

**The stronger you are the tougher you get. That's what you can learn from six-time title winner of Mr. Olympian, Dorian Yates, who still holds onto his fascination for bodybuilding even after being out of the competitive circuit for more than a decade. Here the muscleman speaks at length about his heydays.**

# IRON MAN

**What prompted you to take up body building as a career?**

Back in 1985, I was this 21-year-old athletic looking guy with a good build and lean muscle tone. Long introspection had taught me that I'm the kind of man who prefers to go it alone — my personality was not suited to be a part of a team or a group. I wanted to be responsible, and also answerable, only to myself and nobody else. Body building is a one-man show that well matched my persona and I pursued the sport singlemindedly, with just one aim — to take it to the maximum level.

But in 80's England, opportunities for bodybuilding were as scarce as it is now in India. America was the budding hub for the sport — and I didn't even look eligible when I set these goals. I started reading magazines on bodybuilding, drew inspiration from their covers and the competitions where the guys displayed their big muscles, followed the lifestyles of bodybuilders out there, made notes. And I started working out at the gym, got totally hooked. My entire training was weaved through my own trial and error process of mixing and matching various training schedules. **Isn't there something narcissistic about body building, where the only aim is to build the body to unnatural proportions?**

In a sport that is self oriented it is not the end result, but the challenge of pushing oneself to reach the maximum possible limits. That is the attraction. For example, an Olympic runner would always aspire to get better at his sport, practice to improve his timings and skills, irrespective of whether he is a winner or not. Similarly bodybuilding is a sport where one would like to see how far a man can take his body. Bodybuilding isn't only about big muscles. It's more about how well defined the muscles are and how much work has gone into the process. That's how a bodybuilder is judged. And at the end of the day, bodybuilding is a tough competition like any other sport.

**But the ultimate result is far from natural!**

Let me put it in a simple way — the goal of any man who enters the gym is to lose fat and build muscle. And anyone striving to achieve this ideal is building his body. The only difference between a professional bodybuilder and a layman is that the former trains for a competition, which means to take the body to the extreme.

One needs to understand that professional bodybuilding is not everybody's ball game. I know many people who did exactly the same exercises as I did, and followed similar diet patterns as mine but never could get their body to respond the way mine did. The fact is, after diet and exercise, genetics plays a large role in body building. I was a natural. Since my body responded well and adapted to the tough regimen quickly, I kept raising the ante and challenging my limits. But still, what I feel is, one should respect one's body. That's the first step. Listen to it, see if it is capable of taking on the effort that you are forcing it to.

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**How much time did you spend exercising during your competitive days?**

Believe it or not, just four hours a week. Unlike other sports where half the day is spent in training, in bodybuilding most of the time is spent repairing your body. In the gym when you lift weights you are actually *damaging* muscle. It is when you provide your body rest and correct nutrition that it repairs the muscle fibres to make them bigger and stronger.

I gained muscle really fast during the first year of bodybuilding as my body wasn't accustomed to rigorous exercises. Then it became necessary to increase the resistance as I went on pushing myself to the maximum.

**What was your routine like?**

I always made it a point to warm up thoroughly before lifting. I usually trained two major body parts in each session, doing three sets of exercises with 6 to 10 reps for the bigger muscle groups and two sets each for smaller ones. My lower body, esp calf muscles, was more receptive than my upper body. So I had to work my arms more to compensate and strike a balance.

When 6 to 10 repetitions became easy I increased the intensity by upping the weights.

**What was your diet like?**

I was on a high protein diet that would help me build muscle tissue. My protein sources came from chicken breasts, lean beef, egg whites and protein supplements. The only carbs I got were from rice and vegetables and porridge at breakfast. I had 5 to 6 meals a day.



My intake during the competition days was 6000 calories which came down to 4000 during the rest of the year. Correct food and protein supplements helped repair and shape my body in the way I wanted it.

**Were your family and wife always supportive about your career?**

Yes, when you are so singlemindedly goal oriented, you would always need a strong support system to fall back on. I have been lucky in that my family always kept their faith and supported me in my sport.

**Did the discipline required to pursue your ambitions come in the way of your social life?**

Yes, it did, in some ways. Way back, when I was starting out, I kept a food log of what to eat and what not to. When a competition was coming up, for example, eating out with friends and family became just a fortnightly affair.

I do have vices like everyone else. I love chocolate and ice cream and indulge whenever possible. I'm fortunate that today I've reached a state where I can keep having chocolate every other day without allowing the fat to show on my body.

