

Popping Questions at Dennis B. Weis

*“If you’re gonna’ ask the tough questions,
be prepared for the hard answers.”*

Here are EIGHT though provoking questions that have come across my desk recently, via e-Mails.

1. On your website you speak of your battle with overcoming the plague of the ectomorph—or the hardgainer. Can you once again briefly recount your initiation into the iron world? Why is it that you particularly admired Charles Atlas at the time? I mean, in your opinion, what was it that made him the stand out figure of the time? Who were some of the others who you feel are worthy of high reverence?

My initiation into the iron game actually began when I was around 14 years of age. I read the Charles Atlas ads (bully kicking sand in the face of a weak as a flea fart skinny dude) that appeared in the comic books and I of course sent away for his free booklet which revealed his amazing story. I was in awe as I read the accounts of him bending steel bars, ripping huge telephone books in half, pulling cars and most sensational of all pulling a 72 ½-ton railroad car 112 feet down the track.

The Charles Atlas story really appealed to my emotional and physical needs because I was a really weak skinny tall guy, with pimples and wore huge thick Coke bottle bottom glasses, so I sent away for his Dynamic Tension course and followed the 12 lesson course to its completion. Other iron game personalities that I felt were worth of high reverence was, George F. Jowett, and then the stable of champions presented in the Joe Weider bodybuilding magazines each month. The late Chuck Sipes was one of (my mentor) was, and still is, my favorite bodybuilding hero of all time.

2. This is of course a loaded question, but what do you feel are the major differences that exist between the current world of bodybuilding and the one in which you began? Has the sport changed drastically in any specific areas, or has the song remained pretty much the same throughout the course of the last few decades?

The question you pose is only loaded if the person you are asking to answer it doesn't want to broach the issue. The major differences that exist between the current world of bodybuilding and the one in which I began back in the early 1960s is most evident in nutritional supplements and informational materials. Back in the '60s there was basically Joe Weider, Bob Hoffman and Rhea H. Blair who were the heavy hitters in supplying supplements to the bodybuilders. With regard to the number of bodybuilding magazines and books (available in bookstores) that provided helpful information, I could

count those on one hand. Back in '60s Charles Atlas, George F. Jowett and Universal Bodybuilding provided some very unique and interesting multi lesson bodybuilding courses. Bodybuilding courses are something that is really lacking today (21st century bodybuilding) and I may make it a mission to publish one in the future.

Enter into 21st century bodybuilding and there are dozens and dozens of supplement providers and quite a few more bodybuilding magazines (which have survived through the decades of the sometimes brutal and competitive publishing industry) and books than there were back in the '60s. I find that the magazines and books are researched in much more detail. And of course the quality of the supplements has improved dramatically.

Of course the problem with having too much of a good thing such as more bodybuilding supplements, magazines and books is the sometimes conflicting messages each venue brings. Back in the '60s it was really simple to make selections because there weren't that many. As a result we continued to seek out informational knowledge on supplements and training information. Today the bodybuilding arena is flooded with information and the end result has been that now a lot of people think they are self proclaimed experts on the topics of nutrition and training.

I would surmise that when you said your question was loaded in reference to the differences that exist between the current world of bodybuilding and the one in which I began back in the '60s has to do with the anabolic drug issue. Suffice it to say that anabolic drugs were introduced back in the early 1900s and in the 1950s some of the top bodybuilders of the day experimented with them. I know this for a fact because I have talked to them.

In the 1960s and 70s many of the contest entering and winning bodybuilders were taking in Dianabol etc., but not in the amounts consumed by today's top bodybuilding champions. I know this to be a fact as well because I was friends with one of the managers at Gold's Gym in Venice back in the '70s and he was privy to the drugs (and amounts) the top bodybuilders were taking. The amounts that the champs of the '60s and '70s took in a month are what is consumed on a daily basis (and more) by the bodybuilders of today.

