was a lot of money and I felt incredibly proud to complement my income with what was now a pretty substantial sum of money; 10 times higher than what I had made at the first Olympia.

THE 1997 MR. OLYMPIA

1997 was a difficult year for me and my bodybuilding career. My 6th place at the Olympia had set up some pretty high expectations for me. Dorian Yates was near the end of his career, tearing a couple of muscles irreparably and setting up the stage for a new heir apparent. I didn't know if that was going to be me, but someone new was going to hold the Sandow Trophy (named in honor of one of the fathers of bodybuilding, Eugen Sandow) at the 1997 Mr. Olympia, and at the very least I was eventually going to move up.

So, I worked extra hard during that year. I prepared thoroughly for

each and every competition. I ate extra disciplined, measuring my food and water intake to the nearest gram and millimeter, working out the precise muscle groups in the most diligent and deliberate way and taking my prep up to the day of the contest to the limit. In fact, I was eating 100 grams of carbs every single day, drinking 2 full gallons of water, eating 2 grams of protein per pound of bodyweight and dehydrating precisely up until the days of competition. It was a very exact formula, and I was following it to the last detail.

However, despite all my efforts, 1997 was a dark year for me. I was competing all around the clock, traveling to Europe, and all over the country in bodybuilding shows.

I was finally invited to the Arnold Classic, which was the second biggest bodybuilding show in the world. To get there you didn't have to qualify, but rather be invited. The lineup was basically the same one as the Mr. Olympia, and I felt pretty good at the fact that I had scored 4th place, ahead of guys like Kevin Levrone, who had beaten me previously.

This 4th place was a breath of fresh air, as I had felt that it was setting me up for a great year. Reality, however, struck me a few months later.

The IFBB Ironman Pro Invitation came along in the summer, and I was invited to participate. The lineup was pretty weak, and the only guy that I felt could beat me was Flex Wheeler. Aside from him, I was the only big name. The rest, I thought, were mostly rookies and amateurs. A top three finish would land me a spot at the 1997 Mr. Olympia. Therefore, in my mind, I knew that I was pretty much a shoo-in for the victory.

I did really good on stage. I was the biggest and most massive guy there. Kevin Levrone, Shawn Ray, Nasser, Chris Cormier and the rest of the giants had not accepted the invitation, so it was pretty much me

against Flex. I posed well, looked massive, lean and muscular and felt that I had done a tremendous job to beat my dear friend Flex. How wrong I was.

Out of nowhere came a tiny little guy named Lee Priest, who was only about 5 foot 2 in height. He came in and ranked so high that, by the end of the comparative judging, it was just him, Flex and me standing on the platform. I was sure I was going to win, but as we waited for the head judge to announce the winner, Lee stood there looking at me while a bright, almost satirical smile, as though he knew something was going on. My body was three times the size of his, and I felt like a giant standing next to a dwarf. Confidence was booming inside me.

Just then, the head judge opened his mouth and said:

“The winner is... Flex Wheeler.” That was no biggie. Flex was a beast. I wasn’t thrilled, of course, but a silver medal was a pretty good deal.

Second place, wouldn’t you know it. Wasn’t me. The judge announced. “Second, Lee Priest.”

I was shocked. I couldn’t believe it. Lee smiled back at me with pride and walked towards his trophy, leaving me empty in a room filled with thousands of people.

I figuratively fell emotionally and physically. My heart collapsed and my entire world vanished.

Still, I wasn’t about to quit. I had to return and continue working on myself in order to prepare for the 1997 Olympia, which I had already qualified for.

That Olympia was held at the Terrace Theater in Long Beach, California. Despite my traumatic experience with Lee Priest I felt that I had what it took to improve upon my performance the year before and

maybe even break the top five. Dorian Yates wasn't at his best, and there were only 13 of us competing that year, so I felt pretty good going in.

The initial solo posing felt great. I showcased my perfectly defined muscles, showing off for the judges and got my call back very early, which was definitely good news.

As always, the top 10 guys got call backs, and I didn't think anything of it. Things were flowing smoothly, and I felt really good coming in.

In the competitive showing however, something very weird happened that day. Despite posing with two torn biceps and not being in the best shape of his life by far, Dorian was crowned king of the Olympia ahead of Nasser el Sonbaty, who looked amazing. I remember Nasser was so upset he walked off stage screaming, saying he had been robbed of the title.

Behind him were both Shawn and Kevin, perpetual contenders, who also weren't very happy with the placing they got. I was pretty sure I was going to score next, which would have been fifth and an automatic qualification to the 1998 Mr. Olympia (not to mention a \$15,000-dollar prize).

Paul Dillet, (world-famous today for created the WFBB which, among other things, ranks the most beautiful fit women on the planet) who had competed at the Mr. Olympia next to me since 1994 and who had always placed in top five, beat me to the 5th spot. I hadn't even expected that.

However, the 6th place was next, which would have tied my placing at the previous Olympia but would have been an improvement considering I only got 6th place in 96 because Nasser had been disqualified (I actually got 7th). I was more than happy with that placing.

Would you guess what happened next? Lee Priest, of all people, again came in from nowhere with his small size and got 6th place. I couldn't believe it. Again, he scored ahead of me.

And wouldn't you know it, I didn't even get 7th or 8th, I scored 9th place, which was fourth to last.

ALMOST QUITTING

I was heartbroken. I had felt incredibly good coming and thought that I may have been good enough to podium. Of course, this wasn't the case, but a ton of guys around me, including some of the bodybuilders who placed ahead of me, as well as many of the fans and members of the audience felt that I looked great... maybe even good enough to win.

I remember this older gentleman, who turned out to be a prestigious bodybuilding journalist, approached me and said:

"I would have given you at least third place. I don't know what happened tonight."

I couldn't agree with him more, but neither him, nor me, nor the audience have final say in anything. Bodybuilding is a highly subjective sport and judging the perfection of the human body depends on many factors that are largely out of your control. You could look the best to one judge and the worst to another. It's all a mystery to me, to be honest.

"Thank you, sir." I told him with a feigned relaxation. "But it is what it is."

I took my 6,000-dollar prize (half of what I made the previous year), honorably received my medal, gave a fake smile to the crowd and walked backstage with my brow lower than the Mariana Trench at the bottom of the ocean.

I changed and took a cab back to the hotel, where I cried for hours. I couldn't believe that after so much hard work and dedication my efforts hadn't paid off in the slightest. Not only had I not placed high enough in the Mr. Olympia to automatically qualify for next year's competition, but I hadn't won a single show in over a year.

"What the hell am I doing here?" I asked myself. "Is all of this trouble really worth it?"

Doubt swept through my mind like an F-5 tornado through a decrepit wooden barn. I thought that I had lost my drive, my confidence, and most importantly, my willpower to succeed and be relentless, which had been my number one characteristic throughout the years.

My girlfriend at the time, Vicky Gates, who was also a bodybuilder, consoled me like a mother would take care of a sad, lonely child. I will talk about her in more detail later, but it's important to mention that if it were not for her, I would have quit that very night.

"I don't think this is for me." I told her as the tears came down my eyes. "I'm done with this bodybuilding stuff."

Right there she stopped hugging me and looked at me right in the eyes with a fearsome face.

"Ronnie, shut up. You are not going to quit. You got 9th place, which means you are the 9th best bodybuilder in the world. You are the 9th most muscular man in the planet, and beyond that you are the most go-getter, hustling, resilient person I have ever met. You are not a quitter, and you are not going to start now."

Her words swept in me like an antibiotic of pain. Suddenly, I came to my senses and got myself together. I have never been a quitter and I wasn't going to start now. The war wasn't over because one battle is lost. Besides, if I had decided to quit, I was probably going to lose my free membership at Metroflex and I was going to disappoint Brian... so

no deal. No quitting. I was going to go back to the Olympia as many times as I could until I won.

The only problem now was that I had to win something to qualify for the 1998 Olympia.

KEVIN LEVRONE TEACHES ME HOW TO WIN

I had no time to lose. I still had a year to compete for the 98 Olympia, but I wasn't going to leave anything to chance. I knew that I had to step things up in my training and sign up for as many contests as possible to get my qualification to the 1998 Mr. Olympia done. I did just that and signed up for the 1997 Russia Grand Prix, which was just two months after the 97 Olympia.

That competition was to be held in Moscow, and whoever won that would automatically qualify for the Mr. Olympia. The competition was fierce, as all the big dogs, including Kevin Levrone, Nasser, Shawn Ray, Chris Cormier and Paul Dillet were going to be there.

I had to win, there was no way around it. I knew that I still had several competitions left before the 98 Olympia, but I had to qualify as early as possible to focus exclusively on my training and get that out of my mind.

I remember we were all staying at the Grand Hotel in Moscow. It was snowing and, with the wind chill factor, the weather was probably down into the -40s. We couldn't go out, so we had to stay in the hotel for a couple of days waiting for the competition to come along.

I knew I had time to kill, so I took upon a strategy I had applied back in my days at Grambling both as an accounting major and as a football player. In order to be the best, I had to learn from the best. That's exactly what I had done when I wanted to become a great middle linebacker. I asked the guy in first string how he did it and learned more than I ever thought I could. In accounting I asked a great

professor who owned an accounting firm all the questions I could, and boy did it help in learning the trade.

Now I had to learn all that I could from one of the champions who was staying at the hotel. There were a ton of friendly guys out there, but I decided to try Kevin Levrone. Not only was he the best at that time (he had won six straight shows), but he had been very nice to me in the past and had motivated me to keep working hard in the sport despite not yet being the best.

I didn't know what room he was staying at, so I called the front desk. In their broken Russian-accented English they told me he was staying in room 9201. I walked over to 9201 and, with all the humility in the world, I knocked on the door.

A few seconds later, Kevin opened up, surprised but smiling at me.

"Hey, what's going on, big dog?" He said with a great demeanor.

"Kevin, what you doing? I wanna ask you something."

"Sure." He said as he opened the door and invited me in. "Fire away, brother."

"What's your trick? What are you doing to win all these shows?" I asked him as I sat down.

Kevin looked at me and, with all sincerity and compassion, uttered the most magical words I have heard in my life.

"Man, Ronnie, you know what your problem is? You're too tense, buddy."

"I am?" I asked him.

"Yeah, man. You're sitting here measuring your food, your water, not missing a single workout, and not enjoying anything. What you gotta do is just relax."

I realized he had a point, but I wasn't exactly sure of what he meant.

Kevin stood up, walked to the mini-fridge and took out a bottle of cold vodka from inside.

He poured two shots in two coffee mugs.

"Drink some of this, man, you'll feel better." He told me.

I wasn't sure if I wanted to drink anything. I hadn't had a drink in a very long time, and bodybuilders weren't supposed to drink any alcohol, much less the day before a show.

"You sure about this, Kevin?" I asked him.

"Yeah, I'm sure. You'll be alright." There was so much determination in his voice that it didn't doubt it for a second.

I took the shot, feeling as the near-frozen acidic substance flowed down my throat. I felt instantaneously relaxed. Kevin noticed it.

"You feel the relaxation, man?" He asked.

"I sure do, buddy."

It was true. For the first time in months I felt completely at peace. No pressure to win, no need to prove anything to anybody and no need to feel the best. I was me. And that's all I needed to be.

After that beautiful moment I walked back to my room, but I couldn't sleep at all. Instead I spent the entire night going to the bathroom. I don't know what it was, but was peeing again and again.

THE 1997 MOSCOW GRAND PRIX

The next morning, after spending hours trying to fall asleep, I got up from the bed and went to the bathroom to take a shower.

Suddenly, however, when I looked at the mirror, I noticed

something very strange. My chest, shoulders legs and, especially my abs were a lot more defined than they were the night before. The muscular tissue was so chiseled that I could see every single vein popping through.

I looked at myself again, trying to clear my eyes because I couldn't believe the sight. Something had happened, and I didn't know what it was.

Suddenly, it hit me. The alcohol was the cause of my repeated trips to the bathroom. This, of course, had dehydrated me completely to the point where my body was much more defined than it had ever been. I looked the best I had up until that point.

Later that day, when I arrived at the competition, everyone, including Flex, Shawn, Nasser, Chris, the rest of the bodybuilders and Kevin himself looked at me with awe. They all noticed the change in my body.

Kevin walked to me and said, with a smile. "I told you, big dawg."

That night, there was no contest. I blew everyone away, getting first place by unanimous result.

I couldn't believe it. I beat all my rivals by a landslide, destroying not only my self-imposed ideal of never being able to win, but everyone's expectations of me going forward. However, most importantly, I had qualified for the 1998 Mr. Olympia and got to a point where I could win it. If I beat those guys in Russia, there was no reason I couldn't beat them at the Olympia.

It was only a matter of time. Kevin had shown me that relaxation in addition to dehydration were essential parts of the process in addition to everything else, even as important as training hard.

To this day, I am grateful for Kevin for showing me that trick.

1998 Mr. Olympia, here I come.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE 1998 MR. OLYMPIA

“I knew he could be Mr. Olympia one day. There’s no man who trains harder anywhere. I truly believe that if Ronnie put his mind to it, he could set the all-time record in powerlifting and not only be the greatest bodybuilder of all time but the greatest powerlifter of all time also. I think Ronnie could’ve been Mr. Olympia until he was 45 or 50 years old if he wanted to be.” (1)

— Brian Dobson, Ronnie’s trainer, mentor, and owner and operator of the Metroflex Gym in Arlington, Texas.

THE BIRTH OF A CHAMPION

I started 1998 with two straight victories, one at the Night of Champions in New York and the second one at the Toronto Pro Invitational, which was an invite only tournament held in that great Canadian city, where I had already won before.

I had already qualified to compete at the Mr. Olympia the year before and we were more focused on getting in the best shape possible to win the Olympia. Hence, we decided to sign me up to these two as well as a variety of smaller tournaments. The more I was on stage the better.

In addition, I wanted to learn what a champion was really about. At that point Flex Wheeler was at the top of his game, and just like I did with Kevin before, I wanted to learn as much as I could from the man at the top of the mountain in order to increase my game.

Flex knew that I was going to be one of his main competitors, but despite this he was a real sportsman, and he gave me some of the best advice I have ever received in my entire life.

“Who does your nutrition Ronnie?” He asked me in his calm voice.

“I do, man.” I answered.

“Nah man, you gotta get someone specialized to do it for you. I go to the best nutritionist ever, and he’s helped me make gains in every single category. He gives me the supplements, vitamins, guides my food intake and has helped me a lot.”

“If he’s the best, I need to know his name and his number then.” I told him with determination.

Sure enough, Flex gave me the number for his dietician: Chad Nichols based out of St. Louis, Missouri. It turned out that this guy wasn’t only Flex’s nutritionist, but that of some the top guys at the Olympia, including Nasser el Sonbaty, Chris Cormier, and several others.

MY NUTRITIONIST

A couple of days after Flex gave me this golden piece of advice, I made a telephone appointment with Chad Nichols (albeit, after a lot of persistence). I made the investment in the cost of the consultation, but it made all the difference in the world to me.

Chad was and still is a genius. Right when we started to talk he asked me my weight, bodyfat percentage, how much I was working out and how much I was eating.

After I told him, he immediately said: “You’ve got it all wrong Ronnie. You are winning the shows in spite of your diet and workout routine, not because of it.”

“What do you mean?” I asked him.

“Well, your lifting routine is great, but other than that you have to double everything. You have to double your cardio, you have to double your calorie intake, and you have to take a ton of supplements.”

“Okay, perfect.” I told him. “Let’s do it.”

“I’m gonna give you a full list of foods and supplements you need to take. If you start doing this, you will be a champion.”

That’s all I needed to hear. I did exactly what he told me. I doubled my cardio, doubled the amount of food and bought everything he told me. Some of the supplements I had no idea what they were, but Flex had given me the name of a guy who could supply them no problem. I bought them and started taking them a couple of days after. In total, I had to take about 60 pills and tablets a day.

That made all the difference. My energy increased exponentially, as did my cutting, and my overall results. It felt simply majestic, but I still had a lot of work to do before I won.

DORIAN YATES RETIRES

Bodybuilding is a sport of eras. For some strange reason, once someone jumps into the sport and starts winning, it’s very, very hard for someone to knock them out while they’re at the top. Most of the time there’s never a new champion until the creator of that dynasty retires.

Many, however, have tried to oust a current champion and have failed. Franco Columbu failed repeatedly when trying to knock Arnold Schwarzenegger out, Dorian Yates had failed trying to kick out Lee Haney, and Nasser el Sonbaty, Flex, Kevin, Chris and Shawn all failed when trying to defeat Dorian.

There were, of course, sporadic situations where champions were defeated in their prime, such as Sergio Oliva at the 1969 Olympia, but these were notable exceptions.

Hence, when Dorian Yates announced his retirement at the start of the 1998 season, everyone knew that the stage was wide open for a new champion.

Kevin Levrone, Shawn Ray, Chris Cornier, Nasser el Sonbaty were all competing, but it was more than apparent that the new champion was going to be Flex.

Flex arrived at the bodybuilding scene in 1993 and had gone from getting his pro card to destroying every single show he competed in. He won absolutely everything: the Arnold Classic, the Ironman, the pro shows of Europe, the pro shows of Canada, and the pro shows back home. Nobody had ever seen anything like him. His symmetry, his size, his genetics, his flexibility and his posing routine were simply superb. No one was going to beat him. There was just no way.

1998 was going to be the year of the Flex. Everybody knew it. Flex knew it, the audience knew, the journalists knew it, and I knew it.

MY 1998 GOAL

Despite my heavy training and dieting, realistically I knew that I had no chance at winning the 1998 Mr. Olympia. There was just no way. I had, of course, beaten them all the year before in Russia, but when I got to the pumping room in Madison Square Garden on the night of the Olympia, I saw things I never even imagined.

Everyone was in a much better shape than they had ever been. Kevin looked more massive than ever, Shawn looked like a statue made by the hands of the gods, Nasser carried a chip on his shoulder due to his defeat the year before, and Flex looked better than he ever had. He was the sultan of symmetry, and he carried a swagger of

confidence in him that, in my eyes, simply made him unbeatable.