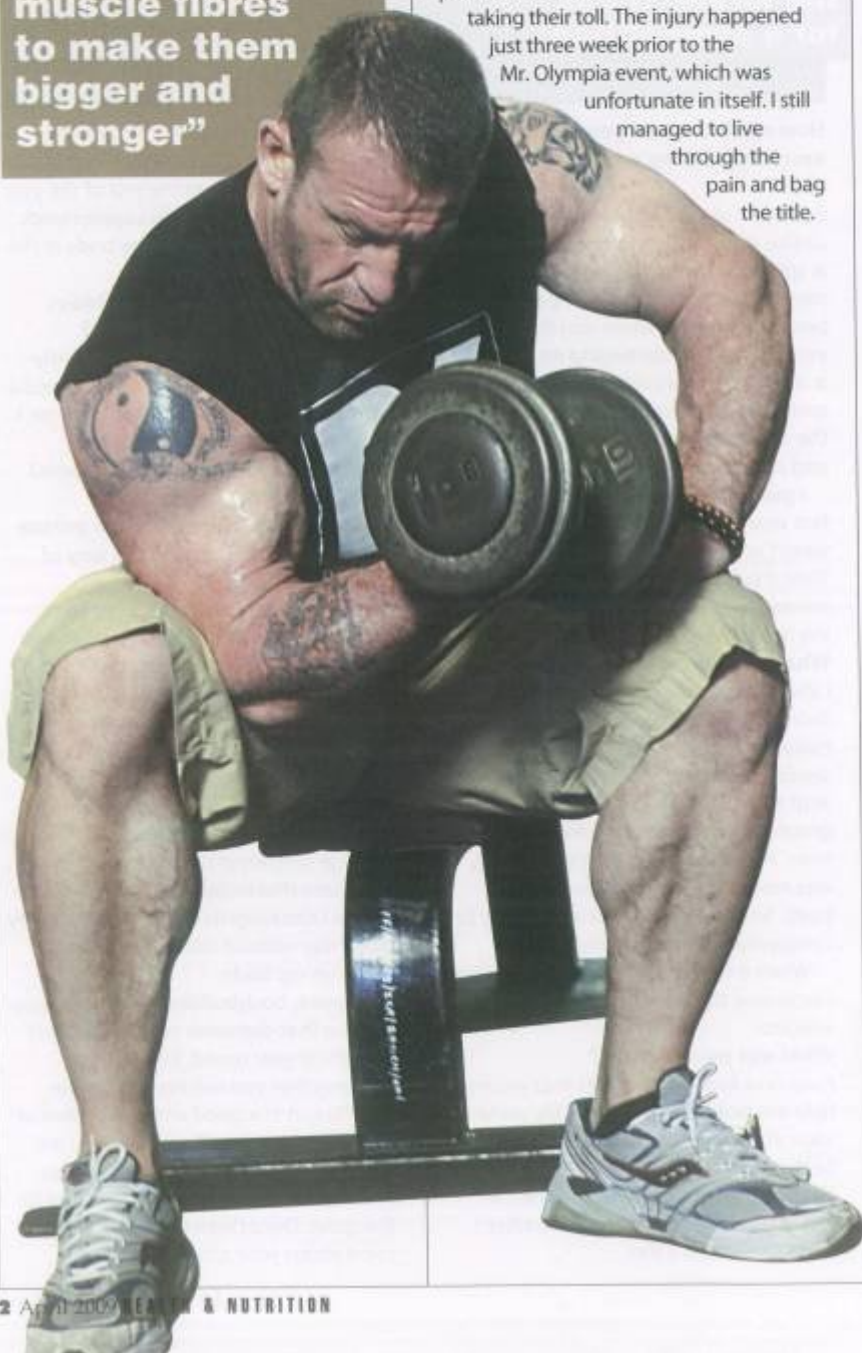
You see, bodybuilding is a meticulous science that demands you put in effort the whole year round. Even before thinking that you will avoid a certain food or put in a good amount of time at the gym, ask yourself whether you are up to it. That is the kind of dedication you need to keep yourself motivated for the sport. Once there is clarity in your mind about your actions, having a

limited social life may not feel like a sacrifice and will help you to stay focused on your goal.

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**In 1997 you suffered a triceps injury at the peak of your career. How did it happen?**

One of the most important dictums of weight training is, listen to your body. This is easy to say but hard to follow to the letter. An injury happens when your form is incorrect or your training routine is wrong. That wasn't the case with me. I am a living example of intense training gone wrong. Even before the ligament tear happened I sensed that something was wrong with my arms but I kept on pushing my limits. That was natural because as a five-times Mr. Olympia, I was training for a 6<sup>th</sup> title. I couldn't allow myself to rest before the competition. I remember doing a thorough warm up before getting into the hard core lifting. But that still couldn't prevent excessive wear and tear from taking their toll. The injury happened just three weeks prior to the Mr. Olympia event, which was unfortunate in itself. I still managed to live through the pain and bag the title.



Yet today when I look back I have no regrets. Because I'd already had a successful run of 12 years in competitive bodybuilding. And if you look at other demanding sports like cricket or soccer, it is fortunate that I, as a bodybuilder, had had just one injury in my entire career.

**How long did it take you to rehabilitate?**

Soon after the competition I underwent surgery followed by physiotherapy to make the torn ligament functional again. But then I was forced to retire from the international competition scene. With that my lifestyle and exercise routine changed. When I returned to the gym I started with just 70 per cent of the weight that I lifted while training for the competition.

**Does aging limit a bodybuilder's capacity?**

Interestingly, during my recent visit to India, I met a 60-year-old man who is into bodybuilding at Gold's gym. He mentioned that he started training at the age of 50 and ten years down the line he has a body very close to that of an amateur bodybuilder.

With a little variation in the exercise routine, strength and stamina can be developed irrespective of age. But, of course you will see results only if you're dedicated and your body responds in kind.

**How did you deal with the testosterone-fueled aggression that comes from body building?**

This is another myth that people have in their minds — that guys with big muscles are aggressive. On the contrary it's actually the opposite. Just like in the streets it's always the little dogs that bark the loudest, the big ones know if they bite, the small ones are gone forever. A big man knows, respects and uses his strength for the better.

**How did you cope with your retirement from the competitive circuit?**

My retirement was an unfortunate event. Naturally I was not ready to call it quits but was forced to, when I realized that after the surgery I was not capable of taking on the best in the world. So I focused my energy on young bodybuilders. I used my experience towards imparting training and guiding others. In fact my company — Dorian Yates Nutrition — was developed from the body of knowledge that I'd gathered over the years. So retirement has brought few regrets because I am able to reach out and help people who are desirous of building their bodies.

**DEBJANI SENGUPTA**