I have personally never used anabolic drugs of any kind so I don't get caught up wasting my thought process talking about them. Rather than discuss the drug issues all day long (and conclusions are never forthcoming) it would in my opinion be much better to invest the time in the investigation of the natural alternatives to training and nutrition (**such as those revealed in the book: HUGE & FREAKY MUSCLE MASS AND STRENGTH SECRETS by Robert Kennedy & Dennis B. Weis**).. If anabolic drugs had never been introduced into competitive bodybuilding the list of winners over the decades would still be the same simple due to the superior genetic factor.

3. Your routines over the years have pretty much always stressed the use of compound, multi-joint exercises and free weights. Why is it that a need arose for Nautilus equipment and other “isolation” machines when free weights are so much more versatile? What are the pro and cons of the pervasive strength-training machines that occupy the floors of today’s fitness facilities?

When I was sixteen years old, I began lifting free weights as a means of enhancing my overall size and strength potentials. I learned early on from my mentors in the iron game, Donne Hale, Chuck Sipes and Peary Rader, that free weights involve the little nuances of timing, balance and coordination, something that machines don’t offer. I personally have been acquainted with bodybuilders who have used Nautilus equipment exclusively for 3 months, doing heavy negatives and the associated training principles strictly. Some mighty impressive poundages were hoisted using these machines but upon a return to using free weights only strength losses were between ten and twenty percent. It generally took another 3 months of free weight adaptation to regain the ten and twenty percent strength losses.

Machines such as Nautilus are primarily mono-planar devices, meaning that there is only one plane in which a given movement takes place. I wish I had a dollar for every time a person would brag to me that they could bench press 315 pounds or more on a machine but yet it took a Herculean effort for them to do a free weight bench press with 225 pounds and displayed a lack of balance and coordination when doing so.

I will say that machines are excellent for select rehab situations, getting members in and out of a fitness facility very quickly and in doing exercises such as leg curls, leg presses and leg extensions. Imagine trying to do these three exercises with free weights as many of the old time bodybuilders did in decades gone past. It has been my observation that “isolation” machines cannot be the core of a person’s weight training in a multi-dimensional world. I generally suggest that a person use free weights 90% of the time and machines 10%.

4. Many of today’s top strength coaches advocate the employment of “functional” weight training. They stress the advantages of using Swiss Balls, bands, cables, sledgehammers, medicine balls, tornado balls, kettlebells, and other devices for stabilizing and strengthening the core muscles necessary for maintaining the integrity of the entire body during various movements. What is your position on the relatively sudden advent of these techniques and devices in the bodybuilding world? Are they advantageous in anyway to the bodybuilder who bases his workout on compound exercises? Can they be counterproductive?

It would take a number of in-depth article discussions regarding the training tools and devices you have just mentioned. I personally believe that each of them have merit, especially the bands, expander cables and kettlebells but realize that the strength gained in one plane from one of these devices, such as kettlebells etc., is not strength in

all planes. So having said it is a good idea to incorporate the use of all of them (not all at once) at one time or another in one's training protocol.

Back in the '70s I trained for bodybuilding, powerlifting and arm wrestling competitions. I used a huge variety of exercises associated for the training in these events. People would sometimes come up to me and say "Well Dennis you may be stronger than me in say powerlifting and arm wrestling but I'll bet I could beat you at doing pull-ups, pushups or sprinting." I'd accept their challenge at the drop of a hat, and I'd drop the hat. Ha, ha.

It was my training philosophy to have all around strength in say 50 different lifts and bodyweight only strength as well, as opposed to being brutally strong in just 5 lifts and having the other 45 lifts SUCK. As a result I would practice doing pull-ups (10 sets of 10 with a hundred pounds strapped on), pushups (150) and explosive 100 yard sprints all at a bodyweight of around 212 pounds. One sprint I did lose was when I told a challenger that I thought I could; beat him in a 100 yard dash while carrying an 85 pound dumbbell in each hand. I was ahead at the 50 yard mark but pulled a groin muscle at 75 yards and had to terminate the sprint. I am happy to say that I won most all of the challenges put before me because of my bigger, faster, stronger training philosophy.

