

## *Training for Mass, Second Edition*

### Bonus chapter: The business of advice

The question of which is the best strategy of weight-training will almost certainly never be answered to universal satisfaction. Volume training has a massive and dedicated following. The high-intensity camp is much smaller, but its adherents are no less devoted. Most training methods are variations of one or the other, and each is in possession of a committed camp. The goal of *Training for Mass* was to make a good case for high-intensity training. For the *Second Edition*, a greater depth of analysis was given to both the logic behind brief, highly intense workouts, and to what exactly an ideal HIT workout should look like—down to each individual rep. The book drives home the idea that although successful training takes place in the gym, to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of that training, you have to use your head.

Yet it may help to understand the purpose of the book within the context of a greater theme. After having been involved in bodybuilding for 27 years, both as a successful competitor and writer (but more so as a just a regular, dedicated gym-goer), I've made a large number of observations relating to the pursuit of muscle mass. Many of these center on the training habits of bodybuilders, from massive professionals to what I call perpetual beginners—people who lift for years yet seemingly never add a single ounce of muscle—and all those individuals who fall somewhere in between. I've reached an important conclusion.

The bottom line, the absolute and somewhat ugly truth of the matter, is that as long as you're training hard and consistently with basic exercises, and you're able to avoid mental and physical burnout, your ultimate success in bodybuilding will largely be determined by your genetics—and, especially if you opt for this route, the amount and type of drugs you take. This being the case, you might as well use high-intensity training. It takes less time and it carries a reduced probability of injury.

Consider Mr. Olympia Dorian Yates' single-set approach, or 1988 USA Champion Greg Defendis' 100-set program; also mull over the wide range of variations used by all other champion bodybuilders which fall somewhere in between; all these examples testify to the claim that if the right ingredients are present, there are countless effective means of training. If you're in possession of great genetics, and your discipline and effort are equally great—and you have a daredevil attitude regarding drug use—the only thing that can stop you is someone with a better overall combination of these attributes. The only *other* thing that can stop you is injury. The combination of the wear-and-tear of high-volume weight-training and performance-enhancing drugs has resulted in a large number of muscle tears, shot knees, and disabled shoulders. So be warned. Regardless, the majority seem able to slip this noose.

If you're a drug-free bodybuilder, this changes things quite a bit. You won't have the luxury of using chemicals which can atone for deficiencies or excesses in your training. You especially need to avoid overdoing it, and you need to keep in mind that overtraining *will* cause your physique to deteriorate. It's imperative that you choose a strategy of training that mandates adequate recovery. Traditional volume training makes no such mandate per se, and

most of its adherents seem to be only vaguely aware that overtraining is necessarily a bad thing. The training routines of most bodybuilders include the stipulation that adequate recovery should take place, though the idea usually isn't given much more thought than that. As such, most volume trainers periodically, if not perpetually, overdo it and become overtrained. Natural bodybuilders are far more susceptible to this. For everyone else, success comes from great genes, hard work, and drugs. This statement should not be misconstrued as an endorsement of steroid use. It's merely a verifiable observation.

Conspicuously absent from the list of ingredients necessary for success in bodybuilding is the ability to think rationally. This ability can help you to optimize your training and avoid injury, but if you're in possession of the traits mentioned above, rational thought need not be present. Many great champion bodybuilders, on their paths to greatness, have used methods that range from questionable to blatantly irrational. This isn't surprising. In the world of bodybuilding, there just isn't a whole lot of rational thought going around, nor was there ever. There's a whole lot of advice-giving and advice-taking, but the rationale supporting much of this advice is based solely on correlation, or other forms of faulty logic. The following quote from Pat Neve, a Mr. USA and Mr. America class winner from the 1970s, is a good example of this:

I've won the Best Arms trophy in five national-level bodybuilding competitions primarily because I superset my biceps and triceps exercises to increase the intensity level of my arm workouts.<sup>1</sup>

Though many bodybuilders may find Neve's assertion to be a compelling case for supersets, here he makes an irrational deduction. He didn't win those "best arms" titles because he performed supersets for his arms. Rather, Neve won those titles for the following, simple reason: His arm development was better than that of his competitors. The reasons why his arms became this good in the first place are as follows: good genetics; good supplementation; hard work; dedication. He was also merely fortunate enough not to compete against anyone with better arms.