Everyone had told him he was going to win, including some of the judges. We were all simply there to compete for the second place, and personally, all I wanted was to place in the top six, maybe in the top five. The prize for 5th place was 20,000, almost half my year's salary as a police officer. Furthermore, I had only recently been sponsored by supplement brand MET-RX. They were paying me 55,000 dollars per year and all I needed to do to keep that contract was wear their t shirts, appear in their photoshoots, and land in the top 10 at the Mr. Olympia. So, if I landed in 5th place I was going to be a very happy camper.

THE TRAINING ROOM

The moment I walked into the waiting room to undress and start pumping out everyone's eyes turned to me. I didn't know why at the time, but every single bodybuilder there was opening their mouths in total amazement.

I didn't need to hear what they were thinking, as their eyes said everything. They thought I looked like a beast of muscular perfection. Shawn, Nasser, Kevin, Chris, my tormentor Lee Priest and even Flex were looking at me with awe. Within them, they thought they were seeing the new champion.

I thought they were hallucinating. I looked at myself in the mirror and felt pretty good about where I was at, but I was nowhere near the shape these guys were in, especially Flex, who had the best genetics in the world.

Humbly, I went about my own business, pumping up my muscles and oiling myself up to look good as I waited for my call out during the prejudging.

Bodybuilding competitions like the Olympia are structured in a very

specific way. First there's the prejudging, where all the competitors go out to the stage and perform in front of the judges. No fans. The arena is closed to the public. This is where most of the points are awarded. This is called the symmetry round, and all contestants are judged based exactly on that trait.

After that, we go out and compete together in groups for a comparative judging round. We are placed in different groups and go out and perform together in the same poses. After that we go out for individual posing. Then, the top ten guys are issued a call back and go out for another round of comparative judging. Then the top five or six guys get one last call back. Then, one after the other they are given their final placing until only the top two guys remain. There, the winner is declared, and the competition ends.

That day, during the initial prejudging, I felt pretty good and confident in myself. Everyone was doing really well, and even though I didn't expect to win, my chances of scoring top five were really high.

Suddenly, from behind, just after we finished the prejudging, I felt a familiar voice call out my name. I turned around it was no other than the father of bodybuilding himself, Joe Weider, the creator of the Mr. Olympia and the cultivator of champions.

"Ronnie, just wanted to tell you that you look amazing." He said in his particular Canadian accent.

"Thank you, Mr. Weider." I said with shyness.

He smiled and walked away.

That should've been a pretty good indicator of things to come, (as he didn't talk to anyone else and left the room), but I still didn't believe it.

I had been through too many disappointments during the course of the last year to get my hopes up. It was kind of like being inside a

dream. Everything was happening very slowly, and I felt like I was outside of my own body. I was physically there, but I was so nervous but excited about what was to come (I guess a part of me did know I was going to win that night) that I couldn't process it. It was like a system overload, and all I was thinking was that I'd be very happy placing top five or six.

THE OPENING CEREMONY

After the prejudging is over with, the time comes for the posing to occur in front of the fans. This is the best part of the show, and I was super excited to start. Like I said before, consciously knew I wasn't going to place higher than fifth. I was just happy to be there, but Joe Weider's words, plus the eyes of my fellow competitors were making me uneasy. What if there was a real chance of me winning? "Nah..." I thought to myself. "Joe's just being nice. I'll be happy if I get 5th place."

After a few minutes of eternal and everlasting pause, the introductory music to the show started. The Mr. Olympia was commencing.

Ben Weider, (president of the IFBB), and Joe Weider walked onto the stage, dressed in tuxedos, and officially opened the ceremony.

"Welcome to the Mr. Olympia." Ben said amongst a rain of applause. "This year, I would like to announce that after 54 years of continuous lobbying, we have officially been recognized by the Olympic Association as an olympic and real sport."

The auditorium went even louder. My heart was racing as I listened to the speech.

"This means that now, every single bodybuilder competing here tonight and everyone who does bodybuilding at any phase of the game, is now a real sportsman. Now, it's time to begin. We just came back from backstage, and we just saw these bodybuilding champions

that will blow your mind. Now sit back, relax and enjoy the best and biggest bodybuilding show of your lives.”

The room was rolled over by a massive applause. Mr. Weider’s speech had electrified the crowd and had energized me more than I have ever felt during my entire career. I felt honored and privileged, and no matter what happened, it was going to be okay.

THE COMPARATIVE JUDGING ROUND

Just as the Weider brothers proceeded backstage, all 18 of us bodybuilders were ordered to go on stage. The arena was decorated exquisitely with an ancient Greek theme, almost as though we were emulating Mount Olympus itself, cheering for another one of us that would forever be immortalized amongst the gods.

I was asked to stand in the middle of the pack, right next to Flex. This, of course was a good sign, but I was still very wary and skeptical of my possible victory. After all, Flex had already been told he was going to win.

The idea was for all of us to stand together and get called out to the front of the stage in groups of three for initial posing for the judges.

I was the first person to be called, and wouldn’t you know it, I was paired with no other than Flex and Nasser, the two favorites to win. This was an amazing thing, and I couldn’t contain my smile. Flex was very happy to see me next to him, and he proceeded to hug me before the posing even began.

A couple of seconds later, Jim Manion, the chief judge, started to tell us what poses we needed to do to show off our bodies.

“Double bicep.” He ordered. Immediately after, I proceeded to gracefully pose my arms around me in the most classic bodybuilding pose in the world. Nasser and Flex did it simultaneously.

“Lat spread.” He said as the applause cheered me on. We did just that, showcasing our massive and thick lats for the world to admire.

“Side chest.” Jim continued. “Back, double bicep.”

Flex, Nasser and I followed his command and moved in unison like a threesome of living sculptures. We looked like figures of perfection and conveyed a flawlessness that could only be a product of three of the best bodybuilders of all time.

Now that I come to think of it, I should’ve been pretty confident standing there. The three of us were the first being called, it was no coincidence that we scored first, second and third place in that competition.

INDIVIDUAL POSING

After the comparative judging was done, it was time for the individual posing. Each of us was going to be called out and asked to perform our favorite and personal posing routine in front of the audience and the judges at the tone of a song of our choice.

I wasn’t the first, nor second nor third being called back. In fact, I wasn’t even in the top five, nor in the top ten, nor in the top fifteen. I only got called back at 16th. That of course, worried me extensively.

“What if I had my chance to win and my initial posing was so bad that I shot myself in foot?” I thought to myself. “What if my chances of winning are over?” I started to horrify myself, thinking that I was done.

However, I thought that at least I could get the judges back on my side performing the best individual posing routine I had ever done in my life.

Lee Haney, no less, was the person instructed to call me onto stage. “From Dallas, Texas, Ronnie Coleman.” He said with deep, sonorous voice just as a beautiful R&B song started to play loudly.

I came out smiling, dancing with a soft groove at the chants of the crowd roaring “Ronnie! Ronnie!”

I decided that the best course of action was to turn around and start with the highest card I had. This of course, was my massive, muscular, chiseled, granite-grade strong back. I graced the stage with elegance, posing my back by showing off the traps and rear delts along with a sweeping double bicep showcasing my 24-inch arms.

Immediately after, I switched to posing the middle back, showing off my gigantic lats for the world to see. After that, I moved on to a front pose, showing my flexed chest, and then turned to a most muscular pose, letting the audience and judges see my massive traps from the front in addition to the thick but fine borders between my triceps, biceps and forearms.

The routine lasted about two minutes, but I was so deep into it that I poured more sweat than I normally did in a two-hour session in the stair master at top intensity. Maybe it was the combination of extreme hot lights plus the tension, the energy and the burning desire of wanting to win. I felt like I burned off every single gram of fat within me, turning me into a monster of muscle.

THE FINAL POSING

Like in every bodybuilding competition, the 1998 Mr. Olympia was followed by a final call back. Before that however, Joe Weider asked all the competitors to walk back to the stage so he could personally hand us our medals. After that, the top 10 guys would be asked onto stage for one final pose-off.

Joe came out and gave all of us our coveted medals, and when he put mine over my shoulders, he gave me a big bright smile. I knew that I was on the right track, even though I didn't know how far I was really going to get.

Soon after, Wayne Demilia, the master of ceremonies, walked to the podium and told us he was going to call the top 10 competitors over to the stage one by one, for the final pose off.

“Flex Wheeler.” He said as the audience cheered. “Mike Matarazzo... Jean Pierre Fux... Nasser el Sonbaty... Kevin Levrone... Shawn Ray...”

I started to get nervous. The number of spots were running out and I still wasn't being called.

“Chris Cormier... Ernie Taylor... and Lee Priest.”

For a second, I thought my world had collapsed. Lee Priest, the Ronnie Coleman killer, had been called and my name hadn't been announced yet. I didn't realize that they had only called nine names and only one was missing. Finally, the master of ceremonies called me.

“And Ronnie Coleman.”

I walked down the ramp into the lower stage, where a massive applause was waiting for me. Flex saluted me with a pat on the back, almost as if he was saying “You belong here, with us.”

Mr. Demilia then said, “A big applause for the eight competitors who didn't make it for the top ten.”

The audience applauded with joy as the rest of the walked out of the stage.

Immediately after, we were instructed to pose together, showcasing our muscles for comparison while the judges made up their minds as to who was going to be crowned the champion of champions and in what order.

After about five minutes of posing, the judges called for us to relax, as they were going to name the spots 10-7, leaving behind the

remaining six for a posing finale.

Again, Mr. Jim Manion, the top judge, took the microphone to name the competitors. For the last six Olympias I had been placed in this group. Even in the one I got sixth place I didn't get a spot in the posing finale because my sixth place was obtained after Nasser's disqualification, so I had never held that honor.

I hoped to God that this wouldn't be a repeat of the last competitions.

"Number ten, Jean Pierre Fux." He said as Jean Pierre walked towards him to get his medal.

"Number nine, Mike Matarazzo." Matarazzo did the same.

"Number eight, Ernie Taylor." There was just one spot left in the top six, and aside from the perennial contenders of Nasser, Chris, Shawn, Kevin, and Flex, it was just me and Lee Priest who were standing there. I didn't want to lose to him again.

"Number seven, Lee Priest." That phrase relaxed me like nothing else before. I had finally landed a genuine top six place at the Olympia. I knew that no matter what happened, I was going to be a happy camper. I had beaten my 9th place of the year before and was, at the very least, going to make \$14,000 dollars and keep my MET-RX contract.

Now it was time for me, and the other top six bodybuilders in the world, Kevin Levrone, Flex Wheeler, Nasser el Sonbaty, Chris Cormier and Shawn Ray, (who had all won many more competitions than me and had all podiumed at the Olympia at least once), to pose with me one last time to deliver the final champion.

As the music started once again, the six of us followed the guidelines of the head judge and showcased our muscles by group. We had already let them see almost everything, but the judges wanted

us to display our best poses so that they could make their final decisions. I was standing right next to Flex and Nasser and was so happy that I felt like I was flying into the highest heights of success, tranquility, achievement, and victory.

After a couple of minutes, the master of ceremonies proceeded to silence the crowd to give the final announcement. Before he shut them up however, I started to hear what I thought were chants of the audience screaming “Ronnie! Ronnie!” At first, I couldn’t believe it. I thought that my mind was playing tricks on me. After a few seconds, however, I realized that I was right. This time they weren’t calling out my name because I was on the stage solo, but because I was doing better than some of the greatest bodybuilders in the history of the sport.

“Now...” Said Mr. Demilia as my heart started pumping faster. “Time to crown the winner of this great contest. Without further ado...”

“Sixth place...” I was sure he was going to say my name next. A part of me believed that I could win it, but realistically I knew that I wasn’t going to land in the top five no matter what happened. “...Chris Cormier.”

The audience clapped as Chris walked over to the judge to take his medal and his check for \$14,000. Now, no matter what happened, I was going to be ecstatic with joy. Fifth place had been my ultimate goal, and now it was real.

“Fifth place...” I got ready to start walking when he surprised me with. “Shawn Ray...”

My heart started beating faster.

“Fourth place... Kevin Levrone.” This was just surreal. I was going to podium and get at least 35,000 dollars in pay.

Right then and there I looked around and suddenly realized that it

was just me Nasser, and Flex. This time I was sure I was going to go next. The three of us had started this competition a couple of hours before, and now it was time for us to finish it. This was Flex's year, and he was going to win for sure, but Nasser had felt that he been robbed of the title the year before, so this was most likely when I was leaving.

"Third place... Nasser el Sonbaty." I couldn't believe it. I had displaced Nasser, of all people, someone who had always consistently beaten me and who had been at the top for a long, long time. I kind of felt bad for him, though, as the disappointment on his face was vivid... he was going to have to wait an entire year to get this opportunity again; boy I knew what that was like.

Right then, while it was just me and Flex, he turned towards each other one another. No matter what happened, we were winners and lifelong friends. I wouldn't have been there if it wasn't for him.

"Second place..." The audience stood still. Lee Haney, my hero and eight-time Mr. Olympia, the best ever, walked over to us with the first-place trophy in hand, ready to hand it to us whenever the winner would be announced.

The wait was eternal. I remember I looked up at the lights on stage, turned my head to every side to look at the audience, and tried to think about anything except the tension of not knowing who was going to win. Suddenly, I heard the chants of "Ronnie! Ronnie" again from the audience.

"Second place..." The judge repeated. "Flex Wheeler."

In that instant, I was so shocked by the news that I simply collapsed into the floor, letting go of the frustration that had plagued me for such a long time, through years of training at the gym nonstop, traveling around the world and juggling that with my work at the Police department. I was the champion, and no one could take that away

from me.

Flex turned towards me and hugged me while I was on the ground, telling me “You got it, Ronnie. You got it.”

I wish I could tell you I remember what happened next. But I don't. The shock was so overwhelming and amazing that I simply don't have memory of that event.

A CHANGING ON THE GUARD

The most unexpected moment of my life was, almost paradoxically, the moment I had longed for and worked for extensively for years and year.

Everything I had ever done with my life had been a sort of prelude to that wondrous moment in Madison Square Garden. It had been the biggest Mr. Olympia ever, and to me it was the greatest and best moment of my life.

Looking back at it now it was definitely a changing of the guard. The only British Mr. Olympia ever, Dorian Yates, was lowering his flag and I was pulling mine up to rule and look over Mount Olympus to look over the ancient Gods and reside in the hall of champions for eternity.

It was supposed to be Flex's turn, and even though at the time I thought I had been extremely lucky to win, the reality is completely different. Through the years, bodybuilding experts, journalists and even hall of fame bodybuilders (including Flex himself) have said that I won that battle because I had one of the greatest bodies to ever grace the Mr. Olympia. Flex had one too, as he always did, but mine was completely over the top.

Like I said before, Flex had the best genetics in the world, but I outworked him. I never skipped a workout and never cheated on my diet, while Flex sometimes did.

This all yielded dividends, and while facing the champion to be, I defeated him mano a mano, and crowned myself as the most muscular man on the planet.

Still, I would be remiss and ungrateful if I didn't thank my good friend Flex for the support he gave me prior, during, and after the competition in addition to the advice on finding a nutritionist and taking the adequate supplementation. If it weren't for that I would have never won the Mr. Olympia. Flex is a great person, and one of the finest sportsmen I have ever had the pleasure of meeting.

Up next was my quest to fulfill Joe Weider's words and create the Ronnie Coleman era of bodybuilding, dominating the scene like Dorian, Lee, Arnold and Sergio Oliva had done before me.

PART FOUR

THE BEST BODYBUILDER EVER



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MY GOLDEN ERA

“To get to that level you have to train like that. Ronnie had enormous amount of size and the quality of the muscle... that can’t be done just by sitting there and pumping 25, 30 or 40-pound dumbbells. He put the workload on his muscle to get them to a level where there were deep cuts, deep striations and hard work... that’s why his body prevailed. You saw that. If you are not willing to go to that place where he is going to, and train like that, and withstand that, and lift like that and do that, and do that, and do that, you don’t have a chance against him.” (1)

— Kevin Levrone, hall of fame bodybuilder

MY 1999 AND 2000 VICTORIES AT MR. OLYMPIA

Even after my awesome and unanimous victory at the 1998 Olympia, I still had serious doubts about my potential as a hall of fame bodybuilder. Of course, I knocked out some amazingly successful guys in their prime, but at the time I was still very skeptical about the possibilities of a repeat, or much less, the probabilities of creating a dynasty, like Lee Haney, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Dorian Yates and Sergio Oliva before me.

Even in the afterparty and celebration following the 1998 Mr. Olympia, when all the guys, including Kevin, Nasser, Chris, Shawn, Flex and a ton of other guys said that no one was anywhere near me that night, I was still dumbfounded at the fact that I had won, and

never did it cross my mind that I could still win the event.

I was, in fact, so unconvinced that when Joe Weider came to me in the minutes following my victory after party and told me they wanted to sign me to a sponsorship contract I didn't think I was worth that type of deal.

"You are going to be really great." He said. "You are going to be winning for a long time, and I want you right here with me."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Weider." I answered with utmost respect and humility. "But I think that I just got lucky. Flex and the other guys are very hungry, and they are going to beat me next year for sure."

"Nonsense Ronnie."

I accepted the opportunity of being sponsored by Weider. If Joe Weider believed in me, as he had in Sergio Oliva, Arnold, Lee, Frank Zane, Franco Columbu, Dorian Yates and all the champion bodybuilders before me, I was definitely going to prove him right. No matter what cost.

People have called me crazy for not believing in myself even when I reached the pinnacle, but I think that this helped me more than anything else in the world.

To me, remaining humble and, as Arnold would say, "Staying Hungry", is one of the most important characteristics of being successful in life, no matter your profession and your goals.

Whenever someone gets too comfortable, too cocky, too confident, and too self-assured about themselves and their possibilities of winning, they stop training as hard as they did when they were hungry, they don't focus as much as they did, and they don't have that big of a desire as they once had when they were hungry. That's why many champions don't repeat, and that's why some of the best teams fall off once they are crowned by the media as champions.

