



“So why do you compete?” I asked, not realizing that for top Masters bodybuilder Dave Marinelli, the question was ludicrous. At forty-nine years of age, Marinelli has a boyish energy and passion for bodybuilding that can only be described as ‘contagious.’ Just ask him about training, nutrition or his successful personal training business and watch him light up like a Vegas casino.

Dave Marinelli competes because he is a competitor. After sitting down with him for an hour, it became obvious that his definition of competitor goes far beyond the twelve-week period in which he is dieting for a contest. For Dave, the drive to excel is a constant part of his mindset.

To start, he follows a daily itinerary that would crush a man half his age. In fact, he seems to thrive on it. As a highly-requested personal trainer in Stewart, Florida, Marinelli clocks an imposing sixty to seventy hour-long personal training sessions a week. On a busy week, he spends sixty-seven hours training clients just between Monday and Friday. He gets lazy on Saturdays, with a mere four appointments.

To be able to work with this volume of clients, Marinelli starts each weekday at six in the morning and wraps it up at 7:00 PM. “I do not take a lunch break,” Dave says, “its just one training session after another until its time to head home.”

While this work ethic was a part of Marinelli’s persona since childhood, serious bodybuilding has only been a part of his life for the past two decades. His introduction to training began in 1975, where he threw around the weights a bit in order to stay in shape for his job as a firefighter. “We had a weight set at the station,” he recalls, “so every third day, when I was on duty, I would do eight to ten exercises.” It wasn’t until 1981 that he joined a gym with thoughts about competition.

In 1983 Dave entered his first contest (the Natural Florida) and earned a respectable third-place finish. The following year, he moved up to second-place. On his third attempt he finally won the overall. In 1990 he had his first big win when he won the Florida state title.

The big change for Dave was in 1993 when he received guidance from professional bodybuilding legend John DeFendis. DeFendis was familiar with Dave from witnessing his Florida win and felt Dave displayed unfulfilled potential.

At the time Dave was wrapping up his prep for the ‘93 Junior Nationals. After a brief chat, DeFendis



told him that some changes in his prep could make a big difference. At this point, they arranged a time to sit down and talk right before the show so that John could fine-tune the final week of his diet. “Up until this point,” Dave says, “I was always able to get myself up until the last week but wasn’t able to finish my diet off. DeFendis helped me out and I’ve been using the same routine on myself and most of my clients that are getting ready

for shows.” Since Dave Marinelli and “shredded, grainy muscularity” are synonymous, it’s obvious that DeFendis knows his stuff.

TRAINING

Dave Marinelli only trains three days a week, which is an amazingly short amount of gym time for a competitor at his level. On top of that, his workouts only last sixty to eighty-minutes. On Monday he

does a push-pull routine, which consists of only ten working sets for chest and ten working sets for back. Wednesday is his leg training day. Friday is reserved for shoulders and arms. Dave adds, “This is almost exactly the same thing Dexter Jackson does. That sixty to eighty minutes, three times a week, seems to be enough for me.”

How can he build muscle on such an abbreviated program? The key is that he lifts heavy ALL

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the time. When people ask Dave if he ever has a light day, he tells them, “Tuesday, Thursday and the weekends. Those are the days I’m not in the gym. Every training day is a heavy day.”

Since “heavy” is relative, I asked Dave about some of his poundages. “The most I’ve ever deadlifted is seven-hundred pounds,” he says. “My best bench is 455 and my top squat is 635. These lifts were when I was in more of my powerlifting stage.” These are big weights by anyone’s gauge.

Dave’s body seems suited to handling heavy weights. “I have no aches, no pains, no back problems. Nothing. I learned what not to do. There was a Bob Cicherillo interview I read recently called “X-Frame Training” [by David Young, *IronMan*, May 2002] which had a lot of truth in it. He hit it right on the head when he pointed out the difference in what people THINK we should do and what really works. I love the point where he mentioned ‘whoever said that the elbows have to be held in when we do pushdowns?’ I’ve always done them with the elbows out comfortably.”

Dave follows some simple rules to keep his joints and connective tissue healthy. “I probably have injured every part of my body the first ten years I trained. I’ve been injury-free the past six years because I listen to my body and do what feels good for me. For example, I don’t do behind-neck presses. They are too rough on my shoulder joint. I’ve had people recommend that I actually strap my elbows together for skull-crushers, the day after trying that I dislocated my shoulders. It is foolish to ignore what you feel and know about your body.”

