

“Price for perfection”

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With the continuing pressure of being the biggest and strongest competitor in bodybuilding, many athletes must make the decision to either grow their muscles naturally through diet and exercise or use performance enhancing drugs, most commonly referred to as steroids.

Steroids were introduced in the 1960s, but they were not commonly used until the mid-1970s with bodybuilders like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sergio Oliva. This was when bodybuilding made its most drastic change from symmetry to bulkiness and the usage of steroids mixed with certain drug cocktails.

Show promoter for the Ohio State Bodybuilding Championships and former bodybuilder Mike Davies has been in the sport for over 30 years and acknowledges how the “bigger is better” movement is something that came out of the 1960s and drove steroid use. “The taste for the more attainable, classic symmetrical physiques of Eugene Sandow, Frank Zane, Bob Paris, and Steve Reeves fell out of favor as people started mixing new drugs and seeing the dramatic results,” said Davies.

While steroid use is a felony and, per the U.S. Department of Justice’s Drug Enforcement Administration Diversion Control Division, one can incur a \$500,000 fine with 10 years in prison, this does not stop bodybuilding competitors. Jay Jacobs and Austin Green are two competitors who use steroids and whose names have been altered to protect their identities to keep them from facing the legal ramifications of their steroid use.

“I have been using steroids for over three years,” said Jacobs. “I fell in love with bodybuilding when I needed to gain weight as a track runner and felt that I was too skinny and needed to improve my leg strength. No matter what I did to gain weight, nothing worked and had to rely on more drastic measures like steroids.”

Within those three years Jacobs would see huge improvements in size in not only his lower body but his upper body as well. "I gained several pounds of muscle in such a short period and after I graduated high school, I lifted weights more and more and started to compete in bodybuilding shows, placing extremely well," said Jacobs.

When asked about the health implications of steroid use, Jacobs is not worried. While the National Institute on Drug Abuse has proven that steroid use has been linked to acne, male breast development, heart attacks, liver cancer, and infertility, this still does not deter athletes from using them. "I will not be on them forever," said Jacobs. "I will just be on them long enough to make money to finish my degree and then I can go off them and no longer compete. Some people go to extremes to make money like strip or prostitute themselves. I am not hurting anyone and have been pretty successful at making money."

It is the promise of money and fame that drives athletes like Austin Green. Green started bodybuilding after he dropped out of college and found that steroids were the way for him to expand his career. "If you stay in it long enough the prize money, sponsorships, and endorsements can set you for life," said Green. Green is aware of the medical issues of steroids and has noticed the increase in pimples, out of character mood swings, and smaller testicles.

"When I want to have kids, I will go off them long enough to return to normal and then go back on them," said Green. Green acknowledges that his goal is to be on the Mr. Olympia stage and to achieve that he must gain almost 80 more pounds of pure muscle.

Green is also not afraid of the legal ramifications. He orders his steroids from the internet from countries where it is legal and buys pre-paid cards at Wal-Mart paid with cash so they cannot track him. "The legality of steroids is of no real concern to me," said Green. "People know it is there and it is used."

Even though competitors like Jacobs and Green use steroids to advance their careers in the sport, a new movement has started. Bodybuilding shows now have divisions called classic physique and

men's physique. These classes are recently new and are becoming more and more popular. In classic and men's physique the competitors are once again judged primarily on symmetry and less in size and in theory eliminating the rampant use of steroids.

"These classes were created in response to the concern of the athlete's health and to those who did not want to become so large," said Gary Udit, who promotes drug tested and untested bodybuilding shows in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.

"We know that steroid use is a large part of the sport but that will not change unless the audience and the athletes steer the change and with the different divisions they are doing so," said Udit. "I hope that the changes will promote healthier lifestyles and will put a more positive light on the sport."

Natural athletes Shomo Das and Cory Coder got into bodybuilding to help with their fitness and improve health. "I was also the skinny kid who ran track and wanted to get the girls," said Das. "As I lifted more and more, I got addicted to it and I read everything I could on health and nutrition."

Das, a graduate from Duke University with a bachelor's in business and minor in nutrition, moved to Columbus, Ohio, last year. He competes, trains athletes both in person and online, and sells nutrition advice online. He learned to mix the two things he loved, which are health and business, and is proud to be a natural competitor who competes in tested and untested shows.

"I love competing in untested shows with the big boys," said Das. "Not only do I win against the bigger guys, but I prove that being bigger is not always better."

Das has stated many times he will never do steroids. He loves learning new recipes and cooking too much. Das has been competing for over three years and has taken home several first and second place statues and sees no reason in changing anytime soon. "I like not having to worry about the medical issues that come with the use of steroids and in safe in the knowledge that I should be able to easily have kids someday and pass on my knowledge to them," said Das.

Cory Coder from Kent, Ohio, is also a natural bodybuilder. Majoring in exercise science, Coder recently placed first in his first bodybuilding show.

“I was very proud of my placing,” said Coder. “I beat a lot of guys who have been doing this for a while. I was blessed with great genetics and proud of my experience in health sciences in general.”

Asked about steroids, Coder said he will not use them. “Steroids is a recipe for disaster, and I do not plan on doing this the rest of my life,” said Coder. “Bodybuilding is too subjective and will never be something I do to make a living at. I enjoy being healthy and showing others how to be healthy and if I beat someone who does take steroids, so much the better.”

Bodybuilding as a sport has been around for over 100 years and, like other sports, has continuously changed and evolved. It began as a measurement of strength but changed into the judgement of symmetry in the early 20th century. Competitors were once judged by the audience and won depended on the number of cheers and this practice was replaced with a panel of judges to try and make things fairer and not as much a popularity contest. Steroid use and natural bodybuilding also continue to change the sport. It has most recently gone from comparing titan physiques to athletes looking to be healthier and showing off the results.

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