A great example that comes to me lies in professional football. Here in Dallas, there is no bigger craze in sports than the Dallas Cowboys. They are the city's main source of entertainment, and they have always been pushed to become the best. I remember in the early 90s the Cowboys were hungry for success and won two straight super bowls (in 92 and 93 in absolute dominating fashion). The victory had catapulted to so much fame that they started to take winning for granted.

They lost their hunger, their drive and their vision towards success. That's why in 1994 they lost the championship game due to stupid mistakes and only repeated their super bowl win in 1995 largely due to luck. By 1996 the engine collapsed, and the Cowboys haven't been back to the Super Bowl since. They lost their hunger, and victory defeated them.

On the other hand, the 1990s Chicago Bulls never took victory for granted. They fought each day as though it were their last, and always operated with the same formula that brought them to the ultimate title. That's why they won six championships in a span of seven years, only interrupting their winning streak when Michael Jordan temporarily retired after his father passed away. Victory only made them hungrier for success. They never let it defeat them.

I never let this happen to me. I always stayed hungry. Doubting my possibilities of victory propelled me to become better, more hardworking and more intense than I had ever been as a competitor. That's the only reason as to why I continued winning, and I am thankful that I pushed myself to make this happen.

If not, I would have probably only won two or at the most three Mr. Olympias.

TRAINING FOR THE 1999 MR. OLYMPIA

As it turns out, I wasn't the only one who doubted the possibilities of me repeating. The media, and many of my fellow bodybuilders felt that my win had been a fluke, and pretty much openly claimed that the 1999 championship was very much up in the air. I think that the only person who believed I was going to win was Joe Weider himself.

At the same time, Flex, who was my number one competitor, decided to train harder than he ever had. He had a goal in view: in 1999 he was going to win the Olympia.

This, however, didn't bother me. Of course, I was happy that the creator of bodybuilder was confident in my victory, but the fact that everyone doubted me made it even better for me. I felt that I had to work extra hard to prove one more time that I was the best. No problem for me.

I kept on doing the same. Working full-time for the police department and training hard six days a week at Metroflex and at the treadmill I had at home.

MY LIFE WAS CHANGING

By this point Ronnie Coleman's life was changing at an unimaginable rate. My salary, which had been about 100,000 a year, including the money I was receiving from MET-RX and the Police Department, jumped started all the way up to about a million dollars a year, ten times in a matter of nothing.

I was getting hired to do appearances, promotions, contests, endorsements, and a ton of advertising. It got to the point where I was working harder than I ever had. Not only was I a full-time bodybuilder, but now I was a full-time endorser and a full-time police officer.

At around the same time I got a loan to purchase a house in the Arlington Era. I looked around and chose a large, 4000 square foot house in a nice, quiet street. It had four bedrooms, two living rooms, a

sunroom (which I would later convert to a full-size gym with the same equipment as Metroflex) and a large kitchen. It was a beautiful home with fancy materials and a beautifully quiet setting. To this day, I still live in that house.

MY WORKOUT ROUTINE

A lot of people through the years have gotten to know me thanks to the videos people posted of me online. Most of these videos were shot at the Metroflex gym while I trained for upcoming Mr. Olympias.

People were pretty impressed to see me lift not only because of my size and muscularity, but due to the strength that I was acquiring through the years. A few of those videos were shot during training sessions for the 1999 Olympia, although most of them were shot for the 2001 Olympia.

By that time, in 199, I was 34 years old and felt like I was on the pinnacle of strength. I was training with 200-pound dumbbells for reps on the incline press, shoulder pressing 315 for reps in the barbell, doing lateral raises with 100-pound dumbbells and doing back rows with nearly 500 pounds. I was stronger than I ever had been, and this not only helped my bodybuilding career but propelled my fame forward to where I never thought it could reach.

This type of training was based upon using my God-given strength to my advantage. This was the number one key in creating a Ronnie Coleman dynasty in bodybuilding. No one else in the history of bodybuilding has had the level of strength that I did, and I used that to pump the muscles with a level of definition and size that no one could compete with.

Doing T-Bar rows with almost 500 pounds, squats with 800 pounds, deadlifts with 800 pounds, bench presses with 500 pounds, leg presses with 2300 pounds, front raises with 80 pounds, and dumbbell

shoulder presses with 170 pounds on each hand gave me the chance to build a body that no one else had. No one had that strength, so no one could have that body.

Amazingly, this jump-started a positive feedback loop which gave me more strength, which in turn allowed me to lift heavier weights and build the muscles even larger, which again, provided me with more strength... and round and round we went.

This was the secret behind creating my gigantic lats, massive arms, enormous legs, colossal traps, immense deltoids, titanic forearms, monumental calves, and miniature waste. Just like Sergio Oliva before me, I managed to create a waist that was smaller than my thighs, which was the epitome of what the perfect bodybuilder was all about.

Furthermore, I also followed the strictest of the strictest diets, took all my supplements and did 2 hours of cardio a day. This allowed me to improve myself upon my 1998 victory and create an even better Ronnie Coleman.

THE 1999 MR. OLYMPIA

By the time the 1999 Mr. Olympia rolled around, I was so focused and so confident that I pretty much knew I was going to win from the moment I hit the stage. Flex was looking better than ever, but by that time, I was long gone, and no one was going to catch me.

The 1999 victory was again, unanimous, and again, Flex got second place. By this time, however, this solidarity had been replaced by a fiercely driven desire to win, and he was so mad when he got called second place that he started to walk off the stage. He was about to leave when one of the guys (I think it was Kevin) pulled him back to the stage.

Flex decided to stay in front of the crowd, but this time, there were no congratulations or anything like that, but only a vibe of ferocious

competition that morphed into tension. The judges, however, had the final say, and I was crowned as Mr. Olympia for the second time.

This time, there was no talk of flukes or of winning by luck. All the guys congratulated me for my victory and figuratively opened the way for me to create my dynasty. Flex, like I said, was angry at what happened, but I eventually patched things up with him and I am glad to say that today we are the best friends.

Needless to say, more fame and more money started coming my way. Thankfully, I used that to fuel myself even more. I wanted to win the Mr. Olympia yet again.

THE 2000 MR. OLYMPIA

Anyone who is old enough to remember what the transition from 1999 to 2000 was like knows that it was a time of tension. Everything that circled around the world was that the planet was going to change because of the new millennium.

There were rumors of some sort of computer virus destroying all electronic systems due to a malfunction and people taking to the streets and rioting with unreachable demands.

This, of course, never happened, and 2000 started like any other year did. However, the important thing is that amidst the wind of change, the top bodybuilders were still saying that they were going to beat me. Flex, Kevin and the other guys weren't giving up, and by the time the 2000 Mr. Olympia came, they were in an even better shape than the previous year.

Unfortunately for them, so was I. I had trained harder than I ever did and won the Mr. Olympia again by unanimous decision. The podium was the same as the year before. First place me, second place Flex and third place Kevin.

This time Flex took it well. He congratulated me for my victory and pretty much let go of the notion that he was going to be Mr. Olympia while I was still a professional bodybuilder.

A SAD ENDING TO 2000

Despite all my triumphs in the world of bodybuilding, my family life suffered a tremendous blow by the end of the year. My grandma, who had raised me along with my mom, who had seen me grown from a small country boy to the most muscular man in the world, who had pushed me to become the best, who had taught me a massive work-ethic, who had taught me love, respect, and the importance of family, passed away from natural causes. She was just shy of her 100th birthday. She had been born at the beginning of the 20th century and had seen quite an array of changes. Her life started when the world was largely agriculturally based and ended when it was an empire of electronic telecommunications.

I hadn't spent too much time with her since I left home at age 18 to enroll in Grambling State University, but I still kept in contact with her through the years and always invited her to my bodybuilding contests. She couldn't go to all of them due to her age, but she did go to some, including my first Olympia victory. She was very proud of me, and I was extremely happy to see her smile when I received my very first Sandow trophy.

I was very sad to see her go. Of course, I helped my mom with all the funeral arrangements and practical matters, but beyond feeling grief for her passing we felt grateful for having been able to spend so much of our lives with this great woman.

Thank you, grandma. Thank you.

I was of course, sad to see her go, but by spending so much time in the police department, dealing with death on a daily basis, you get

accustomed to its reality and it doesn't affect you anymore as much as it does other people. No matter what happens and how healthy you are, one day you are going to die... and what better way to die than at the age of 100 after living a prosperous existence?

You have to keep on digging and working. That's exactly what I did. Now, my next step was to keep on winning the Mr. Olympia until I tied Arnold Schwarzenegger's record of seven titles. I only had four more to go.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MY RIVALS AND BROTHERS IN BODYBUILDING

“Ronnie Coleman was challenged by hall of fame bodybuilders... in their prime.” (1)

— Shawn Ray, hall of fame bodybuilder and 13-time Mr. Olympia Competitor.

THE KINGS OF MUSCLE: HALL OF FAME

No book on my life story and no book that talks about bodybuilding would be complete without elaborating on what I call the generation of steel in the history of bodybuilding.

This generation of steel are the guys I competed against during my pro career. I’m talking about the guys I was fortunate enough to work with, learn with, learn from, sweat with, enjoy time with and grow with.

These guys are my heroes, and I feel very fortunate to be able to write about these fine gentlemen.

AN ERA OF STEEL AND GOLD

Aside from the Golden Age of Bodybuilding, in which bodybuilding was brought to the mainstream, I believe that the most important and definitely most competitive era in the history of bodybuilding was the time when I competed in the sport.

I normally define this era from around 1990 to 2001. Of course, it’s a relatively long period of time, but it covered a span of three

champions but dozens of genuine masters of body composition, muscularity and symmetry. The era begins with the end of my dear friend Lee Haney's tenure as the king of the Olympia and ends with my fourth Olympia Championship, right when gifted bodybuilder and dear friend Jay Cutler started his to dominate the scene.

This was an era in which guys like my friend Flex Wheeler, king of genetics and sultan of symmetry, competed alongside Dorian Yates, with other masters of muscle like Kevin Levrone and other great friends and competitors like Shawn Ray, Chris Cornier, and Nasser el Sonbaty.

Any one of these guys was good enough to have dominated the Mr. Olympia on any other era, yet in this one we all competed together, and sadly only one could come on top. During the course of my career, I lost to all of these guys at least twice and they lost and won between them as well. We battled it out for a very long time, and we all came out winners at some point. Yet I can't stress the following enough: I was honored, and I am still honored, to have competed alongside these men. They were more than competitors. They were my brothers in iron, and to me, there is no greater bond between a group of people than when you sweat together and suffer together. That's why we will all have a bond that will forever transcend anything.

That is why I am privileged to dedicate a chapter of my book to talking about these truly great men.

LEE HANEY

I have never known a finer man than Lee nor have I ever had the privilege to meet someone so amazing and genuinely good natured as Lee. Lee was a champion on and off the stage, and on and off the gym. He was as hard a worker as any other man and a kind, generous person who would go out of his way to make you feel comfortable, respected and appreciated. Lee is a man of God and a man of good,

and even after retiring from bodybuilding he always stayed hungry, finding new challenges and searching for new pathways in life. He has written and published three books (which I recommend you read), including his most recent *Fit at Any Age: Exercise to Stimulate not Annihilate*, which talks about how to improve our life and become fit no matter how old we are.

Lee was always my hero, and upon taking up the sport of bodybuilding I always fought hard to be like him.

Lee was special because he had a physique unlike anyone had ever seen up until that time. He was incredibly big, but he had a lean quality in him that could have made him win both the Olympia and the Classic Physique categories in bodybuilding. He had massive arms, a massive chest, incredibly chiseled legs and arms like no other, but he wasn't incredibly gigantic like many that came after him.

He looked like a combination between the old school performers of the golden age of bodybuilding and the monsters of mass of today. He is, I truly believe, the only bodybuilder ever who could have competed and successfully win in any era.

But it wasn't just the body and the muscles. Lee had a personality and a positive demeanor that no one else had ever brought before. He simply looked flawless while posing, showing off his big smile, charisma and bright energy while flowing with the perfection of a swan. The stage simply lit up the moment he stepped onto it. He was a true sportsman who fought with honor and love for the sport, and he was one of the greatest things ever to happen to the sport of bodybuilding.

DORIAN YATES

I've already said this before, but I'll say it again. The world of bodybuilding changed due to Dorian Yates. In bodybuilding there was

a before and after Dorian Yates. Before Dorian, bodybuilders definitely had mass, but were more well known by proportion, definition and symmetry than anything else. After Dorian, everything changed. Dorian would show up on the stage with a size, muscular density, thickness, hardness and mass that had never before been seen. He showed up and left everybody in awe.

His training was very much unlike what the rest of the bodybuilders did, and it paid off big time. Dorian dominated bodybuilding for a period of six years and could have certainly continued to dominate had it not been for the set of injuries he was plagued with during the last years of his career. Despite this, he still won his last Olympia with ruptured triceps and biceps. In many ways, Dorian set the stage for guys with mass like me to enter and win the Mr. Olympia.

FLEX WHEELER

To me, there has never been a competitor with better body, better symmetry, and better genetics than Flex Wheeler. Flex, to me, was the greatest competitor I ever faced... and I wasn't the only one who said that. Flex was, in many ways, a walking sculpture. He was truly a piece of art and he is one of the greatest if not the greatest bodybuilder never to win the Mr. Olympia.

Flex had it all, man. He had size, symmetry, definition, proportion, and possibly the best body to ever grace the planet. Flex was as flexible as a contortionist (hence the name), was as proportionate as a painting by Rembrandt and had the attitude of a champion.

Flex could have been the greatest bodybuilder ever if it were not for the extremely competitive era we all lived in. Still, I don't think his legacy as a master of bodily perfection will ever be forgotten.

Aside from this, Flex is one of the most wonderful human beings I have ever met. I don't think that anyone in bodybuilding helped me in

terms of motivation and support than Flex did.

KEVIN LEVRONE

Born to an Italian father and an African American mother, Kevin overcame a very difficult upbringing to become one of the greatest bodybuilders ever and an incredibly well-centered, well-adjusted, and solidary human being. Kevin had an incredible set of genes that, when combined with his unique work-ethic, brought him to the top of bodybuilding many times.

Kevin Levrone placed in the top five at the Olympia for 12 straight years, from 1992 to 2003, including four shows in which he placed second and two of which he placed third. Kevin also won the Arnold classic in 1994 and placed in the top five on several other occasions. In addition, he won tons of international competitions and became one of the best ever.

He was also a great human being and was one of the people who helped me the most during my bodybuilding career. I am very grateful to have met him, and I feel the utmost respect for him and what he has done.

In his prime Kevin was as good as anyone else, and with a few votes going the other way, he could have beaten me and Dorian Yates at the Olympia easily.

SHAWN RAY

Undoubtedly one of the greatest bodybuilders ever, Shawn was well known as the “giant killer”. Despite only being 5 foot 7 inches tall, Shawn was a very smart bodybuilder with a unique set of genes and perfectly defined and chiseled muscularity. He wasn’t heavy and he wasn’t massive, but he was very, very good. He routinely destroyed bodybuilders who were much bigger than him (hence his nickname),

and placed in the top five at the Olympia for a shared record 12 straight years, a feat that hasn't been accomplished by anyone else (except for Kevin Levrone) before or since and will perhaps never be matched.

Shawn was humble, smart, an extremely hard worker, and a man I will always remember and respect for the great competitor and professional that he was and still is.

Shawn's posing was so good that I actually copied pose for pose and used it to win the 1998 Mr. Olympia.

JAY CUTLER

Perhaps my biggest rival ever, Jay Cutler was a master of mass, size and hard work who chased me until he achieved his goal of winning Mr. Olympia, placing behind me in second place for four years.

Jay started weight training at age 11 by working hard on a construction business with his brothers, where he developed not only brute strength and a naturally muscular physique, but an amazing work-ethic that took him to the next level.

Jay was a gentleman of a competitor and a remarkable sportsman. Despite placing second at the Olympia again and again he never allowed himself to be defeated and continued to compete until he finally won. He went on to win three more for a grand total of four... and he deserved them for sure.

Jay was an intelligent man, a humble human being and a man with a determination like no other. To him, life was about bodybuilding and competing, and that was all he did. And he did it really well. He lived what he called an "encased lifestyle", in which all he did was work out, cook, eat and sleep. He didn't care about having a life outside of bodybuilding, and it paid off, as he is undoubtedly one of the greatest

ever.

NASSER EL SONBATY

Nasser was undoubtedly the smartest bodybuilder ever and one of the smartest people I have ever had the privilege to meet. Born in Germany from to an Egyptian father and a Serbian mother, Nasser grew up as a multicultural person. He had degrees in history and political science and was fluent in seven languages. In short, he really earned his nickname “The Professor”. He was truly a pleasure to talk to and an honor to compete with.

A former semi-professional soccer player, Nasser turned to bodybuilding when he realized he had a talent for it... and boy was he good at it. He built an incredibly amazing body, with a great combination of symmetry and muscle.

Sadly, he is mostly remembered in bodybuilding for the controversies that surrounded his life. Nasser was very vocal of his criticism of the judges in bodybuilding and even got to the point where he blamed the judges for not picking him over Dorian Yates in the 1997 Mr. Olympia. He went so far as to say that they robbed him of his victory and the money that would have come after that. Nasser fell out of the spotlight after retiring and died a few years ago, again amidst controversy. However, I am incredibly grateful to have competed alongside him and I consider him one of the best bodybuilders ever.

CHRIS CORMIER

Chris “The Real Deal” Cormier was one of the best bodybuilders to come out of California and one of the best in the history of the sport. He was a one-of-a-kind competitor, with a massive size of 252 pounds of solid muscle during competition, a near perfect symmetry, unique

definition, and a firmness and hardness that has hardly ever been equaled. Chris was a hard worker who managed to compete at the Mr. Olympia ten times, during a span of 11 years, which is a tremendous achievement in and of itself. Aside from this, he won 12 international and professional bodybuilding competitions.

