

2008 Fittest Couple



Dena Anne Weiner and Rado Pagac Shake Things Up at the Los Angeles Convention Center With a Cirque du Soleil-Inspired Routine

by David Young

Photography by Michael Neveux and James Farrlley

The winners of this year's Fittest Couple competition at the '08 Fit-Expo were a departure from those of past years. Why? Previously the winners have been young couples just starting their fitness careers. While that's great, it can be an even greater source of inspiration to see people like Dena Anne Weiner and Rado Pagac. Dena is a 45-year-old mother of three teenage sons, ages 19, 18 and 16, and a hardworking, career-oriented mortgage broker. Her partner Rado is a 30-year-old personal trainer who moved to the USA from Slovakia in 2003.

Dena and Rado met in 2006 when she was judging Rado in a fitness and bodybuilding competition. Dena approached him after the event with the idea of pairing up to perform a fitness routine and go on the road promoting health and

fitness. Rado's nobody's fool—he wasn't going to pass up an opportunity like that.

So they ventured off, and in 2006 traveled the country doing guest appearances at contests sanctioned by four different affiliations: Musclemania, Amateur Bodybuilding Association, Organization of Competitive Bodybuilders and the Muscle Beach Classic. All in all, they did a total of six guest appearances. In 2007 they decided to change their style and add difficulty to their routine. One of Dena's friends who was familiar with Cirque du Soleil moves trained them to do lifts off the ground and flexibility and strength moves as a duo. That year proved to be even more successful, and together they performed at a total of nine venues, finishing out the season in Thessaloniki, Greece, in late November, in

addition to a few solo appearances.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that there are some tricks of the trade to learn from this couple.

DY: What are your heights and weights?

DAW: I'm 5'6" and weigh 122 pounds.

DY: Is that in contest condition or off-season?

DAW: I compete around eight to 10 times a year, and my weight stays fairly consistent.

DY: Rado, what about you?

RP: I'm 6'1" and weigh between 200 and 210 pounds.

DY: Success in fitness and bodybuilding doesn't happen overnight. How long have you been training?

DAW: My entire life! I've competed in two sports nationally and internationally: gymnastics and fitness and figure. I lifted my first weight on July 31, 1994. Before that I lifted my own bodyweight with gymnastics to gain muscle mass and be small and compact.

RP: I started lifting when I was 13 years old and never stopped. So that would be 17 years now.

DY: Dena, you remember the exact date? How did you get started?

DAW: On a dare. I went to a gymnastics reunion. I was 5'6", 125 pounds, whereas when I went to UCLA on gymnastics scholarship, I was 4'11", 87 pounds. I had three kids—ages six, five and three—at the time. My ex-teammates dared me to do some of my old gymnastics moves, and they helped me get invited to compete in Florida at the Ms. Galaxy competition in January 1995. That was 76 fitness and figure shows and 13 years ago.

RP: When I was seven years old, I started with karate. At the age of 12 I added traditional national dancing. A year later I discovered the world of bodybuilding. It didn't take long for me to fall in love with the sport. When I was 20 years old, I entered my first fitness show in the junior division and got second place. That motivated me to do more shows.

DY: I like that you both started with diverse athletic backgrounds, and it sounds as if you've both done quite a few





and on track. We motivate and inspire each other to reach our competition and routine goals. In 2007 we were constantly moving from one competition to the other trying to improve our

competitions. It's important to have good people influence your training. Who inspired you?

DAW: A team of fitness experts has helped me along the way over the past 13 years. That group has inspired and educated me to be successful, change constantly for every show and make it fun. My sidekick, nutritionist, bodyfat measurer, massage therapist, personal trainer, rehabilitation and physical therapist is Steve Murphey in Newport Beach, California. Jay Cutler used Steve as well. My three sons also influence me to be a great role model for them and to teach them about the importance of being healthy and fit 12 months out of the year.

DY: Rado, same question.

RP: I've never had a real mentor or fitness guru to give me direct inspiration. I found motivation and inspiration in fitness and bodybuilding magazines. My biggest hero since I was 15 years old has been Arnold.

DY: Besides fitness, Dena, what do you do for a living?