So where did his conclusion about supersets come from? For those unfamiliar with the term, a "superset" is a somewhat common method of training that involves performing an exercise for one body part, then immediately performing another for the opposing part, with no rest in between. In this case, it's biceps and triceps. Chest and back are also opposing parts that can be trained as part of a superset, though this combination mainly went out of fashion in the 1980s.

There's just one important problem with the technique. Supersets do not make either of the two exercises which comprise them any more effective. The first muscle trained will respond exactly as it would in a normal, single-set approach. The second muscle worked can only stand to suffer from the method, since the highest levels of intensity—the catalyst of muscular growth—can only be maintained for a very short period of time. There is also absolutely nothing about performing sets for opposing muscles in quick succession that will stimulate more growth. Though the Weider Supersets Principle (the official name given to it by Joe Weider) promises to be a device to "increase intensity," this method is incapable of creating any such effect. The only possible effect that supersets can have on intensity levels is to lower them for the second exercise.

The appeal of this technique has always been the good pump that goes along with it. Historically bodybuilders have erroneously equated a good pump with increased growth. A good pump—where a muscle becomes gorged with blood and swells up—is of course great, and any good growth-stimulating set should typically (though not necessarily) be accompanied by a decent pump. Nevertheless, a great pump can most certainly occur in a non-productive workout. And most critically, there’s nothing about a pump per se that leads to more growth.

Pat Neve ended up with an award-winning pair of arms. He also performed supersets. He deduced that his arm development “primarily” resulted specifically from this technique. He therefore confused correlation with cause-and-effect, which is really the granddaddy of all bodybuilding training errors. In other words, he wasn’t thinking rationally about the relationship between his training and his muscular growth. In the end, his arm development was achieved in spite of this method rather than because of it. His arms may have actually been better had he not used supersets. Nevertheless, don’t expect to ever see an admission like this, from Neve or anyone else:

I’ve won the Best Arms trophy in five national-level bodybuilding competitions despite the fact that I superset my biceps and triceps exercises.

The theory supporting high-intensity training describes a cause-and-effect relationship between weight-training and muscular growth. Theories which attribute their effects to correlation alone are actually not theories at all. The one-set approach was devised to be the most effective and efficient means by which to apply the high-intensity theory. It also allowed that theory to fulfill a crucial attribute of any such idea: The HIT theory successfully predicted future occurrences. The idea predicted that brief, infrequent, and intense exercise would build muscle—and that it would do so as well as, or better than, other strategies of weight-training. In this regard it succeeded. Quite a few bodybuilders, some quite massive, have successfully demonstrated that HIT works.

However, in the context of my *genes, drugs, and hard work* observation, high-intensity training is really nothing more than an optimization of a standard bodybuilding strategy. Pat Neve did not optimize his arm training because he didn’t think about it rationally. He certainly had rationale for his use of supersets, but that rationale wasn’t logical. The correlation of his development and his methodology made it *seem* like cause-and-effect. And granted, in an activity like bodybuilding where progress comes very slowly, it’s difficult to tell which methods or exercises work and which ones don’t. Fortunately, rational thought and deduction can be a valuable tool for making determinations about what you should be doing. It can at least help you to narrow things down by ruling out techniques that are not capable of improving your results. Supersetting is a good example.

Neve’s claim seems to simply be a variation of another of bodybuilding training’s greatest errors—the fantastically optimistic notion that once inside the gym, all hard work pays off. There appear to be three reasons why bodybuilders have long held this view. The first is that it’s intuitive. In other words, it just seems like it should be the case that within a

rudimentary activity like weightlifting, all hard work should pay off. The second reason would be the informal proliferation of this view: The idea that all hard work pays off is implied by observing or discussing the training strategies and techniques of others.