A WORLD OF CHAMPIONS

Throughout my near 20-year career as a bodybuilder I competed alongside thousands of different bodybuilders all over the world. The ride was amazing, and I always felt fortunate to be standing on the stage amongst men who had the bodies of gods and champions. However, out of all those bodybuilders, it is these eight guys whom I feel the closest to and who I was most honored to compete with. We live in a world of competitors, and all eight of us will forever be champions of the sport of bodybuilding and the sport of life.

CHAPTER FIFTHTEEN

DOMINATION

“A true champion never stops training. Gotta keep moving forward or else you’ll get stuck exactly where you are.”

— Johnny Lawrence in the Karate Kid sequel Cobra Kai.

MY 4th TO 8th VICTORIES AT MR. OLYMPIA

After I won the 2000 Mr. Olympia and got coronated with a third Sandow Trophy, (placing sixth in the all-time list for most wins ever – next to Sergio Oliva and Frank Zane), my mindset going into 2001 was to dominate and win everything. It was really as simple as that. I was determined to be not only the best bodybuilder in the world and of all-time, but to dominate the opposition in such a decisive fashion that no one could ever question the legacy of Ronnie Coleman.

In fact, I was so focused on my goal that, from the moment the year began, I already knew that I had won before the competitions even started.

That year I received an important phone call, which was from none other than bodybuilding promoter Jim Lorimer, Arnold Schwarzenegger’s partner in the Arnold classic. himself. I was, needless to say, incredibly surprised and honored to receive this call, for obvious reasons.

“Ronnie.” He said in his determined and amiable voice. “I want you to come to the Arnold Classic and compete this year. We would be

honored to have you over.”

That was a beautiful phone call to get and I couldn't have been more appreciative. Still, I had some serious doubts about competing at the Arnold's. After all, my main goal was the Mr. Olympia, and I felt that I didn't want to compete in two major shows that year. Lorimer, however, told me that the champion was going to receive a Hummer H1 (in addition to the cash prize), which was my favorite car. In addition, going to the Arnold Classic was going to secure me a spot in The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, which was a very big deal.

The Hummer, the money and The Tonight Show were more than enough to convince me.

THE 2001 ARNOLD CLASSIC

Sure enough, in the spring of 2001 I flew to Columbus, Ohio to participate in that world-renowned and vitally important bodybuilding contest.

I was super excited about competing at the Arnold's, after all, it was the biggest fitness festival in the world and one of the most massive and popular sporting events on the planet. Furthermore, it was founded by a champion bodybuilder just like me, and a part of me thought that I could eventually become just like him and form my own festival.

Lastly, the prize money was pretty high, and it felt like I could propel my fame even higher.

I arrived in Columbus weighing 247 pounds of solid muscle with a fat percentage of .33. That was the most muscular I'd ever been, and I had worked my muscles so hard ever since my victory at the Olympia the previous fall that I felt like I was at my best ever.

It's really hard to explain how good I looked that day. The pictures

taken that day don't really do it justice, especially because of what the photo editors did. My back was so perfectly defined that the photographers felt it simply wasn't believable. "It's way too chiseled." They told me. "People are going to think it's fake. We're gonna have to edit it to make it look more normal. Take away some of that definition."

I couldn't believe I heard that. How muscular do you have to be that people will see it, but they won't believe it? "Most people have to get photoshopped to look better." I thought. "My body is so developed that they have to dial it down."

No bigger complement for me.

The next day I got up, stood on stage and smashed the competition in a way I had never won a bodybuilding competition before. There was simply no chance of anyone else getting second place. I got a near-perfect score and unanimous victory. Many have said that this was the best I ever looked in my professional career. I don't know about that, but I did feel really good.

The next step was going on to the Olympia and winning. I was going to become the first guy in history to win both the Arnold and the Olympia on the same year.

THE 2001 MR. OLYMPIA

This edition of the Mr. Olympia has long been remembered as one of the most controversial bodybuilding contests ever, fourth only perhaps to Arnold's unannounced 1980 decision to compete, Dorian Yates 1997 victory, and Sergio Oliva's 1970 defeat mano a mano at the hands of Arnold.

A lot of people think I breezed through the victory like I did the year before, but this is far from what actually happened.

Bodybuilding is an extremely grueling sport. You work so hard that

you bring your body to the very limits of what it can take. You dehydrate yourself, lose almost all bodyfat and starve to look your best. I normally had no problem with doing this once a year by seeing it all the way through with the Olympia and doing it in a more moderate fashion with other shows. That year, in 2001, however, the invitation to the Arnold classic changed all of that.

I had competed at the Arnold's before, but this time I wasn't going to go if I wasn't going to win. Hence, I prepared myself extensively, just like I would do for a normal Olympia. This meant that I was taking my body to its very limit two times in one year, which is not medically recommended. I won the Arnold Classic and felt great, but when I got to the Olympia something weird was happening.

I prepared for the contest just like I had in the years prior, dehydrating my body to its lowest capacity, bringing my bodyfat percentage to .33 and pumping up my muscles to their utmost potential.

Up until that moment, nothing was out of place. Except that when I arrived at the hotel the night before the show, I felt that something was wrong. I was extremely tired... more tired than I had ever been in my entire life. I didn't know what it was, so I went to bed hoping to feel better the next morning.

How wrong I was. When I woke up, I felt drained of all energy and filled with a pain and physical agony that is incredibly hard to describe. In short, I felt like I was going to die. I was so weak that I couldn't get out of bed, much less pump up my muscles or pose for a show.

I didn't know what to do. My mindset was "forget about the Olympia, I'm going to the hospital." But before I did so I called up my nutritionist, Chad Nichols and told him what was going on.

"No, Ronnie. Don't go to the hospital. You've worked too hard for this." He said.

"I don't care." I told him. "If I don't go to the hospital I am going to die."

"No Ronnie. I think you're just dehydrated." He answered calmly. "Grab a gallon of water, drink it all and you will feel better."

"Okay." I answered.

I did just that. And wouldn't you know it, as soon as I drank almost the entire gallon, I started to feel a lot better. It turns out I was just extremely thirsty.

Of course, the point of dehydrating for a bodybuilding competition is to bring about all the definition possible, and when you drink that much water said definition is going to disappear. That's exactly what happened.

In the prejudging I was so bloated up from the gallon of water that my muscularity had been temporarily compromised, and Jay Cutler had earned a lot more points than me in that round. To win I was going to have to overwork him in the other rounds.

I did just that and put on possibly one of my best posing routines ever. I ended up winning by four points.

Many journalists, some fans and many fellow bodybuilders criticized the judges for giving me the win ahead of Jay Cutler, who had come from nowhere to take the second spot in a similar fashion as I had taken first place three years earlier.

They have said that I was too big and that he was more muscular, more defined and more athletic. I am in no position to judge with any objectivity, but what I can tell you is that the judges make the decisions based on their expert judgement, not necessarily based on tendencies or on fan opinion. Yes, Jay had an impressive body, but personally I felt like he was years away from beating me. My back, my legs, my arms and deltoids were way superior to his, and that's the

reason why I beat him in 2001 and in many more Olympias in the next few years.

In addition, my stunt that morning had severely affected the shape of my body, and I beat Jay that day despite what happened. If I had been perfectly okay, just like I was the year before and in the years that followed, I would have beaten him by a lot more points.

But I don't regret it, that's the price you pay for winning two major shows in the same year. It was quite an accomplishment, one that was equaled only by Dexter Jackson in 2008.

Regardless, there was a point in the night in which Jay was beating me by six points. This is no big deal in bodybuilding, as the whole tide can change in the final pose down and that's exactly what happened. I emerged victorious over him and was coronated for my fourth Mr. Olympia.

Nevertheless, this victory did set up a big-time rivalry that would dominate the scene in the years to come, (and which I will describe in a later chapter).

TRAINING FOR THE NEXT OLYMPIAS

After the controversy at the 2001 Mr. Olympia I had to make sure that no one could ever come to question my reign under any realm whatsoever. I didn't want my next victories to be like the 1998, when I was considered a fluke, or the 1999, when Flex walked off the stage angry, or the 2001. I wanted all my victories to be like the 2000 Mr. Olympia and 2001 Arnold Classic. I wanted to let people know that there was simply no chance of beating me and I wanted them to be aware that I, Ronnie Coleman, was the King of bodybuilding.

In 2002, the Mr. Olympia panel told me that I was too big, and that in order to ensure a victory that year, I was going to have to lose weight and hit the stage at no more than 245 pounds. I agreed with

their request. The only problem was that I was already at 260 with such a small amount of bodyfat that losing weight would mean losing muscular mass. I had no choice.

Therefore, just as I had done before on multiple occasions, I upped up my ante in training and dieted for 16 weeks before the contest instead of the usual 12. In addition, I perfected my workout routine to put on less weight and become leaner.

Bodybuilding and creating muscle are about two things: Consistency and patience. It had taken me 12 years of working out six days a week to get to this point, and in order to become even better I was going to apply both to the limit, just like I had done before.

It worked wonders. I pumped the iron, did the cardio, dieted like hell, and worked on my posing every single day to become as best as I could.

By the time the 2002 Olympia came along, I was more prepared than I had ever been.

That year the roster of competitors featured the usual suspects of the previous years, including Nasser el Sonbaty, Flex, Chris Cormier, and Kevin Levrone. The only guy missing was Shawn Ray, who had retired the previous year. Nevertheless, most of the guys from this new golden age of bodybuilding were there, and it was the last time we would stand there together. Flex and Nasser would retire soon after, Kevin would go into a string of injuries that would never allow him to be the same again, and Chris wouldn't be back until two years later, and by then he was way past his prime.

In many ways, one could say that the 2002 Mr. Olympia was the last of the classic Olympias the first of the new era.

Regardless, 2002 was my four-peat victory. Kevin had a wonderful physique, like he always did, but I beat him by a whole nine points and third place Chris Cormier by thirty, proving exactly what I had wanted:

that there was me, and then there was the rest of the pack.

I was, just like I had predicted, wished for, and worked for, dominating.

THE THIRD, FOURTH AND FIFTH OLYMPIAS

Just as the opening quote of this chapter states, a true champion never stops training, and my mindset going into the 2003 bodybuilding season was exactly that. I was going to be a champion no matter what; I was going to keep on winning no matter what.

That year, the effort went even further. Normally, in order to avoid burnout, I took off three months of training after the Mr. Olympia. This helped me refocus and get myself back to neutral.

In 2002, however, I couldn't take a lot of time off because I was hired to do the GNC bodybuilding Show of Strength only three weeks after the Olympia. Normally I wouldn't have agreed to do something like this, but the money was too good, and I wanted to try something different.

Sure enough, on November 8th, 2002, I was in New Orleans for this GNC show of strength next to Chris Cormier, Lee Priest, Dexter Jackson, Gunther Schlierkamp and a few other guys. I wasn't really prepared, and nowhere near my best, but I still knew I was miles ahead of all of these guys.

Surprisingly however, the judges ruled that Gunther was number 1 that night and put me at number 2. I wasn't too upset at this, as I knew it wasn't a big deal, but I wasn't thrilled either. It was first time since 1984 when a reigning Mr. Olympia was defeated at a show (when Lee Haney defeated Samir Bannout to win his first title).

Regardless of this loss, by this point I had become so good that I didn't feel like I needed to do anything different. All that I had to do

was train as hard as I had done for the last five years and the result would be exactly the same. No one had been training as hard for a longer amount of time, with such intensity and such discipline, and within me, I knew that there was absolutely no chance of anyone else beating me. In fact, I thought that it was just a matter of time before I tied Arnold and then Lee Haney.

The 2003 Mr. Olympia was a wonderful competition. Not only did I take home 110,000 dollars in prize money, but the award also included a Cadillac Escalade that I gladly took home as well as a ton of endorsements that would bring my income higher than ever.

After that Olympia I tied Dorian Yates for 6th of all time, catapulting myself to third place on the list of most Mr. Olympias. It felt tremendously amazing, but within me, I still knew that something was missing. My goal wasn't yet complete. I still had at least two more Mr. Olympia victories ahead of me, and I was determined to capture them no matter the cost.

The following year began just like any other for me. I was long gone from the police department and the only object of my concentration was training for the next Olympia. Everything I did, everything I breathed, everything I ate and everything I slept had to do with acing that contest.

In many ways, life was like Groundhog Day to me. Getting up in the morning, eating, training, eating, training, eating, training, sleeping and repeating. Every single day I did that.

I'm not going to lie. It wasn't easy. At times it was grueling and taxing, but looking back at it now, I feel nothing but gratefulness. That's what made me a champion and that's what turned me into the greatest bodybuilder ever. Very few people were willing to do that, and that's exactly the reason why there are very few champions (in all areas of life).

Hence, no matter what my internal resistance said, I continued going forward, giving it my all.

The 2004 Olympia was another great victory for me. That morning I was weighed in at 296 pounds, the heaviest I had ever been and was coronated for a 7th straight title, tying what was once the unbeatable record by Arnold Schwarzenegger and beating up-and-coming star Jay Cutler for a third time. It was a beautiful victory, as I dominated the stage through and through, doubling the points of second place Jay Cutler and nearly quadrupling the points of third place Gustavo Badell. In many ways, I kind of felt bad for Jake. How many times could a man tolerate a second-place finish and still continue participating? I knew that it would have definitely been extremely difficult for me, and I was fortunate that I had never had that sort of displeasure in my entire career.

The following year, 2005, was the Mr. Olympia in which I was determined to tie Lee Haney for my eighth victory, which would put me in first place of all time. It would be, in many ways, the culmination of all my hard work, and I was determined to make it as epic as possible.

Aside from my intense training, in which I didn't bow down for a single second, I decided to make a full-on performance on stage. I had always loved to be called the King ever since the bodybuilding magazines started to hype me up as the all-time emperor of bodybuilding, so I opted to make a play on that nickname.

In the 2005 Olympia, as sure as I was that I was going to win, I walked on to the stage when my name was called for the individual posing wearing a velvet king's cape, scepter and massive crown. It was all colored in the reddest red and looked more over the top than anything else in bodybuilding history (more so even than the Leopard outfits the turn of the century strongmen used to wear)... but it made me look beyond awesome.

As I walked onto stage wearing that open cape, showcasing my best muscles and my 285-pound body, the crowd roared with eternal cheer. They loved seeing me like that and pushed me to pose and show-off even more. Everyone smiled, from the judges, to the journalists, to the organizers, to the Weiders to the fans to the other bodybuilders. It was, in many ways, my golden moment and one of the best parts of my whole bodybuilding career.

At that moment, with the stage lights on top of me, and everyone screaming my name at full lung capacity, I knew not only that this 2005 Olympia victory was mine, but that I was going to forever be remembered as the greatest bodybuilder in history.

AN ERA OF DOMINATION

2005 ended in the exact same way as the previous eight years: with my victory at the Olympia. I had proved, yet again, that I was the king of the hill and the dominating force in the world of muscle building.

Nevertheless, this time, I felt it was going to be different. I had tied Lee Haney for eight Olympias, which was the best ever up until that point. Up next was my quest for a ninth Mr. Olympia, which would indubitably place me as number one in the history of the sport.

PART FIVE

THE END OF BODYBUILDING



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE 2006 MR. OLYMPIA

“Every one of us is losing something precious to us. Lost opportunities, lost possibilities, feelings we can never get back again. That’s part of what it means to be alive.”

— Haruki Murakami, Japanese best-selling novelist.

THE NINTH VICTORY THAT NEVER WAS

Life is all about taking what you can get, working for what you want, and being grateful for what you have won. Looking back, I have nothing but extreme gratefulness for my time as a bodybuilder and for all the victories that I won. Like my idol Lee Haney, I won eight titles in a row and dominated an extremely competitive sport for nearly an entire decade.

I was at the top of the mountain for a very, very long time, and I knew that eventually, it was going to come to an end. On September 30th, 2006, my reign as Mr. Olympia came to an end at the Orleans Arena, in Las Vegas, Nevada, at the hands of up-and-coming star and archrival, Jay Cutler.

This chapter is that story.

A SPORT OF ERAS

I have already talked about how bodybuilding is, unlike other competitive contests, a sport of eras. The Mr. Olympia was created by

Mr. Joe Weider as a way in which Mr. Universes could repeat as champions for as long as they could. And from the very first championship in 1965, which was won by Larry Scott, the tendency was well established.

Scott won again in 1966 and retired that same year, ending his era of domination. Next came Sergio Oliva, who won three straight titles including the 1968 Olympia, where he was simply so good that the other competitors forfeited before the competition. He was defeated in 1970, at the hands of Arnold Schwarzenegger, who ended one era and started his own epoch of dominance, winning six straight and a controversial bonus title in 1980. After Arnold came Franco Columbu with two lone separate wins and Frank Zane with another three-year era. After that came two isolated champions, creating a unique period of solo winners.

However, in 1984, a whole new time emerged. This was the time of longer ages of dominance. First came Lee Haney, winning eight in a row, retiring at age 31, as the biggest champion up until that time, then came Dorian Yates, winning six straight and retiring after severe injuries.

Then I came along with eight consecutive victories and what I believed would be at least two or three more.

The reason I mention the eras is because out of all the truly dominating champions, such as Arnold (7 titles), Lee (8 titles) and Dorian (6 titles), I was the only one who was actually defeated on stage. All other three retired as champions, and all except Lee under quite controversial circumstances. Dorian's last championship was severely questioned by other competitors, including Nasser el Sonbaty, who became infuriated after his loss. Arnold's last championship in 1980, in which he came in as a surprise competitor, was also highly, highly divisive. It was the first non-unanimous victory at the Mr. Olympia, and it bled bad blood between Arnold and the

other competitors.

Regardless of this, all three domination kings I mentioned retired as winners. I didn't. I will give a detailed description of that day in Las Vegas, but before I do so, I want to explain the background of the 2006 Mr. Olympia.

TOTAL AND COMPLETE DOMINATION

Just as I illustrated in previous chapters, my era in bodybuilding was one of total and complete annihilation. No one ever challenged me, and I was always the undisputed champion. I had a bigger body, more muscle, more mass, and more stage presence than anyone else, and I felt that I was simply unbeatable.