SCHEDULE

Laziness is not a trait associated with Dave Marinelli. For twenty-five years, he worked for the fire department (retiring as a captain three years ago). In addition, he also worked as a personal trainer, clocking in a combined 90-100 hour workweek. With this type of background it should come as little surprise that he finds his current schedule to be a breeze. “Right now a slow week for me is sixty hour-long sessions,” says Dave. “On my full week I do sixty-seven hours on the weekdays and only four hours on Saturday.” Obviously, he has never struggled with a deficient work ethic.

With the client-load Dave carries, following a schedule is crucial. As he relates, “I get in one meal of real food before 5:00 AM. I drink a shake at 8:00. At 11:00, I have a client that gives me ten minutes to eat another meal. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, I am doing my own workouts so I start ten minutes late into my noon hour (to make up for the client that gave me ten minutes at 11:00.) I drink a Cell-Tech drink and a protein shake after I train. Later, I have another protein shake. I am able to get in three more whole food meals that day — 7:30, 10:30 and then around 1:30 or 2:00 in the morning. I do eat



Hard “grainy” muscularity is a trademark of the Dave Marinelli physique.

eight times a day, EVERY day. I eat in the middle of the night and always have.”

Dave never gets fat. “The fattest you will ever see me,” Dave says, “is about six to seven percent bodyfat. I never bulk-up, which may be a mistake.” The heaviest he ever lets himself get in the off-season is 208. This means Dave has only to lose five or six pounds of water and a modest ten pounds of bodyfat to reach his 5’5” contest weight of 190. Dave says, “Being a trainer, I like to always look like one.”

A master of multi-tasking, Dave has two clients that pay to train with him. “It doesn’t matter if they are male or female,” he says. “It doesn’t even matter what their strength level is. As long as their intensity is on the same level as mine, they can train with me. I just want to see intensity. They can’t tell me about their dog that was run over by a car. They have to be ready to train. If not, then I am working at a lower level and I have to bring someone else into the training circle. Anyone that has ever trained with me for a consistent period of time has made twice the

gains of a regular client. So if someone leaves me, that space is always immediately filled.”

After training six people in a row, Dave is ready for a break. “That break is MY time to hit the weights and work on myself,” he says. “To keep myself going. I will use a Ripped-Fuel type of ephedrine, caffeine, ma huang stack.” This gets Dave’s body jolted into action but his mind never has to be coaxed into training mode. “If I go on vacation I train — no matter what town or city. I don’t take a break. I never have and I never will. I lift weights because I like to lift weights. No one has ever forced me. I do it for the enjoyment. It gives me a feeling nothing else can.”

NUTRITION

Breakfast is Dave’s favorite meal. This usually consists of a twelve-egg white omelet filled with vegetables (mushrooms, onions, peppers), dry rye toast and oatmeal. “If I was able to eat it six to eight times a day, I would,” he says. He may add some ketchup or Parmesan cheese for off-season flavoring but eats only for fuel; the emotional “comfort” aspects of food do not enter into the equation.

Dave’s eating throughout the rest of the day follows a similar high protein/ low carb pattern. “I try to get in eight-ounces of red meat every day in the form of hamburger or steak,” he says. “Lately, I have been doing more shakes than ever, probably three or four sixty-gram shakes a day.”

He finds that a low carb intake allows him to maintain his lean physique twelve months a year. “People that don’t know me often will ask if I’m getting ready for a show,” Dave says. In true Shakespearean style he responds, “Yeah, the show of life. Every day is a stage and I have to be on it to keep my business.”

“I plan to continue competing until they put me in a pine box,” Dave says, his eyes squarely fixed on mine. “People ask me why I compete. It’s because I’m a competitor. It keeps me driven to train hard.”

Dave Marinelli’s ultimate goal would be to compete in the over-fifty class at the Master’s Olympia when he hits his golden birthday next year. “If you follow my career,” he says, “five times I’ve missed a pro card by one place! It kind of gets old when you come that close on five separate occasions.” Dave strongly feels (and quite a few other mature athletes agree) that the NPC should also award a pro card for the over-fifty class winner at the Masters Nationals. There is currently one card for the overall winner, who is almost always going to come from the Over-forty class. If athletes over-fifty years of age knew that a Masters Nationals win in the Over-fifty class qualified for the over-fifty class at the Masters Olympia, the depth of that class would improve. Dave says, “There are a lot of us hardcore old-timers that do not intend to ever quit.”

Spoken like a true competitor.

