

So... You want to compete

If you train long enough, chances are at some point in time the thought of competing in a bodybuilding contest will enter your mind. You've worked hard and achieved a lot through your efforts, but you may wonder how you'd compare with others. Maybe you were a competitive athlete in the past and miss the feeling of competition. Maybe you weren't and just need a lofty goal to set your sights on to motivate yourself and bring your training to the next level. Whatever your reason(s), getting ready to step onstage for the first time can be a daunting endeavor. To help facilitate this sometimes frustrating and confusing process, below I've outlined some fundamental but nevertheless very important points that may help you to begin your journey.

1. Commit to doing a contest

As silly and as self-evident as it sounds, the first step is also the most important - decide to do a contest. By that I don't mean casually say "Oh yea...I guess I'll do the Muscle Beach Classic in a couple months". I mean COMMIT to do a specific show. You're doing it - plain and simple. Come hell or high water you WILL step onstage. Barring a life-changing event, you need to focus 100% on that date. By making the commitment and removing any indecision, you eliminate (or at least minimize) the temptation to cheat on your diet or skip a workout or cardio session. Why? Because you know you HAVE NO CHOICE but get up onstage in your posing trunks and it'd be an awful feeling to get up there knowing you didn't give it everything you had and you really just beat yourself by not preparing adequately. You also need to remember that commitment when you may find yourself struggling 4 weeks out from the show and need to find that fortitude to forge ahead in your prep full steam ahead. Also let me say that when you're initially pondering the idea of doing a show, you will NEVER be big enough and everything will NEVER be perfect in your life. Accept it. Those are by far the two most common excuses I always hear from people that "want to compete". Forget the excuses. Make the decision, buckle down, and get to work.

2. Set a realistic goal

Rather than trying to go out and win the first time around, I'd recommend you strive to be your all-time best. It's great to win but you can't control who else shows up that day, and to solely focus on winning as the only measure of success will most likely leave you disappointed. Just go out there for the experience at this point. As cheesy as it sounds, you've already won if you look the best you ever have because in the end, you're only competing with yourself. Down the road you can aim for the top half of your class, or the top 5, etc. Don't worry about that now.

3. Hire a contest prep dietician

Ok - you've decided wholeheartedly that you're going to compete. Fantastic! Now what? As you probably guessed, the biggest difference between pre-contest prep and the offseason is the diet. I STRONGLY recommend you have someone experienced do your diet. You're not dieting to look good for the beach here - it's a whole new ballgame. I did my own for years but it wasn't until I handed over the reins to a diet coach that I made my greatest improvements. When trying to choose someone to do your diet, as for references. See what kind of results they've gotten for other athletes. Meet with him/her periodically or send pictures via email if necessary to keep them updated on your progress. You'll literally shave years off the learning process this way. Most diet coaches charge between \$250-1000, but the investment is worth it when compared with the price of not doing well due to a lack of knowledge. Also as a side note, write everything down - when/how much/what you ate, what supplements you took, how much cardio you did, etc. Create a detailed record for yourself so that you and your dietician can more easily troubleshoot in the event things aren't going as planned. This will also serve as an invaluable resource for future contests.

4. Go see a few contests

Unless you've already been to a number of shows, your preconceived notions of what a bodybuilding contest is all about may be significantly different than what really transpires. Go see a few shows of the caliber you plan on competing in to get an idea of what kind of competition you may be facing and how the shows are run. Pay attention to how the different rounds are run, the mandatory poses, etc. so that you'll be prepared when you eventually step onstage. Critique how people pose so you can apply it to your own posing - what makes them look better or worse than the others? How much oil looks ideal? What color posing trunks look good? Although these seem like insignificant points, remember this is all about presentation and even the most minute variable can influence your placing.

Well that's it. Although these suggestions are simple, they really lay the foundation for your entire contest prep. If you decide to compete, great! Have some fun, learn as much as you can, and next time look to improve and build upon what you've already achieved. Good luck!