

Brett Becker

The Collegiate Nationals is an undisputed talent showcase, attracting young rising stars from across the country. The stand-out, as far as future potential from this year's contest, was not the overall winner, but rather the 28 year-old mass of heavy-weight sinew that chased him to a close second place in their class, Brett Becker.

Born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, Becker first showed his athletic prowess on the soccer field. As a standout in high school, the 5'9" naturally muscular athlete even got to play a little soccer in Germany. Unfortunately, this dream came to an abrupt conclusion when he tore both of his hamstrings, effectively ending his chance to be the second coming of Pele'. It was at this point that soccer's loss became bodybuilding's gain.



Brett's first bodybuilding contest was the '99 Caveman Classic, in which he competed as a middleweight. He followed this up by entering the Missouri State about three months later. Not filling out his frame as he was meant to kept him from making a huge impact in either contest. Knowing he was not destined to compete as a mere 176-pounder, he then took a year off to put on some weight.

It was at this point that Brett began to work with top trainer and pre-contest diet guru, Ronnie Gregorecz (pronounced as if there was "-ets" on the end). In addition to helping with his contest prep, Ronnie also began double-duty as Brett's training partner. (We'll discuss their hellish training a bit later.) As a successful Masters competitor and a veteran of his fair share of years in the bodybuilding trenches, Ronnie knows the ins and outs of the bodybuilding game. This partnership seems to have made all the difference as Brett began to display the impressive heavyweight fullness and definition shown in the accompanying photos. With the added size and confidence, Brett decided to begin climbing the ladder toward national-level shows. In 2002 he displayed his thicker, sharper physique at the Junior Nationals, earning a respectable eighth place in the heavies.

Brett is currently a student at Merrimack College, and preparing to transfer to St. Louis University, where he will be attending the Physician Assistant program. It was at the 2002 Collegiate Nationals, where he earned a close second to overall winner Vladimir Kogan in the heavyweight class, that we conducted this interview.

Soccer Balls and Shock Scenarios



Training

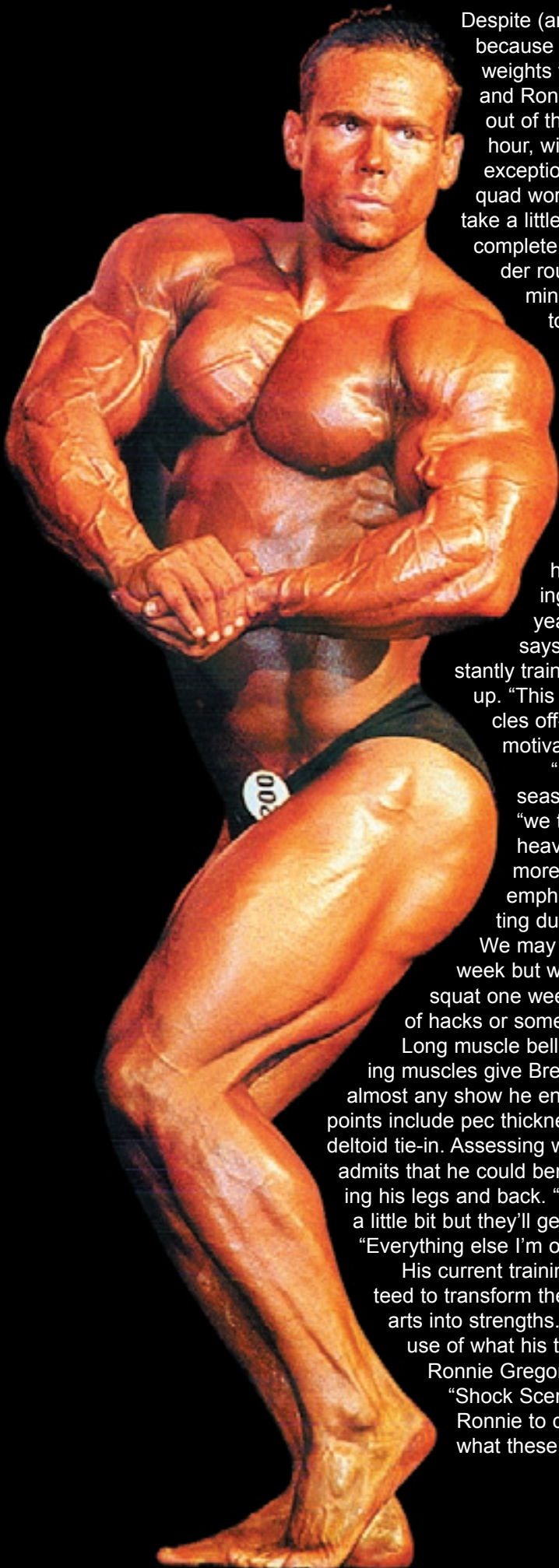
Speaking of strength increases, lets explore Brett's training. Brett trains with Ronnie Gregorecz six days a week with one day off. The pair focuses on one major bodypart a day. They train as heavy as possible, even right up to a show. They scoff at the concept of "high rep- low weight" pumping. Pushing strength levels seems a basic tenet in their training philosophy.