Every year I trained harder, prepared harder and focused on my single goal, which was to continue winning. 2006 was no different for me. My mindset was simple: "Go into the competition, beat everyone, and win the Mr. Olympia again." The only difference was that this year was going to be a world-record ninth victory, ahead of Lee.

In my mind there was no one else that could beat me. There was me, and there was the rest. I felt that all I needed to do was walk in just as I had before, with the body I had before, pose like I had done for the last eight years, and win once again. It was really, as simple as that.

Sadly, the federation didn't see it that way.

I don't want to take anything away from Jay Cutler, because I think he was a fantastic, fantastic bodybuilder (and always has been), and I am glad he worked hard to win four Mr. Olympias. I don't want to seem cocky nor do I want to say that he didn't deserve to win many times, but I felt that in 2006, he still didn't have what it took to beat me. Maybe he did in 2007, but not in 2006.

In all sports and in all activities that function as entertainment, competition creates ratings and viewers. Lack of competition makes the audience get bored and lose interest, which translates into a loss of money.

This is exactly what was happening during bodybuilding in the early 2000's. I was dominating to such an extent that there was no more competition anymore. Everyone walked into the show knowing that the rest of the guys were only fighting for the second spot. Hence, the audience and other bodybuilders started losing interest.

A ton of guys were no longer competing, and the sport was starting to get stuck. The International Federation of Bodybuilders had to do something to change this, and in 2006, they decided to make it happen.

What did they do? Simple. They decided that they were not going to give me my well-deserved ninth title and were going to prevent me from winning so that the sport would once again be competitive and garner a lot more audience.

I know this sounds pretentious, conceited and aggressive, but I sincerely believe it to be the truth.

Bodybuilding is a subjective sport. There is not genuine, scientific objective way of measuring a champion. Unlike powerlifting, or strongman, where the competitors have to lift weights and whoever lifts the heaviest one wins, bodybuilding is not so cut and dry. You win based upon other's opinions and judgements. Other people decide who wins, not you. Therefore, it is very easy for someone to lose despite being superior to the other.

It's in many ways, similar to what happens in gymnastics, professional boxing or used to happen when they selected the best two colleges in NCAA football. The winners are chosen based on opinion, not based on fact.

As a consequence, victories like Arnold's controversial 1980 win, or Dorian Yates' 1997 victory can happen, and no one can question them.

Furthermore, because the sport of bodybuilding is not a mainstream activity and, compared to other past times, such as baseball or football, the fan base is rather limited, a lot of the time, the judges make decisions based on what best for the sport and not what is actually real.

I don't like to piss on the sport that gave me life, but a lot of the winners are handpicked by the guys in the big offices before the contest even takes place. That's why in 1998 Flex believed that he was going to win the Olympia and that's why Dorian won in 1997 despite having several torn muscles and not being at his best.

Everyone in professional bodybuilding knows this reality, and whoever denies it is lying to himself in a very deep way. We all know this, and we all live with this. It's just the way the sport works.

Hence in 2006, while I was aiming for my ninth Olympia, this is exactly what happened. The judges picked a winner that wasn't me. Who was it? Jay Cutler, who had been second at the Olympia for four years.

JAY CUTLER

Jay Cutler is one of the finest men I've ever had the pleasure of meeting and one of the best bodybuilders in the history of the sport. There is no denying that. He was intelligent, humble, hard-working, and had a tremendously massive and defined body with a unique posing routine and a go-getter attitude. He was and still is, a master of the sport of bodybuilding.

Jay was originally from Massachusetts and, like me, worked his ass off from when he was a little kid. He grew his first muscles working on

a farm and in a construction business and is one of the strongest bodybuilders ever to grace our sport.

Like Arnold, Franco Columbu, Sergio Oliva, myself and other bodybuilders before and after him, Joe Weider put him under his wing and reared him to become a Mr. Olympia champion.

Jay trained very hard, dieted like hell, and lived as disciplined a life as I have ever seen. He trained four times a day, lived right outside the gym, and became one of the best through sheer work.

Jay earned his pro card in 1996, at the age of 23, and competed at his first Mr. Olympia in 1999, earning 14th place. The following year he placed 8th and in 2001, he graced the stage next to me all the way until the end, ending up in second place. He repeated that feat as runner up after me in 2002, 2004, and 2005. In 2002, 2003 and 2004 he won the prestigious Arnold Classic and became one of the top bodybuilders in the world.

However, his main goal was still to win the Mr. Olympia and I knew that after four second place finishes, he was desperate to win the contest. I knew that eventually he was going to win and even possibly take it from me, but I was sure that it wasn't going to be at the 2006 Mr. Olympia.

Jay was of course, in great shape, better than he had ever been, but I felt his back still needed a little bit of work compared to mine, and I felt that I was in the best shape I had ever been. However, like I said, the federation thought otherwise.

THE 2006 MR. OLYMPIA

On that night, on Saturday, September 30, 2006, I woke up feeling as confident as I had ever been. This all changed, however, when I arrived in the arena. Vicky Gates, my old girlfriend, (with whom I was still very close friends with) was one of the judges that day. Before I

even walked on to stage, she told me that the IFBB had already made a decision before the show, and I wasn't going to win. Jay was going to beat me.

This sunk me to the deepest depths. My dreams of a ninth Olympia had instantly vanished, never to come back again. By the time I walked on to stage for the prejudging, I wasn't really concentrated anymore. My muscles were massive and well defined, but I no longer stood a chance.

Jake, of course, didn't know that the decision had already been made, and he was making his best effort to win. He had become so sick of losing that he invited almost all of his family and friends to the event (I think he bought something like 100 tickets) and was focused solely on winning.

The night started just as it had the last nine years, announcing the competition and starting the posing. Everything went really smoothly. I was featured as one of the first guys, was always placed in the middle of the posing line and was cheered heavily by the spectators.

When the time came to select the final six contestants there were no surprises. Me, Jake, Victor Martinez, Dexter Jackson (who would later become Mr. Olympia himself), Melvin Anthony and Gustavo Badell.

Then, just as had happened for nearly a decade, we all posed together and slowly, the judges called off the competitors one by one.

"Sixth place, Gustavo Badell... Fifth place, Melvin Anthony. Fourth place Dexter Jackson, third place Victor Martinez."

Then, as was accustomed, the judges called out second placed and remained in silence for a few seconds while they called the silver medalist. I could see Jay's emotion in his face. He didn't know the outcome. I did.

I was in better shape than I had ever been (or at least I felt that way), Jay wasn't yet better than me, and it was my time to win my ninth Olympia... but it was not to be.

"Second place..." Said the judge. "...Ronnie Coleman."

My heart sunk to the deepest bowels of the Earth. Despite the fact that I already knew the outcome, I couldn't believe it. Part of me believed that Vicky was mistaken. But she wasn't. For the first time in nearly a decade I had been defeated at the Olympia stage.

A million thoughts poured through my head while I heard the cheers of the crowd and Jay Cutler raising his hands in absolute joy and happiness.

I was more than disappointed. I was disenchanted, disillusioned, crestfallen, downcast and absolutely deflated. My face may not have shown it, but I sure as hell felt it.

I felt good for Jake and his victory. God knows he deserved to win at some point, and I am glad that he did. Soon after being declared the winner, he approached me on stage, grabbed my arm and raised it in a tremendous act of sportsmanship.

I'll never forget that. It was possibly in the most miserable moment of my professional career and the guy who beat me walked next to me and lifted me up my anguish and into the reality of the situation. No matter what, I was always going to be the champion.

Thank you, Jake, for that amazing moment and for all the years we competed next to each other and pushed to make the other better.

THE 2007 MR. OLYMPIA

After my 2006 I was determined to come back the next year and reclaim what was mine: the ninth Mr. Olympia. Never in the history of the Olympia had a competitor who had won multiple times and lost

come back to regain his title. I didn't mind that, I wanted to make history.

That year I tried to train harder, but the reality was that I simply couldn't. I had hurt my back a few years before and I was starting to feel it severely. I couldn't train hard; I couldn't lift heavy, and I couldn't do what I normally did. It just wasn't possible. Nothing went right that year. I soon realized that there was no way I was going to win.

By the time September rolled around and the Mr. Olympia weekend came, my mindset shifted from being number one to placing in the top five.

Just like it was the year before, Jay Cutler, me, Victor Martinez and Dexter Jackson were the top dogs. We were placed among the first guys to pose and were all on stage when the last six were called out.

Immediately after they called in sixth and fifth places, the judge proceeded to announce fourth. And who did they call? Me.

This time I wasn't upset at the outcome. In fact, I was pretty happy with what had happened. I had scored 4th place despite the terrible year I had been through, and this was a great feeling.

After that Olympia I proceeded to go to the microphone and officially retire from bodybuilding. I wasn't thrilled to make this statement, as part of me never wanted to retire, but my back was so bad that I could barely stand on stage without any pain, and the time for surgery had now arrived.

LOSING IS PART OF MY LIFE

Many people have criticized me for competing at the 2007 Mr. Olympia and ending up in fourth place. Some have even questioned my legacy and said that many will remember me for the losses instead of the wins. This, of course, is not true. No one remembers those

losses at the 2006 and 2007 Mr. Olympia more than my eight titles (tied for best of all time).

Of course, it wasn't my finest moment, and many have said that I should've retired after that 2006 second place trophy. I disagree. I have always been a fighter, and I would rather go down swinging than go down quitting... and this is exactly what I did. I wanted to get my ninth victory and I did everything I possibly could to make it happen. I didn't get it, but it doesn't matter, because it wasn't under my control.

I did retire, of course, after my multiple surgeries, and I do miss the sport a lot, but looking back I truly have no regrets. Losing, my dear friends, is part of life. No one is going to go and win everything. No one.

The true loser is he who falls and doesn't get up. And that was never me. I lost many times during my life, but I never stopped, not even when I retired. Sure, I couldn't compete in bodybuilding anymore, but as you will read, I did create a very successful career as an entrepreneur, and I became a winner as a businessman and as a family man. And that, too, is a big, big victory.

Of course, my last two competitions in bodybuilding were losses, but I retired with 26 professional bodybuilding victories, which were the best of all time when I retired. I also retired as a fan favorite, as the biggest bodybuilder ever, as an inspiration to millions of people, as the most muscular man in history, as the strongest bodybuilder ever, as one of the strongest men to have ever lived, and the creator of a legacy in this sport that will never be forgotten.

This has been the real victory, regardless of how many losses I actually had.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BACK PROBLEMS

“Surgery is a powerful placebo, perhaps the ultimate placebo. The effectiveness of a placebo is directly proportional to the impression it makes on the patient’s subconscious mind.”

— Dr. John Sarno, physician of rehabilitation medicine, New York University.

THE STORY OF MY INJURIES

As a result of the wonderful 2018 documentary titled *The King*, by Vlad Yudin, which details many aspects of my career and focuses specifically on my back problems and surgeries, a lot of people have become aware of me and my achievements. This is obviously a great thing. The only problem is that because the documentary talks about my back problems (which I do have) a lot, people have made a much bigger fuss of them than they actually are.

I have written this chapter to dispel some myths about my back problems and explain exactly the issues and the history of my injuries.

THE BACK IS A MUSCLE PRONE TO INJURY

Despite being a combination of several muscles, the back is by far the biggest muscular group in the entire body. Upper back, lower back, mid back, and the lateral back are filled with muscles and muscular fiber designed to aid in pretty much every single movement of the body, both upper and lower. It’s pretty much as simple as this: If

you didn't have back muscles, you couldn't move any single part of your body.

The back is essential to life itself, but despite its awesome power and prominent role in our lives, the back is a generally fragile place in the human body. It's very, very easy to hurt your back (and believe me, I would know).

Hence, back injuries are a normal thing in all people, both in sports and outside of sports. Look around you and you will see that people of all ages have some sort of troubles in their back. Of course, older people are much more prone to back problems, but the majority of the population has some sort of issue with their backside. Why? Well, this isn't an easy thing to answer, but according to the many orthopedic surgeons and chiropractors I have spoken to through the years, this happens due to a basic fault in the anatomy of a human being.

The human body, as perfect as it is, is not designed to carry a lot of weight on a bent back. The muscles of the lower back become tense whenever the upper body leans in any direction, and over time, this creates a pressure on the disks that can eventually result in herniated disks, and cause permanent damage.

This is a fact of life, and eventually it pretty much happens to all of us. In order to avoid it, it's absolutely necessary to fortify and strengthen the lower back with a variety of posterior chain exercises such as back extensions, good mornings, deadlifts, squats, and other similar exercises. The bad thing is that a vast majority of the population doesn't exercise them and ends up with back problems no matter what.

My back problems are a whole different story. I didn't get them due to over-leaning, lack of stretching or lack of preparation. They were a result of a variety of injuries that eventually caused my back to give in.

I will talk about the causes and the effects in the following

paragraphs, but it is vitally important for me to explain that most of my back issues have been exaggerated throughout the years, especially as a consequence of that recent documentary. Yes, I was in a lot of pain, and yes, I've had a lot of surgeries and yes, they've caused me certain impairment in movement, but I am not an invalid, and the back problems don't define my life.

There is a big wave of sensationalism related to my back circling around the world, and while certain aspects are true, I am here to tell you that I am not handicapped and that, eventually, everything will be back to normal. How long? It just depends on many factors, but in no time, I will be back (pun intended) to how I was a few years ago.

THE START OF MY BACK PROBLEMS

A lot of people think and affirm that my back problems started during my bodybuilding career, but this is simply not true. Of course, bodybuilding and lifting heavy weights can hurt your back eventually, and I am not going to be naïve and say that they didn't exacerbate and worsened something I already had, but they weren't the original cause of my issues.

In fact, at the gym, despite what many people assume and what the videos often imply, I was very, very careful while working out. In fact, I always had good form, used weightlifting belts and lifting suits to protect myself. I knew that an injury would devastate my career and I mostly remained injury free during my entire bodybuilding career.

Hence, while lifting these extremely heavy weights did have some intense effects, they weren't the cause of my issues.

MY BACK PROBLEMS BEGAN IN HIGH SCHOOL

In a previous chapter I have already explained that my back problems began while I was in the high school powerlifting team. I

haven't elaborated too much on it, so it's important to talk about it here.

Powerlifting is a rough sport with many dangers. Lifting maximum weight in squat, deadlift and bench press is no easy feat, and many, many lifters have suffered tremendous injuries while trying to go for a personal record or maxing out.

Out of the three lifts, all of them can be dangerous in terms of injuries. The bench can provoke pectoral or tricep tears, the deadlift can cause serious injuries to the lower back or hamstrings, and the squat can cause injuries in the entire body. After all, you are putting a very, very heavy weight on your back and you are descending to parallel, putting enormous strain on your back, knees, hips, ankles, shoulders, and everything in between.

In order to avoid injury, it's vitally important to have perfect form. In fact, many injuries occur because lifters compromise form to lift heavier weights. This is a big mistake, not only because you are leaving a ton of pounds behind when you compromise form, but you are leaving the air wide open for a tremendous injury. Hence, you have to emphasize form over anything else.

I am not going to go into a tutorial on how to bench, squat and deadlift with proper form, but I will say this. In the deadlift, it's very important to keep the path of the bar in as much of a straight line as possible, keeping the bar close to your body while keeping your back straight.

On the bench the best thing you can do is listen to your body. Don't force the muscles to make the lift if you are feeling like they are about to crack, as this is where the worst injuries happen. Furthermore, make an effort to explode from your chest upwards, and also try to keep the bar in as much of a straight line as possible.

On the squat, a lot more things need to be taken into consideration.

The first is the position of the heels and the knees. Be very careful where you place them, because bending your knees towards the inside can be catastrophic. Furthermore, utilizing the low bar squat when you are going down and bending down slightly will allow you to lift more weight and protect your lower back and knees substantially. Remember that the squat is much more of a glute lift than it is a back lift, and if you keep this in mind you will diminish your chances of injury substantially.

Furthermore, to avoid injury, training gear is a must. Knee sleeves, knee wraps, wrist wraps, shoulder sleeves, lifting shoes, compression socks, compression pants, lifting suits, bench shirts, belts, and straps are widely recommended. Of course, many powerlifters won't like what I am saying because many raw federations don't allow for this type of equipment, but if you are training to avoid injury and for hypertrophy, I strongly recommend you use all of these.

Out of all three the bench is the safest, followed by the deadlift and then by the squat. However, I can honestly tell you that despite its dangers, there is nothing, absolutely nothing in the entire world like lifting a very, very heavy weight on your back to get a personal record and win a competition.

That's exactly what happened to me when I got injured.

I was 17 years old and a junior in high school. We had a local powerlifting meet going on in Bastrop and, being as competitive a beast as I've always been, I was determined I was going to win no matter what.

I came in firing from the locker room, pumped up to beat every single man on the arena. Of course, like I've mentioned before, I wasn't nearly the best in my own team, much less in the competition (there were guys who squatted 600 pounds), but I wanted to do my best.

The first lift was the bench press. I had three lifts (like everyone else) and scored a 265, followed by a 305, and finally topped my bench lifts with a solid 335. It wasn't the 350 I was going for, but the 335 came up a lot easier than it did in training. This is something relatively normal in every single competition. On stage, in front of hundreds of people, you are suddenly pumped with energy, feel that the weights are a lot lighter and are able to lift more. This is what happened to me, and it felt really great.

Up next was the deadlift. This was a confident lift for me, as I had executed perfectly in training and it was one of my strong points in terms of form (although not necessarily in strength). Hence, I went for comfortable weights. I started at 365, then went up to 405 and finally finished with 455, which was a decent weight. My total was now at 790, which was fairly decent for a two-lift total at this local powerlifting meet. Furthermore, a lot of the guys both from my team and the rival schools were having a bad day, and their lifting wasn't as good as it had been in practice. Guys who were deadlifting 600 were getting overzealous and failing at 525, landing them 0s in scoring. Hence, a 500-pound squat would put me at a near 1300-pound total, which would be good enough for a win.

I was super excited and pumped up, ready to destroy the competition and win the victory.

"Ronnie Coleman." Yelled the head referee from the megaphone. It was my time go up there.

I walked to the platform while I heard the screams of the audience. I knew I could beat my personal record of 450 and make this competition mine.