DAW: I've owned a mortgage-banking corporation here in the Orange County, California, area since 1991. I'm raising and training my three teenage sons, who all play football in high school and college.

DY: And aside from bodybuilding, Rado, what work do you do?

RP: I work as a personal trainer and nutrition adviser in a private club in Dana Point, California.

DY: You two are filled with energy. It just permeates everything you do. How do you keep pushing yourselves?

DAW: It helps working out with a partner in the gym to stay focused

routine and our body composition.

RP: Before it was always competitions that kept me on track, but since I've met Dena, she's been giving me lots of positive energy and motivation.

DY: You seem to feed off each other's positive energy.

DAW: We respect one another, and we definitely feed off each other's positive outlook on life in general. We're very fortunate and very blessed to have met. We have a lot of chemistry and a very powerful connection together when we're performing onstage together.

RP: I can say it's pretty much mutual off-season, but when it comes down to a few weeks before the show and my mood changes—low carbs and a low-calorie intake—Dena always pulls out some tricks to cheer me up and keep me motivated and focused.

DY: Speaking of diet, tell us what your diet is—during the season and off-season as well.

DAW: Well, I'm a little different here. My diet on- and off-season is basically the same. I'm fit for life. I maintain a bodyfat percentage of 10 to 12 percent year-round. Since I'm a fitness competitor, I don't need to be as lean as a bodybuilder.

RP: I don't have big changes



Rado and Dena perform at the '08 Fit Couple Contest.

either. I eat between 2,500 to 3,000 calories a day divided into six meals. I eat most of my carbs and fats in the first four meals—lots of vegetables and fruits. I try to gain no more than 10 pounds off-season. Most crucial are the last two weeks before the show. I slowly start lowering the amount of carbs and fats, and in order to not burn my hard-gained muscle mass, I increase the amount of protein from 250 grams per day to up to 350 per day. I add BCAAs and regular amino acids to my diet as well.

DY: Do you add cheat days?

DAW: Here's how I look at it: If I'm going to do something and spend the time, money and dedication to accomplish it, I'm going to do it 100 percent all of the time. My biggest fear is that I would get onstage to compete and hear someone say, "What's that old lady doing onstage? She's not prepared." My motivation comes from that. So the answer is no, I don't find it necessary to cheat because I'm only cheating myself out of what I've worked so hard to accomplish in the first place.

RP: I usually have one to two cheat meals per week up to one month before a show. From one month out I stick to the diet until the competition. I always have a "free pass" the day after the show to eat anything I want, including the cookies Dena makes me after every show. The next day, though, I cut back to normal eating habits again.

DY: Can you give us a sample of your eating for a day?

DAW: I never starve myself—never! That would spell diet disaster. I eat 2,000 calories a day. I do not eat

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“During my preparation for a show, I take glutamine, creatine, BCAAs, regular amino acids, L-carnitine and thermogenic fat burners. I also take vitamin C, a multivitamin, fish oil, glucosamine and flaxseed oil on a regular basis.”



any dairy, no processed foods, very little bread and nothing white. I drink a lot of water, and I make sure to eat every three to four hours. For competition season I eat a little less, about 1,800 calories, and add a little more pure protein—that is, meat—but my workout intensity goes up. I split my cardio day and night so I’m able to get leaner and stronger—for my stage presence in a bathing suit and to get through the fitness routine onstage. I have three Crock-Pots with meals cooking all the time, so I never have to worry about preparing meals at the last minute for myself or my family.

RP: I usually start eating between 6:30 and 7:30 in the morning, and from then on I eat every 2.5 to three hours. A typical day’s meals look like this:

Meal 1: omelet made with 10 egg whites and 1 yolk, 1 cup lowfat cottage cheese, 1 whole-wheat tortilla, tomato, bell pepper, a cup of green tea

Meal 2: Protein bar with apple

Meal 3: 1 cup brown rice, 2 pieces grilled chicken, mixed fresh green salad with lowfat dressing

Meal 4: Protein shake with banana, 1 cup oatmeal

Meal 5: Steamed broccoli and asparagus, 8-10 ounces grilled tilapia

Meal 6: Low-carb, lowfat protein shake

DY: What are your favorite supplements?