When Brett and Ronnie talk about heavy weight, they are referring to weights that would impress elite powerlifters. The poundages that Brett uses in training probably leave the other gym patrons scrambling around for leftover plates. Brett has been known to press as much as 570 pounds for Inclines. His squats hover somewhere in the 700s. Although he hasn't concentrated on the deadlift, but has dabbled with weights around 550-600 pounds. He is even considering the possibility of grabbing some powerlifting titles as he works his way up the bodybuilding ranks.

His training week looks something like this:

Sunday — Quads	Thursday — Delts
Monday — Chest	Friday — Back
Tuesday — Hams	Saturday — Arms
Wednesday — off	





Despite (and perhaps because of) the heavy weights they employ, Brett and Ronnie are in and out of the gym within an hour, with the possible exception being their quad workout which may take a little longer. They can complete an arm or shoulder routine in forty-five minutes. This is due to their extremely fast training pace, with rest periods limited to thirty seconds MAX between sets. This keeps the workouts short but vicious.

Asked how their training changes over a year's time, Ronnie says that they are constantly trains to change things up. "This keeps the muscles off-balance and our motivation level high."

"Early in the off-season, Brett adds, "we tend to train heavier. We may do more deadlifting. We emphasize heavy squatting during this period. We may not squat each week but we will do a heavy squat one week and a strip-set of hacks or something the next."

Long muscle bellies and full sweeping muscles give Brett the edge in almost any show he enters. Other strong points include pec thickness and his chest/deltoid tie-in. Assessing weaknesses, he admits that he could benefit from improving his legs and back. "They're lagging a little bit but they'll get there," he says. "Everything else I'm okay with."

His current training seems guaranteed to transform these lagging bodyparts into strengths. In particular, the use of what his training partner Ronnie Gregorecz refers to as "Shock Scenarios." I asked Ronnie to describe exactly what these are.

Shock Scenarios

Ronnie described a recent leg workout for me that focussed on Hack Squats. They begin simply enough, with one or two plates on each side of the carriage for a warm-up. From here, they add a plate to each side on every following set, building up to an amazing TEN plates on each side by the tenth set. We are talking about a tremendous knee-buckling amount of weight (900 pounds plus the weight of the carriage). This is a huge weight for any exercise but particularly for Hack Squats!

If just the sheer poundage wasn't shocking enough, this is where they take things a step beyond what a sane man would even consider. Following their gradual pyramiding up in weight, they add one final Kamikaze drop set. On this final set, they begin to blast out reps with ten plates (and a reliable spotter) on each side of the machine, in what can only be described as a devilishly torturous super drop-set.