The third reason many hold the opinion that all hard work pays off is maybe the most important: Official sources have been responsible for encouraging this line of thinking. No single individual is more guilty of this than Joe Weider, the self-described “Father of Modern Bodybuilding.” For several decades Weider dominated every aspect of bodybuilding. The big magazines were his. The big contests were his. There was a time when he even owned a large share of the dietary supplement and exercise machine markets. And finally, in an attempt to insure that his dominance was absolute, he even claimed that the training techniques of champion bodybuilders were a gift from him.

Weider put his name in front of any and all weight-training techniques of which he became aware, in some cases claimed them to be of his own invention, and required bodybuilders to mention them in their Weider magazine training articles. “*I use the Weider Double-Split Training Principle*” is a quote you could expect to read in the training articles of any one of the several dozen bodybuilders who possessed physiques worthy of *Flex* or *Muscle & Fitness*. Weider was smart enough to note the methods of champions and make them his own. He probably never gave a moment’s thought to whether these methods made any sense or not, and could not possibly have cared. They’re a part of the bodybuilding cosmos; therefore, they’re worth owning. They became just one more object of the bodybuilding microcosm for Weider to stamp his brand onto. This was no mistake. In any single copy of *Muscle and Fitness* or *Flex* magazines from the 1980s, the name “Weider” often appeared hundreds of times. Few can rival such unabashed megalomania. Nevertheless, he was a great businessman. He was a little too great, perhaps. The Weider Principles thus became accepted as fact by the legions of bodybuilders who learned of them—a notable demonstration of the power of marketing. The testimonials of champions who dared not say otherwise sealed this acceptance, and thus we witness the great majority religiously following training ideas which are in many cases ill-conceived and illogical—all because Joe Weider said they should, and all because he was out to promote his brand.

*Training for Mass* analyzes quite a few of the Weider Principles. The majority fare no better than supersets once the light of reason is cast upon them. The most illogical of the lot also may also be the one most proudly advertised in Weider publications: the *Weider Instinctive Training Principle*. “Dr. Squat” Fred Hatfield, in an online article which both explains and praises the principles, summed up the idea as follows:

Eventually, all bodybuilders instinctively attain the ability to construct diets, routines, cycles, intensity levels, reps and sets that work best for them.<sup>2</sup>

It’s interesting that Hatfield can make statements like this and expect to retain any vestige of credibility as an authority on bodybuilding. How exactly is instinct supposed to supply this information? Considering the amount of time modern humans have existed, bodybuilding is a very new phenomenon. Why would humans, who possess precious few instincts in the first place, develop additional automatic behavioral mechanisms to help them construct bodybuilding routines and diets? Humans are capable of rational thought and deduction. Why

not use this powerful, real-world ability instead of relying on some imaginary “instinct”? Are structural engineers encouraged to use instinct to design bridges? Of course not. The notion is absurd. Yet the use of instinct in place of rational thought for bodybuilding training somehow seemed to be perfectly logical. The idea was vigorously promoted, Weider disciples like Hatfield enthusiastically propped it up, and throngs of bodybuilders, eager for success, attempted to tap into their instincts to make their physiques better.

Despite the logically self-destructive character of the Weider Instinctive Training Principle, almost incredibly, few questioned it. Bodybuilders had been, in a sense, conditioned to believe that the entire family of methods had merit. Really, they had little reason to believe otherwise. After all, why would Weider, the so-called Father of Modern Bodybuilding, purposely mislead them? The answer is simple. There’s no conspiracy behind all of this. Conspiracies, after all, exist far less often than some people would have us believe. Weider was never out to purposely deceive anyone, at least with his training advice. He was merely out to make a buck—or a few hundred million. Narcissism may be an evil trait, but it does not an evil man make. However, evil traits will forever beget evil consequences. Weider’s narcissism manifested itself as his desire to create a vast fortune, to gather as much fame as possible along the way, and to be heralded as someone who made the world a better place by giving it the gift of bodybuilding. “If it weren’t for me, bodybuilding would still be in the cesspool”<sup>3</sup> is one of his more infamous quotes. There’s a frustrated majority of people who faithfully use the training methods of which he claimed ownership. They’re ultimately just casualties of Weider’s relentless desire to make every last facet of bodybuilding *his*.