5. In an interview you state that there are things about Mike Mentzer's HIT program with which you strongly disagree. Can you say more about these areas of controversy?

I do not disagree with the Mike Mentzer Heavy Duty program per say. I have a library of all of Mike Mentzers books, video and audio tapes and the one thing that I noticed in his teachings of the Heavy Duty, 1-2 hard wok sets only, program was how dogmatic he was. I always thought it would have been a much better approach if he had tried to ease the high volume training bodybuilders down a few sets at a time rather than suggest that they go cold turkey from their existing training protocol right down to one or two hard work sets of the heavy duty concept.

I think he would have gotten a lot more converts to Heavy Duty if he had taken a more subtle approach. I attended Bill Phillips "No Hold Barred Seminar" in Las Vegas on November 18th & 19th 1995 and Mike was one of the speakers. He managed to get into some heated discussions with some select people in the audience about his Heavy Duty concepts and this sort of humorous analogy came to my mind. Suppose there is a nice carrot cake (i.e. Heavy Duty concept) in the refrigerator and I take it out and eat the whole thing at one sitting (i.e. Dogmatic approach). The next thing I know a few other people (i.e. High volume practitioners) come by and upon opening the frig notice the carrot cake is gone and exclaim "Who the hell ate all the carrot cake?" Of course everyone figures out it was me and are then ticked off at me beyond belief. Now if I had just taken a small slice or two nobody would have noticed and I could most likely have eaten the whole cake, a slice or two, over a period of a few days without making anyone angry.

Mike was a published iron game magazine writer and if he had slowly over the course of time had eased the high volume training folks down a set or two at a time over the span of a few articles I'd be willing to bet they would have evolved into the concept of Heavy Duty training without even realizing it.

Many strength-trainers and athletes are virtual warriors in the gym. They train hard or don't train at all. I'm of course referring to the "no pain, no gain" adherents who take every set to failure every workout. There are others who completely abstain from these types of workouts and herald the research that shows them to be detrimental to progress. Their mantra tends to be more along the lines of "train, don't strain", or "stimulate, don't annihilate." What is your position on the practice of "training to failure"? What exactly does "training to failure" mean? If one does NOT train to failure, how can it be determined that sufficient stimulation has been achieved during a workout to promote an adaptive response?

6. You pride yourself on the fact that you are an all-natural athlete. From what I can tell, you also tend to avoid a large majority of the nutritional supplements that are marketed. Can you provide a list of five or ten supplements that you personally feel are worth the expense and whose benefits outweigh the costs?

have observed many, many vanity bodybuilders load up on every new supplement that comes out. I am amazed when some of these guys tell me that they are taking 10-15 different supplements each day. Of course the question that comes to my mind is "Which supplement or combination of supplements is providing you with the benefits you are seeking?" Most generally they can't give me a determined answer.

You are correct in that I am not a big advocate of large quantities of supplements. Back in the '70s when I competed in powerlifting, bodybuilding and armwrestling competitions (usually all on the same day) my nutritional protocol consisted of desiccated liver tablets, a good combination of vitamins and minerals (there weren't vitamin packs of any worth back then), Rheo H. Blairs protein, Brewers Yeast powder (mixed in Tang) and some Wheat Germ capsules. I would gradually start out with one or two tablets and work up to what I determined was benefiting me maximally nutrition wise and from the standpoint of assisted recovery. I learned early on from my bodybuilding mentor Donne Hale to use the Flashpoint concept in my training and nutrition. And that is to find what the least amount of training and nutrition will provide the absolute in maximum results.