As Ronnie tells it "Brett has a bit more stamina than I do. I'm asthmatic so usually my wind goes before his does. Watching Brett train is incredible. I try to keep up with his numbers but it is just impossible for me..."

Brett interrupts, "...usually I'm holding an inhaler as I spot him."

After blasting out ten Herculean reps, the spotters are instructed to pull off a plate from each side. They do about ten more reps, and then a second plate is pulled. This is continued — ten reps are driven up, in impeccable form with their only reward being a pair of pulled plates and the aggressive screams to drive up ten more agonizing reps.

"By the final drop," says Ronnie, "we're approaching a hundred reps and these last ones feel heavier than the first set, which was performed with almost a thousand pounds." One must imagine that their poor thighs are desperately searching for the handful of muscle fibers that have not been obliterated to jelly by this point.

Brett adds, "It attacks the lungs first. Once the lungs go, everything has a tendency to follow." For Ronnie, this Shock Scenario usually ends with him lying on the floor like a landed fish, desperately grasping his inhaler. For both him and Brett it means a level of unbelievable muscle soreness and a surge of quad growth. With mental drive like this, it is a certainty that Brett's legs will not only catch up to his

upper body, but will most likely become a strong point in his already impressive physique.

The two maniacs from Missouri perform Shock Scenarios occasionally in their workouts to blast the muscles into growth and these techniques are not limited to just legwork. For chest, they will incorporate the technique in a pressing movement like Incline Presses. They've also unleashed Shock Scenarios on T-bar Rows to devastate their back muscles. As Ronnie says, "We pick one traditional compound exercise per bodypart and tweak it to the max." When questioned about the threat of overtraining and the Mentzer philosophy, both men smirked and replied, "Mike who...?"

Nutrition

Off-season, Brett finds he grows best on a high-carb regime, usually consuming about three grams per pound of bodyweight. His protein is more on the moderate side. Fat intake is kept low to moderate as well, making up 20% or less of his daily calorie intake.

Twelve weeks out from a show Ronnie has him start to gradually "flip-flop" those numbers, increasing the protein and lowering the carbs. Protein levels top out at 600-650 grams a day. Carbs drop to a low point of 30-grams on a low day, although this varies day-to-day in order to keep his thyroid from shutting down. Fat also decreases with the carbs in four gradual increments. At the end, the dietary fat is around 5%. It's not uncommon for Ronnie to adjust Brett's diet seven to eight different times during his pre-contest prep.

When choosing protein sources, Brett relies heavily on lean beef, especially eye of round. Turkey cutlets and chicken breasts also are worked in. During his contest prep he will eat four whole-food meals and take two protein shakes. "I usually use three scoops of [Optimum Nutrition's] Pro Complex," he adds.

For carbohydrates, Brett eats bushels full of sweet potatoes. He usually switches to redskin potatoes mixed with sweet potatoes the last week because of their glycemic effect. Eyes rolling as he speaks, Brett adds, "On my pre-contest diet, I have low-sodium green beans with EVERY... single... meal. Needless to say, I will NOT eat a green bean in the off-season."

Speaking of the off-season, bulking up is a big part of Brett's size-building plan. He finds that by flooding his body with calories and nutrients he makes the best gains. "I weighed in [yesterday, for the Collegiates] at 219 pounds," says Brett. "I'm up to around 222 today. As early as next week I could be 240 to 250!" With his eye towards the future, he adds, "I hope to get up around 260-270 this year in order to make an impact at next year's USA Championships."

With his off-season increases in bodyweight, Brett experiences corresponding increases in his exercise poundages. Hard training with big weights ensures that much of his added bodyweight gels into solid, permanent muscle.

In future articles we hope to follow the rise of Brett Becker, as well as sharing some of Ronnie Gregorecz's pre-contest techniques. This talented pair of hardcore athletes seems destined to make a huge impact on the sport of bodybuilding.