I had already called in my first lifting weight. It was a solid 405 pounds. The staff placed the four plates on each side while I prepared myself mentally for the lift. I had my belt on, my knee sleeves placed

on right, and my mind very focused.

I walked over to the bar, put chalk on it to prevent it from slipping placed it on my back and went down and up like it was nothing. I felt it as light as I have ever felt any single weight.

The crowd cheered me up and pumped me up for another big lift. The referee asked me what weight I wanted to lift next.

“455.” I said with determination.

That was 5 pounds more than my max lift, but I was more than ready. The staff placed one 25-pound plate on each side for the weight to reach 455.

A couple of minutes later I was called back in to make the lift. Again, I was so excited from the screams of the crowd that I lifted it like it was nothing. Down and right back up.

I couldn't believe it. That had been a weight I had struggled with tremendously through the last months, and this time it felt so easy that I thought I could have done a full 8-rep set.

Next up was my chance to win. The biggest total so far was 1280, which mean that a 500-pound back squat (495 to be exact), would put me at 1285, enough for the win.

“Put in another 40 pounds.” I told the ref. “Let's go to 500.”

The staff took of the 25s and put in another pair of 45s, leading the bar to have five plates per side, which was a sight I had only imagined me lifting up until that point. That day, however, I knew that I was going to make the lift.

I looked at the crowd, heard the screams, hit my legs and by face, firing myself up and started screaming, ready to make the lift.

“It's all yours, Ronnie.” Said the head judge.

I walked to the bar, put it on my back, walked back to the lifting position with the barbell on top of me. “Man.” I thought to myself. “That’s a lot of weight.”

I know that 40 pounds doesn’t seem that big of a difference when you are lifting 500, but the difference is enormous. You can feel as the bar bends and rebounds, causing you to make a big beffort in stabilizing it as much as possible. This threw me off a bit, but I was determined to jump right back up.

I descended slowly with a lot of caution, being mindful not to break my back in the process. Just as the judge said, “Good Lift” (meaning I had reached parallel and could now head right back up) I exploded from the bottom, pushing my legs and my mind to make the full lift.

Suddenly, something happened. CRACK. I instantly felt like a giant flash of lightning penetrated my lower back, burning my entire backside. I dropped the weight backwards, barely saving myself thanks to the spotters who were at the side.

No lift, but that was the least of my troubles. I dropped down to the floor, deeply in pain, screaming at the agony I was feeling.

HURTING MY BACK IN FOOTBALL

Luckily, the back injury didn’t last long. It felt horrible when it happened, but I was young, strong and the doctors said that it wasn’t anything serious. I took x-rays and everything, and medical professionals revealed that it was nothing that could be long lasting. Still, I had to be careful, because I had no doubt set a precedent in my body that could worsen through time. Unfortunately, I didn’t listen either to my body or my doctors.

I continued on the powerlifting and football teams, working my ass off to become my best.

Everything was flowing smoothly, except for the fact that one day in a game and then a couple of days later in practice I hurt myself again, exacerbating my injury severely.

From that moment on, my back became like an eternal source of pain. I was invaded by discomfort the whole time, and I knew that I needed to do something about it.

I went to the conditioning coach and told him of my predicament. He recommended I go to a chiropractor, who would make adjustments to my back and help me recuperate easily.

That turned out to be one of the best decisions in my entire life.

A LIFETIME CHIROPRACTIC WORK

The first thing I had to do was to find a chiropractor that would be covered under my mom's insurance. Average session cost was about 100 dollars and there was no way I was going to be able to afford that type of treatment, especially if I had to go to multiple adjustments per week for an extended period of time.

Luckily, I found one in the insurance directory. He was a very nice man who lived about half an hour west of Grambling, which meant that I had to commute for one hour every session, but I didn't mind.

From the very first day my whole back pain situation came to a halt. He explained my back predicament very clearly.

"Ronnie, from the amount of hits that you've sustained from playing football for all these years, in addition to powerlifting, your back disks and your neck have become misaligned."

I thought that this was bad news, but he told me not to worry. "If you keep coming for weekly adjustments you will be fine for a long, long time."

He also added that the back needs to be adjusted regularly, as tension caused to a variety of issues can build up through time, causing a lot of trouble.

That was all I needed to hear. Every single week, thanks to the insurance, I went back for my session and fixed by backside problems. It was more than worth it, as it fixed my back, strengthened it, and it provided me with the confidence to go forward and not worry about it anymore.

I went with that chiropractor for a couple of more years until I graduated and no longer played football. By that time, I couldn't afford it anymore, but it didn't matter because I was no longer in Louisiana. Nevertheless, I knew that if I ever returned to lifting weights or to any activities that could be considered risky for my back, I would definitely find another one.

BODYBUILDING CAREER

By the time I started bodybuilding at the Metroflex with Brian, I knew that it was going to be a matter of time before I needed a chiropractor. It wasn't that I was going to hurt myself, but I knew that in order to prevent any injuries I was going to have to get one.

Luckily, I found one under the insurance of the police department, and I scheduled weekly appointments with him. Needless to say, it worked wonders, as I lifted weights as a bodybuilder for nearly 16 years without any sort of severe problem... and it's not like I was lifting light weights (despite my sayings, LOL). The 800-pound squats, 800-pound deadlifts, 2300 pound leg presses, 315 pound shoulder presses and alike, only made my back stronger and I felt awesome because of it.

If it weren't for the chiropractor, I wouldn't have been able to achieve or do anything in the world of bodybuilding.

HERNIATED DISK

Eventually, despite my utmost caution and being at the chiropractor at least once a week, it was only going to be a matter of time before the injuries I had suffered in the football field and in the powerlifting team were going to be exacerbated and come back to bite me.

One day, in 1997, while I was training for the Arnold Classic, it happened while I was squatting on a regular leg day. I was doing a normal set with my middle weight of 600 for which I normally did 10-12 reps. It may seem like a lot of weight, but for me, at the height of my physical peak, it seemed like nothing.

I was going up and down repeatedly until around the eighth rep I heard something that sounded like a gunshot. I didn't know what it was, and I even asked Ntuk, my spotter, if he had dropped a weight on the ground or something.

"No man." He said. "I think it was your back."

I didn't hurt at all, or at least it seemed that way because I was very, very warm. But I knew something wasn't right. I decided not to continue squatting, but I continued my workout and still did leg press and hamstring curls.

Nevertheless, by the time I left the gym and got ready to head to the Police Station, I started to feel a throbbing pain my back. The more I walked away from the gym the harder the pain got it. I didn't know if it was anything serious, but it got to a point where it really, really stung.

I decided to take that day off and go to the hospital to get checked out. Doctors gave me medication for and took X-Rays, but nothing came up. Normally, they would have told me to go home, but I insisted that there had to be something wrong, as the pain was very severe.

"Well." Said the Doctor. "You gotta get an MRI."

Sure enough, the MRI said it all. A severely herniated disk in L4 and L5. Doctor said that the only choice to solve this “severe” situation was to get me into surgery. However, I didn’t want that. I knew that one surgery was going to eventually lead to another and then to another and I wanted to avoid this as much as I could.

“I don’t want no surgery.” I said to him firmly.

“Okay.” He answered. “But if you keep lifting heavy weights eventually you are going to need it. My recommendation is that you simply stop.”

Of course, I wasn’t about to quit my quest of becoming a top guy at the Arnold Classic, so I disregarded his order and kept on training. Of course, I didn’t do heavy squats anymore, and stayed at around 300 pounds for the next couple of years. Furthermore, I went to the chiropractor and rehabilitated my back. It worked wonders, and I avoided surgery for 11 more years.

SURGERIES

After I lost the 2007 Mr. Olympia, I continued touring the world, making guest appearances at a variety of shows and fulfilling my contractual duties with my sponsors. However, I knew that the time had come for me to go into surgery and take care of my back. I wasn’t ready to retire, and I thought that all I needed to do was get the surgery and I’d be right back in training.

The pain was so severe that I couldn’t even stand up on stage at the Olympia for more than five minutes at a time anymore. I couldn’t walk or stand for any durable period of time, and I knew the time had come for the surgery. I wasn’t in tremendous pain or anything, but when I went to the chiropractor, he said that the time to take care of this situation was now. “It’s time, Ronnie.” He said. “If not, you’re going to have some major problems later.”

I followed his advice and scheduled my surgery immediately.

The surgery turned out really well. Nothing complicated, and I felt pretty good soon after. The problem was that this wasn't enough. Doctors said that my back was in such a delicate state that this was going to be the first of several surgeries.

That was just what I was afraid of. I didn't want to go in and out of the hospital, as I really wanted to get back to bodybuilding and keep competing, but I had no choice. My health was the most important thing to me, so I had to oblige. In total, I went through 11 more surgeries during the next ten years (2 in the hip, two in the neck and 7 in my back), going from everything from using screws, to implanting metal, shaving off the disk, shifting it back into place and everything in between. The best was, fortunately, the last one, as it took away my pain and left me prepared to mentally focus on my main goal from here on: to start walking smoothly again.

TODAY AND TOMORROW

Through the years and especially now, as a consequence of the documentary, people ask me all the time if I regret lifting weights due to the "condition" that I have. The answer is, of course, no, but it's a lot more complicated than this. First of all, I am not, like I mentioned before, an invalid, and my life hasn't really changed that much do to the back problems that I've had. Sure, I can't run anymore, and I have a difficult time walking, but I I'm not handicapped, I am not strapped to a wheelchair and I am not suffering like a person who is stuck inside their body. That's just not true. I am not like I used to be, but who is? No one. No one who lifted weights massively can ever aspire to do that for their entire lives... and I am not the exception.

People overblow the proportions of my "ailment", but the reality is that I am not suffering constantly nor am I crest-fallen. I am just me, Ronnie Coleman, working every day to the best I can in the world that

I live in period... and no... I don't regret anything. Even if I had become an invalid due to training and even if I was a complete paraplegic, I wouldn't regret a single thing that I ever did in my bodybuilding career.

In fact, my only regret is that I didn't win the Olympia a 9th time and that I didn't get more than two reps on that famous 800-pound squat. I felt so strong that day that I was surprised of how light the weights really were. I think I could have gotten at least 5, if not 6, 7 or maybe even 8. Still, I made up for it by doing 8 reps with 2,300 pounds on the leg press machine, which is one of the highest totals ever done in that type of exercise. Nevertheless, the 8 hypothetical reps on the squat with 800 would have been calculated as a one rep max of about 993 pounds. This combined, with my calculated one rep max of about 822 pounds on the deadlift (2 reps at 800 pounds), plus a calculated one rep max of about 850 pounds on the bench (8 reps at 500 pounds) for a grand total of 2665, which would be up there as one of the highest powerlifting totals ever (albeit, not raw, except for the bench, which I never did with a bench shirt). For comparison, the current raw world record in Powerlifting is about 2400 pounds, while the world record for the equipped version is a little more than 3,000 pounds). I would have been in the top five in history, without ever training specifically for powerlifting.

Furthermore my 8 bench reps at 500 pounds would have landed me at a calculated world record for a raw bench press. Of course, this is all speculation because I never actually maxed out in any of my lifts because I never wanted to hurt myself. In addition, I don't intend on disrespecting the sport of powerlifting, because my all-time total was only 2200, and equipped, which is not close to the best of all time, but is still very, very respectable and one of the highest ever done in powerlifting, but not high enough for any world record.

However, going to back to my original point, the answer is "No." I

don't regret anything that I did in my bodybuilding career, no matter how much my back hurt.

Today, despite the multiple surgeries I've been subjected to, I can proudly say I am in no more pain. Yes, there was a time in the last few years where I was in constant pain all the time (and, like I said in the documentary, it was extreme pain), but that's no longer the case. The last surgery I had took off the screws that were drilling my nerves into extreme pain and liberated me from the agony and suffering I was subjected to for years. Today, I am pain free and I am no longer on any type of pain medication (thank God).

However, I am not going to lie and say that I am doing perfect and that I can still workout as hard as I used to or that I can walk as much as I can. That's simply not true. I can walk, yes, but only for short distances without my crutches. I can also workout hard (and I try to do so every single day), but I am nowhere near the weights nor intensity I once was.

Yet, as the warrior that I am, I can assure you that this is not going to be the place where I will remain forever. I am a hard worker, and I am determined to walk again normally one day. I don't know when that will be or how long that's going to take, but I can promise you that I will walk and workout hard one day. Of course, you won't see me deadlifting 800 pounds again, but I will regain my strength and will be in top shape to enhance my health as much as I can. It's a mathematical certainty.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

RONNIE THE ENTREPRENEUR

“Sometimes it’s not about who has more talent, it’s about who’s hungrier.”

— Anonymous

THE IMPORTANCE OF STAYING HUNGRY

One of my favorite phrases in life has always been “stay hungry”. This phrase is, of course, not mine. It’s been featured all over the world, including in a wonderful 1976 film, which starred my good friend Arnold Schwarzenegger as well as the 1972 novel for which it is based upon. Arnold uses this phrase a lot too, and I came to adapt it to my own way of seeing life because of what it illustrates.

Basically, staying hungry refers to reinventing yourself, to always keeping yourself guessing and to keep your ambitions high no matter how much you’ve achieved with your life.

The most successful people in history have achieved their greatest victories when they were already thriving in triumph, and the only reason why this happened was because they stayed hungry.

Even though this phrase came to my life relatively recently, it was always, instinctively, part of my existence. Ever since I was a little kid and took up my first job, I’ve always made an effort to stay hungry, as I believe it to be the number one characteristic of success.

Like I mentioned before, if you don’t stay hungry, no matter how

successful you once were, you will be forgotten, and your success will go down with it.

That's why, when I retired from bodybuilding, I decided to take up a new venture, and it turned out to be one of my biggest successes.

Like I mentioned before, I retired from bodybuilding after the 2007 Mr. Olympia due to a variety of back problems.

My original idea was to retire temporarily, get my surgeries done and return stronger than ever to reclaim my 8th Olympia. However, just as you have read, this was not to be. The surgeries turned very complicated, and before I knew it, it was already 2010, I was 46 years old and I just didn't see returning to the Olympia stage as a possibility.

My worst nightmare was to become one of those guys who fantasize about how good they once were and now live a life that's only a shadow of the existence they once had. I wanted to continue doing things right, overachieving and following the road I had paved during my whole life, which was the path to success.

Hence, I opted to launch a new business. I didn't yet know what it was going to be, but I took some time to analyze and think about it. One day, it just hit me.

THE BIRTH OF THE RONNIE COLEMAN SIGNATURE SERIES

Through my many years in bodybuilding I had become very acquainted not only with building muscle, but with the business of fitness. I had learned how to create bodybuilding events, learned how to write for bodybuilding magazines and had learned about the supplement industry. Out of these three, the supplement business was probably the most accessibly one for me. The investment wasn't as big as event organizing (although I later got into that too), and it was a lot more profitable than writing for magazines.

Furthermore, I had worked in the supplement business for a very long time, doing appearances and being the spokesperson for many brands, including two of the biggest, which were MET-RX and Weider Nutrition. I knew how the manufacturing, packaging, distribution, marketing, advertising and sales process worked very well, and I thought that with a little bit of effort, I could probably launch a very, very large brand. Additionally, I had the name to make it happen (I didn't even need to hire any talent), and I had all the contacts to get the right discounts as well as the adequate distribution roads to lead to a successful brand or product.

Besides, this would finally be my chance to put my degree in accounting as well as my three years of full-time study in management into good use.

I sat down and started to brainstorm ideas about with my good friend Brendan Ahern, who had a ton of experience in that area. We thought about how to create this new business and how to launch it. Soon after we made a solid business plan and we created the Ronnie Coleman Signature Series.

We realized that the best way to launch this was probably starting overseas. Bodybuilding was, of course, very popular in America, but in Europe and Asia it is a monster of a sport, probably up there in popularity with soccer. Moreover, I was definitely a big, big time celebrity in Europe, much more than I was in America. Everywhere I went, for example, people recognized and talked to me, which was a big indicator of how successful the brand could become there.

Therefore, I decided that the best course of action was definitely to launch in Europe first, whatever the product may be.

Soon after, I started looking for a good place to manufacture my supplements as well as analyzing what type of supplements were best for the market. I had become acquainted with many factories through

the years, and I knew that one of the best ones was in Florida. Nevertheless, I wanted to contact several to see what cost to benefit ratio might have been more convenient.

The place was well established, they had worked for many famous brands and manufactured a lot of quality product. Besides, they were big fans of mine and offered to provide me with substantial discounts depending on order numbers, and alike. We chose them.

The next step was to select a product to manufacture. This wasn't going to be easy, as the supplement industry is one of the most saturated markets in existence. At first, we thought about doing a protein shake, but there were so many we thought that our best choice was to come up with something in which we could stand out.

We opted to start with two. The first was a preworkout and the second was a sleep product. I felt that with this we had the highest chance of success. Some people I talked to recommended that we start with a protein shake, but like I said, the market was beyond saturated, and our gut told us to start small.

We set a tentative release date for the summer of 2011, which was about six months in the future. Our launching platform was going to be the Arnold Classic Europe, set in Madrid, Spain, where we were hoping to use as a pathway to the rest of Europe.

THE 2011 ARNOLD CLASSIC

The investment needed to launch at the 2011 was substantially high. Not only did we need to pay for the tons of product we were manufacturing, but I also needed to finance the shipment from New York to Spain, as well as a large stand at the expo and advertising in bodybuilding magazines and the limited social media that existed at the time. In short, it wasn't a small amount of money that we had to pay, but Brendan and I were pretty confident that I was going to be a

success.

We prepared everything. We built a very large, stand, decorated it with our logo, paid for advertising in over a dozen magazines and brought in thousands upon thousands of products, ready to be sold.

I am not going to lie and say that I wasn't nervous... because I was. My mindset was that if, by any chance, the launching didn't work, I was going to have to find something else to do (albeit it, after being set back a substantial amount of money in this investment).

In many ways, within me, I was sort of panicking. I had just started a new career, the bills were starting to pile up, and I needed a new source of income. If this didn't work, I was going to have to put the pedal to the metal in something else.