The force driving the creation of these methods must have been business, not any earnest desire to create an effective, logical, and efficient system. Regardless, when all the pieces of the puzzle came together—when the physiques of top bodybuilders were presented in contest shape—it can be concluded that their methods, overall, were effective. At the same time, since many of these methods are illogical, they essentially amount to being little more than a waste of time and energy. They’re therefore not efficient. The physique of former Mr. Olympia Lee Haney illustrates this point. He used the Weider Principles (or at least claimed to in the Weider magazines), and he produced one of the greatest builds of all time. Although Haney obviously got excellent results, if his training articles were accurate, he also devoted a good deal of time and energy to training that was, in the end, totally unnecessary. (One of the aims of *Training for Mass* is to explain how this is possible.)

Weider recognized the potential of bodybuilding to emerge from the shadows, just as he recognized the value in seizing overlordship of the culture itself. It would help cement his image as its leader. The spoils of domination, the flow of money, would follow. He knew no such leader existed before him, other than perhaps Charles Atlas or Jack Lalanne, or a like cast of characters. None of them came close to being the father figure to—or even the shepherd of—the growing ranks of what later became known as “hardcore” bodybuilders. Personal satisfaction over having invented for himself this status may have prompted Weider to notoriously compare himself to Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Weider seemed resolved to ensure that no bodybuilder should ever forget to whom he must pay homage. He appeared equally determined to transcend mortality, at least in image. The Mr. Olympia title is officially “Joe Weider’s Mr. Olympia”; all Joe Weider logos and contest medals depict Weider as a golden, god-like figure, complete with the physique of a

god. Yet you merely have to watch the movie *Pumping Iron* to appreciate the fact that Weider possessed the physique of a typical middle-aged businessman. Regardless, the might of his ego would in no way arrest this ridiculous self-depiction. It didn't stop there. He had the nerve to give himself the nickname of "Master Blaster" and the title of "Trainer of Champions Since 1936." All of this comes from a guy who—in appearance—looks like he never touched a weight. Why didn't his Weider Principles do the Master Blaster any good?

Weider has certainly provided his critics with a good deal of ammunition. However, no amount of criticism can subtract from his unquestionable success, either as a businessman, a make-believe Greek God, or as someone who "created" the training methods of real champions. Regardless, and in light of the opening passages of this section, what does it matter that many of the Weider Principles were illogical and ill-conceived? After all, it's been proven countless times that bodybuilders using these methods—given that they possess the right "ingredients"—can build world-championship physiques. The reason is simple. It matters because time is precious, our biological resources are limited—and because deception and negligence should not go unexposed. In other words, it matters because many bodybuilders waste time and energy on methods that either do not contribute to the growth of muscle or that actually have the opposite effect; because a large number have suffered injuries from following a system which implies that a high volume of work is necessary for building muscle; because many also waste time trying to figure out how to tap into imaginary instincts rather than being encouraged to use their capacity to think rationally. But maybe Weider would have preferred that bodybuilders never use their ability to think rationally. Occasionally some did, and more than once he paid for it.

In the 1980s, a heavily-promoted product of the Weider supplement line was something called "Anabolic Mega Packs." Advertisements and articles in Weider magazines about the supplement suggested or flat-out stated that it was as effective as anabolic steroids. The product was purchased by well-intentioned customers who expected the amazing results that the magazines promised. After taking the pills and getting no noticeable effects, many felt that they had been misled and ripped off. It turns out that the product itself was little more than a collection of vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and herbs. The United States Federal Trade Commission filed charges against Weider on behalf of those who had forked over good money for something that was mainly just enriching their urine. The Weider corporate machine was summoned to court to confront its customers. In the end Weider was found liable for making misleading claims about the product. Anyone who could prove that he bought Anabolic Mega Packs was given a reimbursement check.<sup>5</sup>