DAW: As I’m in my mid-40s and having been an athlete my entire life, I now need to take better care of my body. I eat healthfully. I take glucosamine for joint support, MSM for inflammation reduction and connective-tissue support, CoQ10 for my metabolic energy, chromium picolinate for my metabolism and calcium, magnesium, vitamins C and D and B complex.

RP: I don’t take too many supplements (continued on page 214)



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(continued from page 211) off-season.

DY: What are your goals regarding bodybuilding and fitness?

DAW: Rado and I are in the process of preparing our routine for this year with a theme: Rado as James Bond with me being his Bond girl. We still have to coordinate our costumes, choose the songs and choreograph our routine. We've already been asked by some fitness and bodybuilding associations to do guest appearances. When Rado and I do guest appearances for those

shows, I compete in fitness and figure as well, and Rado does bodybuilding and fitness-model competitions. I have four national and international fitness shows planned so far this year, with the first competition in June in Toronto, for the World Championships.

RP: I'd like to get more exposure in the fitness industry, and my goal is to end up on the cover of a fitness magazine. Another big plan is to promote couples fitness as much as possible and encourage more and more couples to get enough support

to make pairs fitness strong and a division.

DY: Dena, I notice that you seem to always have a plan, a purpose and a goal. Do you have a life philosophy that's helped you be more successful in your training or career?

DAW: Life is *not* a dress rehearsal. You are onstage every minute of your life. The character you choose determines your destiny! Life is an adventure and an amazing journey. Never let an opportunity pass you by!

RP: Everything in life is possible. You just have to believe in yourself, work hard 110 percent and never, never give up on your dreams.

DY: How do you switch from normal training to contest mode?

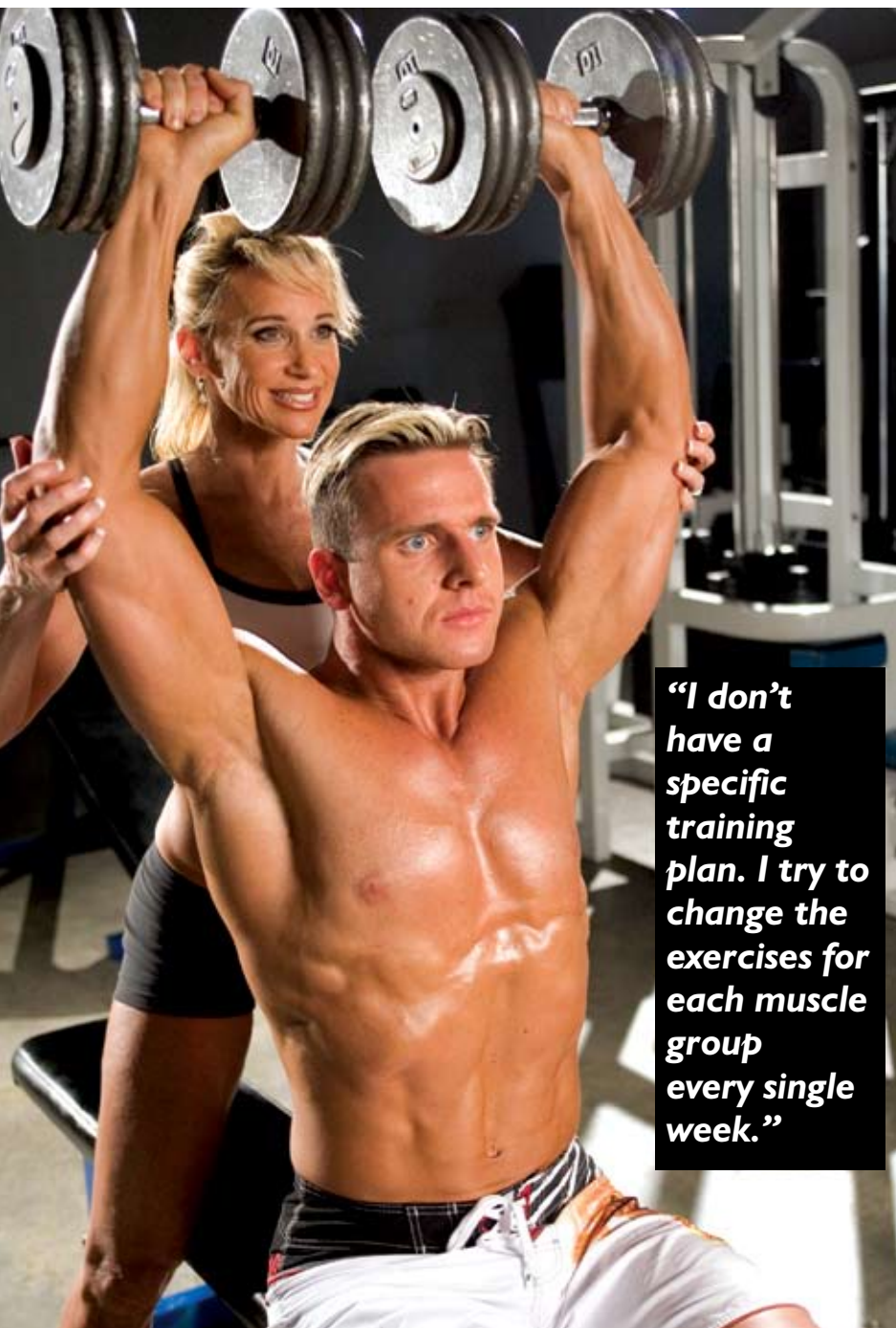
DAW: Once Rado and I have choreographed our entire pairs fitness routine, we practice it as much as we can together. There are a lot of timing issues and coordination we need to accomplish for our routine so no one gets hurt. My intensity level for my cardio exercise picks up, and I split my cardio between the morning when I wake up and the evening before I go to bed. I back off heavier weights so I can concentrate on lifting my own bodyweight for my gymnastics and strength moves in my routines. I have three routines: a fitness routine, a pairs fitness routine and for some affiliations a figure routine.