Fortunately, my fear was very, very short lived. From the moment I first walked into the Arnold classic I realized how successful I was going to be. The expo was paved with hundreds and hundreds of booths and about 100,000 attendees. There were vendors of every fitness-related product imaginable, but incredibly, my booth was the one that had the longest line (more than any other in the whole festival).

Thousands of people were lining up to buy my product, meet me, talk to me, get my autograph and hear me say "Yeah Buddy!".

Before the first night was over, we had sold the entire stock, and more and more people were coming in. I couldn't believe it. We had made back all the money we had invested and then some, and there was still a lot more to be made.

The next day, because we had no more product left, we decided to sell our product at a discount and ship the orders to the people directly to their house. We thought that people were not going to like this idea, but because we offered the merchandise at a discount it worked out really, really well. We ended up selling three times the amount of

product we had brought in and got enough cash to reinvest a substantial amount into the company.

The Ronnie Coleman Signature Series was just about to begin.

NEW PRODUCTS AND NEW MARKETS

Upon returning to America we reanalyzed our whole business model and realized that we had monster potential within us. If we worked with this in the right manner, we could sell millions of dollars a year around the world.

Immediately after, we decided to design and manufacture new products. We added a whey protein and a gainer to the product catalogue and initiated a distribution network to sell in stores all across Europe. To get clients we went to more expos and advertised in all the bodybuilding magazines. This worked wonders, and within a few months, we were selling way, way beyond our expectations.

Soon after, we opted to launch more products and expand into other markets. The most logical step after Europe was Asia, where I was just as big or even bigger than anywhere else. This turned out to be a great idea, because China and India became the biggest markets of the Ronnie Coleman Signature Series by far.

After that we moved on to South America, where the up-and-coming fitness culture gave us a huge boost. We began selling massively all around that area of the world, especially in Brazil and Columbia, where a whole bodybuilding movement were well underway.

After that we decided to break into the toughest market of all, which was the US.

In this country, while bodybuilding is certainly an important sport, we are not, under any means, close to being the number one leisure

activity (we're probably not in the top ten). Furthermore, there is so much competition that being successful in this market is extremely difficult. To make it one has to have a unique product with a gigantic selling point. That's the reason why we decided not to launch in the US when we first started. By now, however, we were well known, and we felt that the time for launching our product line in this country had come.

Our idea was to launch at the Arnold Classic in Columbus, but before we even drafted our plan, GNC head that we were going to debut in North America and offered us a big-time exclusive contract to distribute in all 50 states. This turned out to be a huge thing, because it saved us a lot of hassle and provided us with a massive boost in sales.

In the meantime, we also launch our online sales site. From there we could sell everywhere in the world without having to pay for the percentage taken by the store we sold at. All we needed to do was use the emerging social media, advertise heavily and wait for the dividends to yield. It turned out to be a massive victory, as we began to sell more through our website than anywhere else.

Before we knew it, in a matter of just a few short years, we had become bigger than we could ever imagine.

Today, nearly a decade after our initial launch, we sell nearly 30 million dollars a year in products and have expanded our catalogue from the initial two to 111 products.

KEYWORD: SUCCESS

Just as it happened with my bodybuilding career and with my days as a police officer, my career as an entrepreneur turned out to be a gigantic success beyond anything I could ever imagine.

My stance going in was to create a moderately successful product

line that could sell a good amount of merchandise and provide me with a steady income. It became much, much more than that. In fact, I could even say that my success in supplements could equate to my triumphs in bodybuilding.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

RONNIE THE FAMILY MAN

“The Family is one of nature’s masterpieces.”

— George Santayana, American philosopher and poet.

No book on my life would be complete without an exhaustive and comprehensive chapter on my love and family life. In many ways, it is love and family, and not his professional accomplishments, what drives a man. This is the story of my wives, my children and my family.

SHEILA

In chapter four I talked about Patricia, the girlfriend I had in high school that ultimately caused me to change life paths and go to Grambling. She was certainly not my best love, but she was the first, and thanks to her I learned the meaning of breakup and of how to manage love.

From that moment on, after suffering such a painful separation, I opted to make a very important decision: I was never going to be in a relationship again if it was going to cause me pain. The way I thought about it was pretty simple. Relationships are meant to make you better, not worse. They are supposed to improve your life and increase your joy, not the other way around. Hence, to me, if the relationship wasn’t going to do any of that, I wasn’t interested in engaging in it.

That was my mantra going forward, and I didn't find another suitable girlfriend until three years later. Of course, I had flings here and there, but because they weren't what I was looking for, they never actually lasted.

It wasn't until my senior year at Grambling that I met Sheila (spring of 1985), a very smart, laid back, wonderful girl who was majoring in computer science. From the first moment we met we hit it off really, really well. By that point I had already passed a lot of my credits, so I wasn't under that much stress anymore. Now I had the chance to date and get more serious if a girl happened to show up. Sheila was the right person at the right time in the right moment.

I graduate from Grambling two years before her, but she moved to Dallas as soon as she finished school and we remained boyfriend and girlfriend until 1995. Of course, we talked about getting married, but at that time I wasn't really ready for that. My finances weren't great after I graduated college (as you know), and I became so focused on getting over the hump and becoming a professional bodybuilder that I just didn't want to tie the knot.

Of course, we enjoyed our time together, but I was always very, very adamant on putting limits on how close we got. We always lived in separate homes and lived separate lives. This put a lot less strain in the relationship and it's probably the reason why it lasted so long. At one point we were even engaged, but I decided to cancel the engagement because I felt I was too young and immature to get married. It turned out to be the right choice, as we eventually drifted apart and decided to break up.

It was a very amiable separation, and to this day we still see each other from time to time.

VICKIE GATES

After I broke up with Sheila and became available, I started searching for another life partner. I've never been a big stud nor anything like that with the ladies, and I always put my career ahead of almost every relationship, so it was hard to find the right person.

Eventually however, after a few short weeks of being single, I found one: Vickie Gates.

I met Vickie in early 1996, when I was already a Mr. Olympia caliber bodybuilder but still had a long way to go. Vickie was a bodybuilder too, and a very successful one at that. She turned pro at around the same time I did and had placed very high at a ton of shows at around the time I met her.

I remember I was doing an appearance with a couple of other bodybuilders at a GNC show when she walked in as part of the crew of athletes who were supposed to present the products with me. She was really cool, had a tremendous body, was very disciplined and very nice to me. She didn't know who I was, and I didn't know who she was, but we both lived in Dallas, were both up-and-coming bodybuilders with huge aspirations, and we were both single. Nothing more one could ask for a potential life partner.

It all happened almost by itself, and we started dating almost immediately.

She was, in many ways, one of the best girls I've ever had. Why? Simple. She made me want to be a better man and pushed me to become a better bodybuilder. We worked out together all the time (she is the best training partner I ever had), we had similar goals, and had chemistry all across the board. In fact, right before I won my first Olympia, I was pretty close to throwing in the towel and retiring, and Vickie stopped me from doing it.

This, to me, is what a girlfriend is all about; helping you become a better person. She did, and we had a great relationship together. In

1997 we both qualified for the Olympia, in 1998 we both podiumed at the Olympia (she ended up in 3rd place), in 1999 we podiumed again at the Olympia (she got 2nd for what would be three consecutive Olympias) and in 2001 we both won the Arnold Classic.

It was a perfect relationship while it lasted, and it would have been even better if we both won the Olympia together. It didn't happen, but I sincerely feel that I became a much, much better bodybuilder and person because of her.

Through time however, we started to have our disagreements and we mutually decided to end the relationship in mid-2001, after we won the Arnold Classic. It wasn't a big deal or anything like that. We remained friends and we continue to have a good relationship today. Sometimes we even train together at the Metroflex and she is actually my current wife's personal trainer.

ALTA GARCIA BAUTISTA

After I broke up with Vickie, I didn't remain single for too long. Like I said before, I was focused on my career, but I always kept my eyes open for new possibilities. The ideal girl for me at that point was definitely someone in bodybuilding. This could help me keep motivated and not lose track of my training and my quest to keep winning Olympias.

Soon after Vickie and I separated, I found someone else: Alta Garcia Bautista, a young fitness competitor from the Dominican Republic. Like Vickie, she was fitness oriented and had a beautiful, relaxed personality that allowed me to have a joyful and happy relationship with her.

She was with me from 2001 to 2007, accompanying me through my 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Mr. Olympias in addition to my two losses at the hands of Jay Cutler. We had a beautiful relationship and we

both motivated each other to perform at our best.

The downside was that she lived in New Jersey, and the distance eventually took its toll on the relationship. At first it didn't seem to bother us, as we both commuted all the time to see each other, but after six years of being together, it ended up destroying us. Communication dwindled and we drifted apart very soon. This is a pretty sad fact because she was really a wonderful woman.

ROUIDA

After I separated from Alta, I decided to remain single for a while and focus on my health and my back problems. It was a pretty good decision considering that I was going to have to go through a lot of rehab and was not in the best shape for a serious relationship.

After about a year, I went out on the market to search for other prospects, and by the fall of 2008 I found one. Her name was Rouida, and she was a brilliant fitness trainer from Lebanon. She was incredibly intelligent, spoke five languages fluently, was natural-born entrepreneur and was incredibly successful at her job. She loved training clients and changing their life. We had met all the way back in 1998 and had kept somewhat in contact through the years until we reconnected a decade later.

We fell in love almost instantly and decided to elope a few months after we became boyfriend and girlfriend. We had two weddings. The first one was here in Dallas in a church with a minister and a couple of witnesses. Nothing fancy. A very small, private ceremony to celebrate our love. It was a beautiful moment for me because I felt like I had finally tied the knot and had become mature enough to marry.

A month later we went to Lebanon to celebrate the official wedding with her family. This was a whole different story. She invited like 100 people and threw a big party for her friends and her family. I invited a

few of my loved ones too, but the trip was so expensive that the only person who made it was a close friend. This didn't bother me, as I understood the pressures of being in financial debt and I didn't want anyone to suffer from that because of me.

The wedding was beautiful. I dressed in an all-black tux while she was dressed in a beautiful wedding gown. We looked like a match made in heaven, and I wish I could tell you this feeling lasted... it didn't.

Soon after we got married the beautiful attitude and tranquility that I had fell in love with was replaced by anger and bitterness. I had promised myself a long time before that I was never going to be in a relationship to suffer, and we decided to divorce. No biggie, I just moved on with my life. Of course, it was my fifth long term failed relationship, but I wasn't giving up on love just yet.

THE MOTHER OF MY FIRST TWO GIRLS

Most of the time I spent at Grambling State University was dedicated to studying, but I'm not going to lie, having a love life was something I missed. I didn't like to take time off from school to court women, but from time to time, I did go searching for girls to meet and hang out with.

One such girl was Inger. She was from my hometown in Bastrop, and I had known her ever since we were kids. We were very good friends and started going out in the summer of 1984, when I had just finished sophomore year in college. I didn't have any plans of becoming her boyfriend or anything like that (and neither did she), but we truly enjoyed each other's company... a lot.

Therefore, one fine night, while we were hanging out at my place, one thing led to another and we ended up in my bed. What happened? I got her pregnant. It wasn't planned, of course, but we

decided that we were going to go ahead and have the kid. We weren't going to marry but we were going to raise the girl in the best way that we could without being in a relationship. It worked wonders.

Nine months later, Valencia was born. It was a genuinely beautiful site, and I will never forget that precious moment. It's like everything you've ever done comes together for a graceful dance of celebrating life.

Inger was a wonderful mother and allowed me to visit my girl whenever I wanted and as much as I wanted to. This was a great deal... so great in fact that the next year she had another girl, Jamilleah. Jamilleah wasn't actually my biological daughter, but I adopted her, and she and Valencia became my pride and joy.

Inger and I raised them both really well, and today they are both successful young women who have profitable jobs in their profession. Valencia studied acting and lives in LA, doing auditions while she babysits to make ends meet. Jamilleah studies forensic science but got tired of looking at dead bodies and now works as a schoolteacher. I have a wonderful relationship with my two girls, talk over the phone with them almost every week and see them about once a month.

After Jamilleah and Valencia, I had two more girls via a sperm bank in 2007. I wanted to raise them as my own but after a court battle, a judge ruled that I wasn't really their father. Regardless, I still have a distance relationship with them, and I talk with them from time to time. They live with their mother in California.

SUSAN: THE WOMAN OF MY LIFE

After my divorce to Rouida, a part of me had certainly felt like giving up on love. I had failed on several relationships and kind of felt that I was never going to build a solid family. I was 45 years old and thought that I was maybe too late to follow that dream.

In fact, I often questioned if I had chosen the right path in prioritizing my career over my love life.

Those were thoughts that worried me, but fortunately, on April of 2009, on the day of my annual Ronnie Coleman Classic, that all changed.

The Ronnie Coleman Classic is a sports festival that Brian and I organize every year. It's a bodybuilding, fitness and strongman show that we host here in Arlington to showcase some of the best athletes in the world and give them an opportunity to make money and win prizes. It's truly a world class event, with some major athletes coming every year to compete.

In fact, the world record in the deadlift was set at the Ronnie Coleman Classic by Icelandic Strongman Benedikt Magnusson a few years ago. The record has since been broken by Eddie Hall, but that lift remains the record for the heaviest raw deadlift ever (at 1015 pounds) and one of the most impressive lifts ever made in any circumstance. Personally, I sincerely think that Benedikt could have packed on another 100 pounds there without any problem. He did it incredibly easily and with a perfect smoothness.

The Ronnie Coleman Classic has become an important show in Dallas, and a ton of people come to see it every year, regardless of whether they know who I am or not.

That year, in 2009, a lovely, beautiful woman came to my show and started talking to me. Her name was Susan, and she seemed incredibly interested at what was going on. She was open minded, relaxed, laid back, and very keen on learning about this fitness world.

We started talking and hit it off with a lot of chemistry from the very beginning. In fact, we were so comfortable with one another that we stayed up all night talking with each other after the show.

It had been a long time since I had connected to anyone in such a

way, and I felt fortunate and at true inner peace for finding someone so open and so pleasant.

We exchanged numbers and started dating. She was in the middle of a difficult divorce, but the relationship with me really gave her the strength to carry on with her life (despite being an enormously mentally strong woman). In turn, she made me believe that love was possible despite suffering so many defeats. She turned me into the best version of myself and allowed me to grow into a full human being who would do anything for his woman.

She showed me that relationships aren't always perfect, and that in order for them to work we have to put in a ton of work and fight for it to happen. This is exactly what has happened with ours and we have flourished in a way that I could never imagine. This has made me a better man and helped me improve my life, drastically.

A few months after we met, she officially divorced, and we began our relationship formally. Two years later we moved in together and opted to have a child. Nine months later, our beautiful daughter Susan (Suzy for short) was born.

Susan is a wonderful mother, and with little Susan she grew as a person and we both improved as a couple. Psychologists say that when children are born the relationship can suffer. This is the opposite of what happened to us. We became even closer and loved each other more than we ever did. Neither of us was a spring chicken when we decided to have a child, but it was a wonderful experience for both us, as it helped us realize our dreams of forming an ideal family with the ideal life partner.

Today, Susan and I have four young girls. Suzy, of course, who was our first, Lola, who is two years younger, followed by Sophia, who came in a year later and finally Layla, who is another year younger.

Yes, I'm in my mid 50's and I have four young daughters, but they

give me the will to fight (along with my wife, of course), to reach my potential as a father, husband and push me to truly live a beautiful family life with them.

Today, I can proudly say that my dream of having a family has been achieved. I live happy with my daughters and my wife, and it is possibly the greatest success of my entire life.

MY MOTHER'S LAST YEARS

After moving to Dallas upon graduating from college I left Louisiana pretty much for good. I returned there every year, but I never planned to move back, as Dallas was an ideal place for me in terms of employment and size. There was a lot to do, and I was so focused on my success than I never gave a thought about going back to Louisiana or Bastrop.

My mom moved to Dallas with me in 1988, and we lived a happy life as a family from that year all the way until she died. She lived with me for a year and then moved into her own place in 1989.

Having my mom in Dallas was truly a blessing. Not only did I have the person I loved the most next to me for emotional support, but she always helped me in my bodybuilding career. Who do you think bought all my groceries and cooked all my food while I was a bodybuilder? Who do you think cheered me and pushed me to become the best? None other than my mother. All while she worked as an airport supervisor at the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport.

My mom was me through the good and the bad. She was there to see me become a bodybuilder, win the Olympias, become a wellknown celebrity, retire, get my back surgeries, marry Susan, watch us give birth to our girls, and witness launching my supplement business and see it become a success. She was with me the whole time, backing me up emotionally, providing me with the support I

needed, and always giving me the extra push, I always required.

I once read that Sigmund Freud, the father of psychology, used to say that one can judge how good a parent is based on the happiness and achievements of their children. I can say with all confidence, that my mother was as good a nurturer, caretaker and mama as anyone else. She not only raised me to become a champion, but also taught me the do's and don'ts of life, how to be a hard worker, and pushed me to become the best.

If it wasn't for her, I would have never achieved anything, and for that, my dear friends, I am eternally grateful.

I am proud to say that I was able to repay her some of what she gave to me. In 2001, thanks to my earnings in bodybuilding, I was able to buy her a house in addition to four different luxury Lexus 400 cars that I changed every year. I purchased the first one in 1999 after I won my second Olympia and gave her a new one every three years.

As you know, my mom was only 16 years old when I was born, and I thought that since we were so close in age, we were both going to die of old age together.

Regretfully, one day, she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

She was only 69 years old, but I felt that she was strong enough to make it, despite the 5% survival rate in that disease and the insistence on the doctors that there was little to be done.

By the time she was diagnosed, the cancer was very developed, but I felt like she had a strength tougher than anything within her, and I sincerely believed that she was going to pull through.

I called her up and told her that I was with her in whichever decision she was prepared to make. If she wanted to seek treatment, I was going to be there for her, and if she opted not to, I was still going to be there by her side.