If I were going to do a bodybuilding or powerlifting competition in 2011 I would use the following supplements on a daily basis: One or two Multi Vitamin/Mineral Super Paks, Creatine Monohydrate (5-10 grams a day), a good Milk & Egg protein powder or perhaps 2-3 meal replacement packets (Dorian Yates, Muscle Tech or MET-Rx) and yes some desiccated liver tablets. The company I absolutely recommend for the best bang for the buck as far a nutritional supplements go is Beverly International (www.bodybuildingworld.com).

7. Being a great fan of “finesse” and high-endurance sports myself (boxing, martial arts, soccer, football, etc.), I had to chuckle (or perhaps “wince” is a better term) at a comment that you made about how you used to be very fast in your early days because you had to run from the guys who were so much bigger than you. I realize that this may sound like a rhetorical question, but looking back, do you feel that the acquisition of muscle mass slowed you down any in terms of speed or quickness? Endurance?

The acquisition of muscle mass did not happen to me overnight so it kind of grew, over the months and years along with my continued practice of running and sprinting and as a result I never noticed any decrease in terms of speed or quickness or endurance. Now of course if a person gains a pound a day over the next say 30 days of course speed and quickness will be slowed down due to changes in existing body leverages and fat to muscle ratio's.

My son Billy got interested in the martial arts full contact fighting venue when he was around 17 years of age and at a height of 5' 10" and 144 pounds he was lighting fast. He is now 40 years old and weights 210 pounds, benches 405 for a triple without a bench shirt and is much, much faster, stronger, and can punch and kick dramatically harder than at age 17 years.

8. In light of your reply to this question, what are your views on the popular theories of slow and fast twitch muscle fibers?

I would have to say from my training experiences and many other hardcore lifters I have talked to that to achieve maximum muscle strength, size and endurance, a power bodybuilder should train both the slow and fast twitch muscle fibers. Fred C. Hatfield “Dr. Squat” confirmed the training of fast and slow twitch muscle fibers back in 1980 when I was interviewing him for a feature length article in Iron Man magazine. He stated “Bodybuilders in order to achieve the tremendous musculature that they possess have to do slow movements (reps), fast movements (speed reps), light and heavy poundage and everything in-between, thereby increasing the mechanisms of the muscle structure.”

There is a test of sorts that can be of some help for determining whether a select muscle is of the fast or slow twitch variety. A power bodybuilder takes 80 percent of their unfatigued one rep maximum and do one set of as many reps as possible. The rep cadence is 2 seconds in the positive phase and 4 seconds in the negative phase. If a person does 7 reps that would constitute a 50/50 average makeup of both fast and slow twitch muscle fibers. Achieving less than 7 reps indicates that the muscle is of the fast twitch variety and more than 7 suggests that the muscle is comprised mostly of slow twitch fibers.

Back in the '70s and '80s it wasn't uncommon for me to do 405 pounds in the Barbell back squat for 20+ reps and without any type of specific warm-up prior. I am not talking curtsy squats (barely a 1/8th movement) but I would take each and every rep down to

where my glutes were 12 inches from the floor. As well I could do 450 pounds for 15 reps too. The strange thing was that I could never do more than about 530 pounds for a single effort in the squat (void of knee wraps, super suits etc.). Obviously I had a lot more slow twitch involvement going on than fast twitch.

One solution I found to work very well for me as far as recruiting both the fast and slow twitch fibers was a combination of the following sets and reps.

Slow-twitch Sets: Set 1. Lightest weight - 15 reps

2. Add weight - 12 reps

3. Add weight - 10 reps

4. Add weight - 8 reps

Fast-twitch Sets: Set 5. Add weight - 7 reps

6. Add weight - 6 reps

7. Add weight - 5 reps

8. Add weight - 4 reps plus 1 or 2 forced reps.

I and many others have used the above sets and reps scheme with very good results on one compound exercise (Barbell back squats, Flat bench presses and Barbell curls etc) only for a select muscle group. I at times switch the order of sets around and began with the Fast-twitch Sets first and finished up with the Slow-twitch sets.