RP: The only difference is the intensity of the workout. I usually cut the breaks down from one minute to 30 seconds, and I increase the time of my cardio from 30 minutes to 60 minutes about five to six times a week.

I usually start with one heavy exercise, which always includes forced reps toward the end of the exercise. Then I choose two to three other exercises for the same muscle group and superset them. I usually do eight to 10 reps per set. That way I can utilize my muscles to the maximum and feel the great burn at the end of each set.

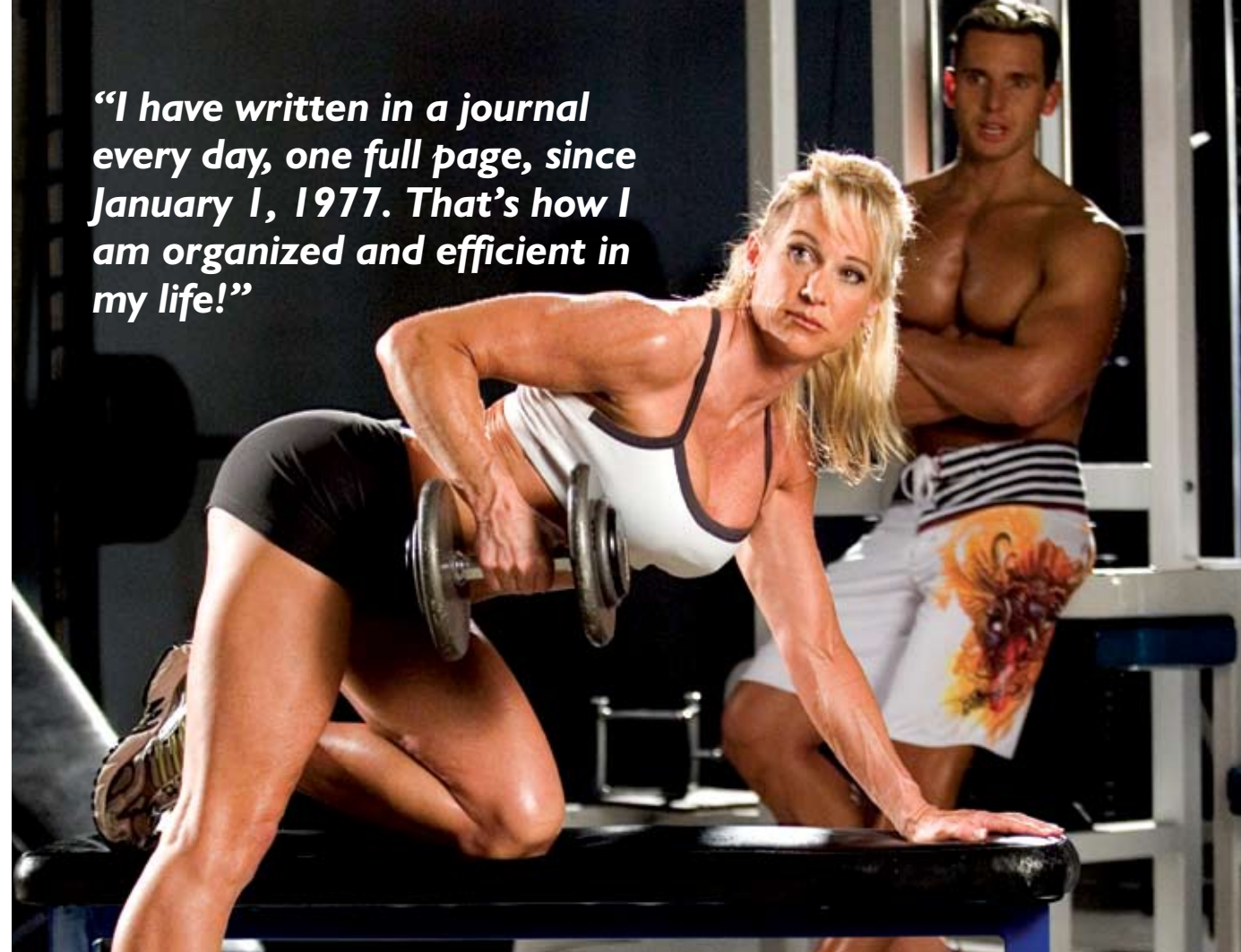
DY: How do you organize your training week?

DAW: Rado and I train our pairs fitness routine two days a week for an hour and 15 minutes. A few days



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a week we weight train together, do yoga and stretch. When we do cardio together, we discuss our goals and what we need to accomplish each week to be prepared for our upcoming show.

RP: I train at the gym five times a week, Monday to Friday, and I usually do outdoor cardio activities over the weekend. Besides lifting weights—which I do a lot more of than Dena—I get together with Dena to work on our fitness routine, practice our gymnastics moves at the gymnastic center, stretch a lot and do yoga. Altogether it's about 10 hours of workout a week.

DY: How much cardio do you do?