Weider was forced to pay back money he had essentially stolen from his customers, but the more important result was that he enhanced his reputation of being a deceiver. Something that never got mentioned in the Weider magazines is his track record of getting in similar trouble. Prior to his Anabolic Mega Packs adventure, advertisements for "Weider Formula No. 7" promised that you would "gain a pound per day"; ads for his "Five-Minute Body Shaper" device assured significant weight loss when used for only minutes a day, and showed faked before and after pictures in its ads. Weider's "Dynamic Life Essence" also advertised results that seemed to be too good to be true.<sup>6</sup> They were. All these claims were brought to the attention of authorities, and in each Weider was forced to repay his customers for misleading them. Nevertheless, he was undeterred, and obviously had not learned his lesson. It's hard to avoid the conclusion that someone who calls himself the "father" of

bodybuilding on one hand while repeatedly swindling his “children” out of their money on the other—who blatantly lies in advertisements yet describes himself as “a pillar of encouragement and knowledge” and a “friend” to bodybuilders<sup>7</sup>—is anything but a brazen hypocrite. In the world of business he certainly wasn’t the first guy to be revealed as a cheater, and as we’ve witnessed in our modern era of Enron and Bernie Madoff, he wouldn’t be the last. Granted, those two entities ruined entire lives because of their actions. Compared to them, Weider’s crimes were petty. Maybe that’s why he thought he could get away with them.

Although Weider repeatedly demonstrated that he’s quite willing to resort to dishonest practices in order to make a buck, in his training methods we see no such purposeful deception. After all, since calling a particular technique the *Weider Eclectic Training Principle* isn’t going to directly add to his bank account, why should he purposely lie about its effects? It’s simple; he didn’t lie. There was no motive to do so. His deception here went no further than his assurances that the Weider Principles all had a scientific foundation.<sup>8</sup> By what is apparently pure coincidence, some of them do. The remaining principles are founded on no more than faulty logic and sometimes even superstition, neither of which bears any resemblance to science. It’s almost tempting to conclude that he didn’t know the difference.

Weider gave himself credit for making bodybuilding what it is today, and went so far as to accept responsibility for starting the entire fitness movement of the 1980s and beyond.<sup>9</sup> The praise heaped upon him by a cast of notable individuals—people who incidentally all benefited from him financially—is flaunted as proof of these assertions. Weider certainly did exert a huge influence over how bodybuilding turned out. He therefore must also share blame for everything bad that’s come out of it. The idea that without him bodybuilding would have remained obscure, and that he was the catalyst for the entire fitness movement—these declarations are little more than speculation, and may be as true as some of his other advertising claims. Regardless, his training advice took hold.

Weider dispensed a lot of weight-training advice. Some of it just happened to be bad advice. He probably didn’t even know it was bad advice, nor does it seem that would have cared had he found out it was. Regardless, the man clearly had a lot of smarts. It was therefore within his ability to know better. Even though it wasn’t his intention, by actively promoting bad advice Weider deceived us. Pushing a system of ideas which contribute to wasted time and energy, and sometimes even injury, ultimately amounts to no less than harmful negligence. Excessive weight-training sucks up time and energy, and it can be dangerous. Many bodybuilders have found out all three things the hard way. Their strategy of training is to blame for this, a strategy most lifters follow at least partly because of Joe Weider. If the bodybuilders themselves are to be faulted for anything, it’s for not investigating the advice—or the advice-giver—that they so readily followed. If you’re determined to not share their fate, a more logical system is called for—not just in the gym, but in your head.

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## Notes

1. Joe Weider with Bill Reynolds, *The Weider System of Bodybuilding*, Contemporary Books, Inc., 1983, p. 25.
2. Fred Hatfield, "The Joe Weider Bodybuilding System," 2005, <<http://www.musclenet.com/weiderbodybuildingsystem.htm>> (17 January 2010)
3. Alan Klein, *Little Big Men: Bodybuilding Subculture and Gender Construction*, State University of New York Press, 1993, p.100.
4. *Ibid.*
5. "Joe Weider," n.d., <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe\\_Weider](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Weider)>, (17 January 2010).
6. *Ibid.*
7. "Joe Weider, Trainer of Champions," n.d., <<http://www.ifbbpro.com/features/joe-weider-trainer-of-champions>>, (17 January 2010).
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*

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