

Rick Woodbridge: Ready to Shine!

Contributed by Rick Woodbridge
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I'm not new to bodybuilding. I officially entered the game at 18, when the vision of Arnold Schwarzenegger's arm on the cover of Time or Newsweek (I can't remember which, I'm 50!) took up what seemed like the entire page. At that moment I knew that I must have arms like that....or at least a close facsimile.

I tried to reach that dream in fits and starts until I was 32. I never won a show, but did win my class in the Mr. Midwest in 1990. During that time, I also promoted shows and became an AAU bodybuilding judge. Although I never was a serious threat as a competitor, I was the highest rated judge in the nation for a couple of years.

Life (translate that to six children, a fulltime job, and a return to college in 1990) put the brakes on bodybuilding for me. I left the gym for 14 years. I missed it every day but it was never convenient or critical that I return. That is until the day I found out that my oldest son was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. My dad was dying from it. I looked into the mirror and saw a 47 year old, pot-bellied, 285 lb man with skinny arms, square ass, and triglycerides at 400. I knew I'd be next.

A morning soon after, I slithered out of the shower, unable to reach my ankles to dry them off and announced to my wife that I was headed back to the gym! Her sigh of relief, albeit a little humiliating, was sign that I had made the right decision. I sat her down and explained what that meant, that I could only approach it one way, the way of the bodybuilder. There would be a regular training schedule and rigid diet and lots and lots of talk about reps and routines and body fat....put down that phone, honey, I know the number to the gym!

Seriously, though, I hadn't kept up with the iron game but I knew that Masters classes had been added to bodybuilding. I decided that, at 47, I wouldn't have enough time to undo the neglect and build a decent physique unless I waited to compete when I turned 50. And I had never given myself three years to build before. At 6'-4", it takes time to build muscle.

The short story, I competed for the first time in seventeen years the day after I turned 50. I got second. Well, I also got last because there were only two of us in the class. I looked the best I had since I quit years ago, but I miscalculated. And I used old dieting techniques. Let's just say I was a bit smooth. I'm not a quitter though. I dieted hard for another two weeks and competed in the Central States 50-over and won! O.K., there were only two of us in that class, too, but I came in harder and, as luck would have it, harder than my competition.

Competing as a Master has its challenges. Slower metabolism, less elastic skin, old injuries nagging like arthritis, slower recovery, low testosterone levels to name a few. Even though the body still can be shaped and grown to look like a twenty something's, the face and hairline refuse to hide the miles. Yet the spirit is still young. I asked my mother once what it felt like to turn sixty. She said "like a thirty year old trapped in a sixty year old body". I know that feeling now. I refuse to be trapped, though. Instead, I focus the wisdom derived from the years into the drive that comes from that thirty year old inside me. Smart, not fast.

I've got to say, it's a little heady now, to walk down the street and see young women blush because they feel weird lusting after a man old enough to be their father, or to hear men of any age say "man, you're a big S.O.B." or "how big are your arms?" or "how much can you bench?". And it's amusing to be in the gym, curling 80lb dumbbells and notice all activity stopping within thirty feet of the dumbbell rack.

If you're a Masters competitor, you know what I'm saying, and I know where you live. I'm here to listen to and share the stories of other Masters in the hope that you can be encouraged and educated. And in the end, to be able to release that young'n "trapped" inside. We're only beginning to shine!