DAW: One hour of cardio early in the morning before work and 45 minutes in the evening before I go to bed, five days a week. On the weekends I do about an hour of cardio, usually outside running, biking or playing sports. I practice my fitness routine, pairs fitness routine and figure routine three days a week for about an hour.

RP: Off-season I try to do cardio at least four days a week. When it comes closer to a competition, then I do cardio five to six times a week. Depending on how close to the show I am and how much bodyfat I still have to lose, I do between 30 to 60 minutes of cardio training a day. Plus, working on our fitness routine together makes us sweat and definitely gets our heart rates up.

DY: Please describe a typical week of your training program bodypart by bodypart.

DAW: One thing you don't know about me is that I write my entire life down. I have written in a journal every day, one full page, since January 1, 1977. That's how I am organized and efficient in my life!

When I'm in training mode—April to November—my workout schedule is very strict and very calculated.

Monday, 5:30 a.m.: One hour of cardio (anaerobic and aerobic)—20 minutes on three different cardio machines. Forty-five minutes of weight training—leg weights, calves, quads and hamstrings. Inverted

squats on the Smith machine, leg presses, leg extensions, seated calf raises. Four sets of 15 reps.

Monday, p.m.: Forty-five minutes of cardio plus core movements, Pilates, yoga, pushups, pullups and moves that lift my own bodyweight and 45 minutes stretching.