In the beginning of our lives, through our teens and pretty much through the entire course of our existence, mothers are like the captain of our ship. When we're very young they'll guide it completely, they'll take care of it, they'll protect it, they'll guard it and they'll help it whenever it reaches trouble.

As we get older, they will not participate as much in that role, but there will always be a certain supervision and a constant checking-in as to where the vessel is going or what it is doing. This is exactly what my mom was to me. She didn't play a major role in helping me train as a bodybuilder in the gym, but boy was she there at the Olympia when I won each time, boy was she there to motivate me to become the best, and boy did she push me to improve my life.

No matter how successful I became, she was always there for me, helping me improve and become better.

Nearing the end of her life, I wanted to help her as much as she helped me when I started my life. I was there to support her during those painful and hard months of treatment, and I am proud to say that I stood by her until the very end. She died in the fall of 2016, just a few short months after she had been diagnosed from the cancer.

Losing her was incredibly hard, as she had been the only person in my entire existence who had stuck next to me the entire time, both in the good and in the bad. I was heartbroken and incredibly sad, but my time at the police department had taught me a thing or two about how to deal with death, and I didn't suffer too much because of it. Don't get me wrong, I miss her to death and I think about it every single day, but I understood that death and dying are a part of life, and that one of the laws of living is that in the end, we should see our parents leave this world (just like they saw us come into it).

Of course, I would have loved to have seen her for many more years and for her to see my young girls grow up, but God wanted her

to be in a better place, and I feel completely at peace with that. I know that, from above, she is looking at me and that one day in the future I will see her again.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

The Importance of family cannot be overstated. In many ways, a man can be judged, more than anything else, by the family he has created. Of course, I have been a very successful man professionally, but the victory I am most proud of is the one I achieved with my family, my wives, and my children.

PART SIX

BACK TO THE FUTURE



CHAPTER TWENTY

MY LEGACY

“Carve your name on hearts, not tombstones. A legacy is etched into the minds of others and the stories they share about you.”

— Shannon Alder, American Inspirational Author

MY VISION REALIZED

Looking back at all that I have accomplished in my life, all I can think about is being grateful. Being grateful for having a wonderful family, being grateful for being a hard worker, for going to college, for finding a job, for working at the Police Department, for meeting Brian, for becoming a professional bodybuilder, for being Mr. Olympia, for winning the Mr. Olympia eight times, for become a world-known celebrity, for forming my own brand of products and for forming a beautiful family.

Gratefulness has always driven my life, and looking back today, seeing what I have accomplished, from being born as a humble country boy to eventually becoming what some people say is best bodybuilder of all time, I am still dumbfounded.

In normal circumstances, the most a person like me, born in poverty, in a small town in the south could ever aspire to was to work at a local factory, raise a family and retire. That should have been the height of my success, and many of my friends growing up suffered the same fate.

Thankfully, however, thanks to my determination, diligence, luck, hard work, and to God, I managed to do a lot, lot more than I ever intended in my life.

To me, when I think of myself and what I've done, a simple word comes to mind: overachiever.

Overachiever is defined as someone who accomplishes a lot more than is expected, projected, likely or maybe even possible. In many ways, this is what my career was all about.

If you really come to think of it, what are the odds that a southern farm boy would grow up to become one of the greatest bodybuilders of all time, an icon in the sport, an inspiration to so many people, and a massively successful fitness supplement entrepreneur? Pretty, pretty low, if not astronomical.

Regardless, here I am, and I feel tremendously fortunate and grateful for being here today, irrespective of my problems and situations that arose along the way.

ACHIEVING MY VISION

As you have read during the course of my biography, I never actually set out with a foolproof life plan to achieve a massive array of goals. In fact, for a large portion of my life I had no goals. It was pretty much circumstances what drove me to go college, what made me switch majors to accounting, what gave me a job at Domino's Pizza, what presented me the opportunity of being a Police Officer and what drove me to the Metroflex Gym.

Of course, I always took advantage of all the opportunities that God threw at me, and I made the best of them, but I never had an actual vision of doing anything up until I became a pro-bodybuilder. And even then, I never had the biggest goal of becoming Mr. Olympia. After that, it all changed.

When I won my first Mr. Olympia my entire mindset changed and for the first time in my life, I set out a plan to achieve my massive goals. At that time, it was to win, make a lot of money and eventually become the greatest bodybuilder ever. Of course, I achieve that, or got pretty darn close it.

After that my goal was to be healthy, build a big family, and form a profitable business. That, too, happened, and my goal going forward is to keep doing what I'm doing, work on my health and be happy.

Today, I can sincerely say, with all pride and joy, that I have achieved every I set out to do... and I gotta tell you, it feels phenomenal. Knowing that you have achieved everything you set out to do is truly a feeling like no other. And just as I will describe in the following paragraphs, I want to inspire you to do the same with your life.

WHAT IS MY LEGACY?

When people approach me in my everyday life and tell me that I have inspired them, or have changed their lives, or have helped them achieve their fitness, goals, life goals, get bigger or simply improve their overall existence, I, of course feel honored, pleased and privilege, but I often feel overwhelmed and humbled. I frequently tell the people that they give me too much credit and that, in the end of the day, they achieved their goals on their own.

Nevertheless, I do like to know that I have served as an inspiration for people around the world, and it's a pleasure to see that I have changed the lives of so many.

Like I said before, I never really set out to be an inspiration for anyone. I never thought of myself as someone worth being a symbol of motivation or encouragement. My quest was always to be the best that I could be. I didn't really care if being the best lead me to actual

victory because I knew that doing my finest effort was more than enough. If I won, that was great, but if I didn't, I didn't mind.

When I hear, however, that I have become a source of spur and drive to all of you guys out there, It fills me with so much joy and appreciation that I am unable to put it into words.

I can't thank you guys enough for being there for me, for feeling that I have improved your life and for encouraging me to help you achieve your goals in whichever activity you want.

Today, of course, I know that I am inspiration, and I hope that I can continue to be one through my life, wherever it may lead me.

In terms of my legacy, aside from my achievements in bodybuilding, I think that knowing that so many people out there have started working out or have improved their physical fitness, strength, or even the enjoyment in their workouts thanks to me is an honor greater than anything else. Knowing that a lot of you have used and regularly use "Yeah Buddy", "Lightweight Baby", "Ain't Nothing But a Peanut", and all the other phrases that I coined to pump yourself up before a lift, or simply to motivate yourself at the gym truly means everything to me.

I was, the top bodybuilder in the world for a long time, and I did inspire a lot of the guys to improve their bodies and join our beautiful sport, and although this is certain a beautiful part of my life, I want and I believe that my legacy goes way, way beyond that.

I do want to inspire you to go to the gym and grow your muscles big, lift heavy weights and scream "Yeah Buddy" until you are kicked out the gym (LOL), but to me, it's much more than that.

I want to motivate you to improve your life, to believe in yourself, to set goals and high standards (and accomplish them), to achieve whatever you want, and to fulfill your potential in this world. I want you to believe in God and use His strength to push you forward in the right

direction. I want you to feel happy, fulfilled, satisfied, content, and pleased with your life and with what you do with it.

I want you to achieve your dreams and make them a reality, and I want you to look back one day and say “man, I made it.” Believe me, there is no greater feeling in the world than that. That’s truly heaven on Earth.

In short, I want to help you and inspire you to become the best version of yourself. I want you to be, as the army points it out, truly, all that you can be. This, more than anything else, is what I want my inheritance to the world to be and it’s sincerely what I believe my true and genuine legacy is all about.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

TO THE NEXT STEP

“All you really need to do is accept this moment fully. You are then at ease in the here and now and at ease with yourself.”

— Eckhart Tolle, best-selling self-help author and spiritual teacher.

THE FUTURE OF RONNIE COLEMAN

When I see old friends and acquaintances, meet my loyal fans or see people I haven't seen in a long time, a lot of them ask me what my plans for the future are. I don't know what it is, but a lot of them want to know what I want to within the next few years.

“Now that you have a family, that you've achieved everything there is to do in bodybuilding, that you've retired from the police department, and that you've founded and incredibly successful line of products and run the yearly Ronnie Coleman Classic.” They tell me. “What are you going to do next?”

Well, contrary to what many of your out there may believe, the truth is that I don't have this grand plan going forward with my life. In reality, I think that I've achieved pretty much everything I've set out to do with my life. Today, nearing the age of 60, I feel extremely satisfied with everything I have done. I've done everything I ever wanted and even more. I've been a successful police officer, the best bodybuilder of all time, a successful entrepreneur and a happy family man.

I like to think of myself as a massive overachiever, and I gotta tell

you, there is no greater feeling in the world than saying this. In fact, I can even say that the feeling is so overwhelming it's incredibly hard to describe.

Now, going forward, like I said, there is no grand plan. My idea and my motivation are simply to continue working on my supplement series, working on great projects now and then (like this book and the Netflix documentary *The King*), going to bodybuilding shows and continue living my life in the most positive way possible.

My two main goals are to see my daughters grow up to be happy and successful (just as I mentioned on the chapter regarding my family), and to be able to walk fully once again.

These are, of course, not goals for the faint hearted, as they require a ton of time and effort, and to me, at this point in my life, they are more than enough.

Eventually however, who knows what goals may pop into my head or emerge in my life? But for now, these are the goals that tick my existence. I feel extremely satisfied, extremely at peace, and extremely relaxed.

Not everything is perfect, nor will it ever be perfect, but I feel that my life is in the best place it has ever been. To me, the future is not the place to look at anymore. The idyllic setting is the present; the now.

My perfection lies in this very moment in this very instant. I enjoy everything that I do, from eating at IHOP every single day, to picking my girls up from school, to spending time with my wife, from traveling around the world for appearances, to hosting the Ronnie Coleman Classic, to working out every single day at the gym, to spending time with friends.

Sure, I don't have the gigantic prospects and plans going forward, but it doesn't really matter. To me, all that matters right now is to be

happy and peace right now, and I have to say that it feels beyond phenomenal.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

RONNIE'S RULES FOR LIFE

“Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.”

— George Bernard Shaw, Irish Playwright and Social Critic

A LITTLE ADVICE ON LIFE

Before I start writing and talking about my rules for life, I would like to take some time to thank you for reading my book. I feel tremendously honored in knowing that a lot of people out there are interested in my life story and have used some of the valuable time to read it. I realize that there are lot of other options out there you can take, and I sincerely thank you for reading my book.

I have been brutally honest about my life, about what drove me to my accomplishments, and about what makes me feel alive. Most of my existence has been filled with positivity, but a part of it hasn’t, and I appreciate you hanging in there with me learning about both the good, the bad, the ugly and the fantastic.

That being said, I think that an important part of reading about my life is showing you guys some lessons that you may be able to use in your own existence and apply it to your everyday situation.

I am not referring to lessons just in terms of being a great bodybuilder, or a fitness expert, but general rules in order to improve your life and become a better person. That’s why I dedicate this chapter to something I like to call “Ronnie’s Rules”. I hope you like it.

1. Open Your Eyes: One of the biggest lessons I have learned in my life is that great things can happen by themselves. Through my life, many of my accomplishments have happened due to a combination of luck and hard work. If I hadn't gone that day to Metroflex I would have never met Brian and would have never become a bodybuilder. If it hadn't broken up with my high school girlfriend I wouldn't have gone to college, and I would have never moved to Dallas, and I would have never been a police officer, nor a bodybuilder. This has taught me that great things can happen due to luck, being at the right place at the right time and, by keeping your eyes open. Many great things can happen in your life if you keep your eyes open. Make an effort to observe the world and great things will happen to you.

2. Be Grateful: An important part of my life, my success and my happiness (and believe me, I am very happy), has been due to being grateful. Grateful is about being conscious about what you have and being thankful for having it. It's one of the biggest and most important qualities of happy people. Why? Because it makes a switch in your mind from "What is missing in my life?" to "How fortunate I am to have this or that." When you are grateful you become aware of how perfect your life is and you become more satisfied, fulfilled and tranquil for what you have.

3. Be Relentless: This is the number one characteristic of successful people; they simply don't take no for an answer and they go after what they want no matter what is happening around them. They are persistent, dedicated, diligent, disciplined, and possess a unique determination. Nothing can stop them. The more they hear "no" the more they fight to get a "yes". This is what I did with bodybuilding, and I went from an unknown journeyman to the best bodybuilder of all time (that's why Relentless is the title of one of my DVDs). No matter what you want to do with your life, if you want to achieve it, relentlessness

must be your main characteristic. It will lead you to victory and you will achieve your goals.

4. Have Passion: Passion is one of the most important keys to achieving what you want in life. No matter if you want to be a professional bodybuilder, or if you want to be a Zen Monk, or a General in the army, passion is your ticket to achieving it. Without passion, you can't do anything. It was passion, in many ways, what kept me going despite not winning during my early years in bodybuilding. It was passion that kept me training, dieting and torturing myself at the gym for years on end and it was passion that kept me working as a police officer despite achieving massive success in other areas of life. Passion drives the world, and it should fuel your life. In fact, if you aren't working in something you are passionate about, you are wasting your time. Don't even bother. You may earn a lot of money, but you will suffer a lot and place a tremendous burden upon yourself. Don't let it happen. Either find passion or switch to something you are passionate about. Life will be much, much better if you do things with passion.

5. Work as hard as you can: This is non-negotiable. If you want to achieve success in anything you have to work your ass off. There is no shortcut to success, and the only way to achieve it is laboring endlessly. Great things may happen, and luck may be an important component that can push you in the right direction, but if you don't put in the hours and work as hard as you have to, the good luck will be of little help. No one, and I mean no one, ever achieved anything great without working hard. In my case, all of my achievements were done thanks to working hard. Sure, many guys talked about how it was impossible to be a professional bodybuilder and still have a job. To me, that just sounded lazy. I was the best bodybuilder of all, training six days a week, all while being a full-time police officer, and being

employed at odd jobs here and there, while at the same time making paid appearances for a variety of brands. People ask me all the time how in the world I managed to do this. It wasn't at all complicated. In fact, I didn't even think anything of it. To me, it was normal, and that's why I managed to do what I did with my life. The same thing with everyone else who has achieved success. If you make it happen, and if you work for it, you will achieve it.

6. Keep your faith high: This has been the most important part of my life and the life of my family and my dear friend, trainer and angel-on-Earth Brian Dobson. To me, faith is everything, and the only reason I got to achieve anything in life was thanks to God. God gave me the opportunities, the genetics, the chances, the determination, the will and the power to achieve my goals. Many people, regrettably, forget the importance of God and keep Him away from their life. I don't like to criticize anyone, especially when it comes to their religious beliefs, but I am 100% sure that everyone's life would be better if they had more faith. Science is very specific and clear on this. People who have more faith are happier. In my particular situation, it was faith that allowed me to become a better bodybuilder and to win all those Mr. Olympia titles. In fact, every time I won, despite being at the top of the mountain, I always knew there was someone above me, and that someone was God.

7. Keep a Positive Attitude: One of the things that people have asked me in recent months and years is how I keep smiling and being so optimistic despite the horrible back pain I was in. The answer, to me, is simple. I have always made an effort to see the good in everything (no matter how bad it may seem). I always look at the bright side of life, and I try to keep my hopes up, my chin up, and my demeanor as constructive and as heightened as I can. Sure, at times it may not be easy, but with the help of my faith, my good humor,

laughter, and being grateful, keeping a positive attitude is fairly simple. Apply this to your life and you will see how beautiful everything will be.

8. Save Your Money: Many of the world's problems are caused by a lack of money. At the individual level, we have become so engulfed with overspending, buying, being in debt and purchasing what we can't afford that we have simply forgotten what it is to save money and have, in the very least, an emergency fund put away. To me, saving money is about having peace of mind. Don't get me wrong, money is of course, to be used and enjoyed, but not the extreme where it affects our very lives and puts us at risk of losing everything. That's why it's very important to save money and put away something for when you need it later. I learned this lesson the hard way. If I would have saved money while working in college, I may have had a little something put away for when I couldn't find a job. This may have saved me a lot of agony. However, it worked out well because it taught me a big lesson about life. Don't let it happen to you. Make an effort to prevent the negative before it happens, and one of the best ways to do so is to save money. How much? Well, that's really up to you. I ain't no financial planner, but I think that, in the very least, you should be saving about 20% of what you make. Some guys even go ahead and say that you should save 50% or more. I am not an expert on this, but I what I can certainly say is that if you can't afford to save any money, you are doing something wrong. Take a look at your expenses. Analyze them and think about what you can change in order to save more. This is nonnegotiable. Do it and you will see how much better off you will be.

9. Stay Humble: This is a very important rule for me. Humility, I believe, is the basis for success. There are very few things that annoy me more in life than people who are pompous, arrogant and ostentatious. Some of them may, in fact, win, but in my book, if they're

not humble, they're not worthy of anything. This may sound a bit severe, but there's a reason behind this. No one is worth more than anyone else, no matter how many achievements, money, or successes they've had in life. We are all equal, not only by law but under God... And the people who are not humble have not only forgotten that, but are doing damage to the world and everyone around them. To me it's very simple. Success is all about humility and never forgetting who you are or where you came from. After all, behind every great master of success there was once a person who hadn't yet achieved anything. Remember to always stay humble.

10. Have Fun: One of the reasons, I believe, is why I became so successful in bodybuilding and enjoyed the gym so much was that I always made an effort to have fun. I followed a strict schedule, yes, both in terms of eating, sleeping, working, working out, and everything else, but I always made an effort to have a lot of fun. If you see pictures or videos of me posing on stage I was always smiling and making an effort to have a good time. Likewise, at the gym, I always screamed, yelled, and made funny voices. They were, of course, meant to fire me up, but they also helped me have a lot of fun, and that's what made the journey even better. Make an effort to integrate more fun into your life and I guarantee that everything will be better.

That's all guys. That's all there is to my life, to my career, and to my existence. Thank you for reading. Thank you, friends, thank you, family, thank you, bodybuilding, thank you, life, thank you, God, thank you, fans!

Works Cited

1. Yudin, Vlad, director. *Ronnie Coleman: The King*. Performance by Ronnie Coleman, The Vadar Company, 2018. Netflix.