Tuesday, 6 a.m.: Run stadium stairs and run sprints on the running track, walking lunges uphill. That lasts one hour and 15 minutes. Stretching afterward.

Tuesday, p.m.: Forty-five minutes of cardio, plus doing my three routines—one with Rado—several times at the gymnastics center.

Wednesday, 5:30 a.m.: An hour of cardio—same as Monday—then 45 minutes of weight training for chest and shoulders. Exercises include flat- and incline-bench presses, cable flies, lateral raises, front raises and handstand pushups. Four sets of 15 reps each.

Wednesday, p.m.: Forty-five minutes of cardio plus core movements, Pilates, yoga, pushups, pullups and fitness strength move-

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ments for my routines and lots of stretching for flexibility.

Thursday, 5:30 a.m.:

One hour of cardio—same as Monday and Wednesday. Thirty minutes of weight training for back—pulldowns, pullups, seated rows. Four sets of 15 reps.

Thursday, noon to

1 p.m.: Work on fitness routine with Rado. We need to do our routine several times a week for coordinating and timing so we don't get hurt. Plus we stretch each other out afterward.

Thursday, p.m.: Forty-five minutes of cardio, do my figure and individual fitness routines at the gymnastics center. Stretch afterward.

Friday, 5:30 a.m.: An hour and 15 minutes of cardio. Biceps and triceps work for 45 minutes—seated curls, barbell curls, hammer curls, dips and rope push-downs. Four sets of 15 reps.

Friday, noon to 1:15 p.m.:

Forty-five minutes of cardio and 30 minutes of sideways walking lunges, stepups, butt exercises and leg stretches.

Saturday, 7 a.m.: Run the stadium stairs and run sprints on the track, jogging 1.5 hours. Pullups, pushups and body countering movements—plus stretching.

Sunday, a.m.: Bike ride—road or mountain—outdoors.

Sunday, p.m.: Work on fitness routines and individual gymnastics or strength moves to perfect them. Lots of stretching. Sometimes 30 minutes of cardio.

RP: I don't have a specific training plan. I try to change the exercises for each muscle group every single week. I usually train for about an hour. After trying to train different combinations of muscle groups in one training unit, I've found that I get the best results by training only one muscle group per workout.

Since biceps and triceps are small muscle groups, I train them together on one day. I usually choose five different exercises for one muscle



group and do five to six sets of each. I start with lighter weight and about 12 to 15 reps for warmup and try to increase the weight on every set as the reps decrease down to six. Right after a workout I usually do cardio. Two to three weeks before a show I also add cardio early in the morning before breakfast.

My usual training split looks like this:

Monday: Chest and abs

Tuesday: Back and abs

Wednesday: Legs and calves

Thursday: Biceps, triceps and abs

Friday: Shoulders and abs

Weekend: outdoor cardio (Rollerblading or running at the beach)

DY: What about rest periods?

DAW: I don't know what that is.

I've been conditioned my entire life with all the sports I've participated in to do some form of exercise. It's like getting up in the morning to brush my teeth. I work out every day for my sanity. Working out early in the morning is relaxing, and it

enables me to clear my head and have a positive attitude and outlook on life.

RP: I've always been a very active person, and it's hard for me to imagine one day without any sport activity. If I don't work out at the gym or don't sweat at the beach, I have to at least go for a walk. Otherwise I would get crazy. Working out is for me the best antidepressant. And to keep myself happy and full of positive energy, I need my dose every day.

DY: What is the best thing about being a bodybuilder or fitness competitor?

DAW: Setting goals for myself; the journey it takes in

preparation to get onstage. Competing against myself to be the best I can be and to push myself to the limit in body, mind and spirit. It continues to make me very disciplined, accountable and dedicated to all aspects of my life. It's balanced out my life with family, career and making health and fitness a lifestyle.

RP: Bodybuilding has taught me to be focused, consistent, punctual, responsible and self-disciplined. I've also built up a lot of self-confidence. All these aspects are reflected in my regular life, and I am taking advantage of it every single day. Needless to say, this sport brought great people with positive energy into my life. Those people happen to be my best friends. Last but definitely not least, if it weren't for bodybuilding, I would have never ended up living in beautiful sunny Southern California.

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