

Evan Centopani Thrashes Triceps

Contributed by Ron Harris
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Triceps- the Final Frontier

Biceps are great and they continue to get all the glory even though they make up just one-third of the upper arm, but it's Evan's triceps that really set his arms apart from the pack and give them that almost impossibly round, full appearance. When this guy's arms are hanging straight down and totally relaxed, you get a sense of how critical thick triceps are in bodybuilding. Biceps only look impressive when flexed (unless of course, they've been shot up full of synthol and seem to be permanently flexed), but killer tri's are imposing and monstrous no matter what. And if you want to have an arm measurement you can be truly proud of, you'd better develop your triceps to their fullest potential along with your biceps. Evan had 20" arms as a senior in high school and has brought them all the way up to 23" since then. To do that, he made the most out of both of the major upper arm muscles, the biceps and the triceps.

A Word on Body Types and Genetic Potential

We often throw the classifications ectomorph, mesomorph and endomorph around fairly casually in describing the body types of various people we see. The truth is, there are very few who are "pure" somatotypes. Most humans are a mix, or should I say, fall somewhere between two of the types. In Evan's case, it's safe to say he's a meso-endomorph. That is to say that he gains muscle mass and strength fairly easily, but he also gains fat rapidly if he doesn't watch his diet and do cardio. "There was always a good amount of mass on me, even before I started lifting weights, but it was buried under some blubber," he explains. "The fat kids who are fat and solid like I was are the ones who probably have the potential to be huge, powerful men."

You could point to many of the men who compete in the World's Strongest Man events as examples of this, but there are plenty of top bodybuilders out there who also fit the description. Guys like Mike Quinn and Mr. America Joe DeAngelis were just like Evan as teenagers- chubby, but solid and strong. "Anyone out there reading this who gets discouraged because they have a hard time getting lean should also realize that they probably gain size and strength much faster than the guys who are always ripped, but fight like mad to gain every ounce of muscle. I'm proof that you can overcome the fat genetics and use that metabolic 'curse' to your advantage." So keep your chin up, my chubby friends, even if you have more than one chin!

The Formula for Triceps Training, Centopani Style

Evan has always liked training both biceps and triceps on the same day. Centopani will select four exercises each for biceps and triceps and subject them to four work sets of six to 12 reps. These are the movements he likes to use for torching those monster horseshoes.

Rope Pushdowns

Like many other top bodybuilders, Evan begins virtually all his triceps workouts with a few high-rep sets of rope pushdowns as a warm-up. "I will do at least two and usually three sets of 20, keeping the reps smooth and aiming for a pump just to get blood flowing around the area in general," he says. "I don't have any elbow pain now, and I plan on keeping it that way."

They are also an exercise he likes to superset with dips, particularly in the last six to eight weeks before a contest (see "Pre-contest Triceps Routine" sidebar). "The whole thing with that superset is that I use the rope pushdowns to pre-exhaust the triceps so I don't have to use crazy weights on the dips," Evan explains. "In the off-season, it's no problem to use two or three 45s hanging off a belt. But once my body fat and water start getting low, I don't have as much cushioning in the joints. It's a lot easier on my shoulders and elbows if I fatigue the tri's first and then go right to dips. If I hurry quick enough from one to the other, a 45 can easily feel just as heavy as two normally do."

Evan also has a tip on how to get a few more reps out of rope pushdowns and ensure you take the triceps all the way to failure. "Do as many reps as you can with a spread at the bottom, then hold your hands together and squeeze out a few more," he advises. "It's amazing the pump you can get from that if you've never tried it before."

Skull-crushers

Just as Evan only has one constant biceps exercise that he never skips, skull-crushers are performed each and every time he goes to the gym to hit triceps. You'll notice that he doesn't lower to the forehead, as most guys do, but goes all the way behind his head so the bar grazes the crown- you know, the area at the top of the skull where most guys start losing their hair. "I tried it that way and the stretch was so much better that I just kept doing it," Evan explains. "It's harder to do this way. I always envision keeping my triceps parallel to the floor throughout the set."

He usually works with a 45 on each side of the bar once he's properly warmed up. "As far as I'm concerned, this is the most important exercise you can do for your triceps," he says. "Once I started doing skull-crushers, my triceps just blew up." Unlike most bodybuilders, he prefers a straight bar over an EZ curl bar, as you can see from the photos. "The straight bar doesn't bother my wrists. Maybe it's because my wrists are pretty thick and strong."

Single-arm Overhead

Dumbbell Extensions

Evan is also pretty strong on seated overhead dumbbell extensions, as he's able to use a 70 pounder in this awkward exercise. He's also able to keep his elbow pointing straight up instead of flared away from the head, which increases his range of motion. "This was an exercise I started doing way back in ninth grade, in my uncle John's basement," Evan says. "I never stopped doing it, because it continues to produce results."

Overhead Dumbbell Extension with Both Arms

Young Mr. Centopani will occasionally do his dumbbell extensions with both hands and a heavier 'bell, going up to 140 pounds. But it's a rarity. "That's one exercise where you have to analyze the cost/benefit ratio," he explains. "Getting a dumbbell that big into the starting position is almost a workout in itself and it's a little dangerous, too, if you think about it. You could blow out a rotator cuff if you weren't careful by extending the arm too far back with that heavy weight pulling down on it." Since his triceps seem to do just fine without them, he doesn't worry about including them more often.

Elbows-flared Pushdowns

Evan never really cared for close-grip bench presses too much, but a couple of years back he discovered he could mimic the movement by using a cable station and a bar attachment. "Again, it was one of those things where I tried it and just got this tremendous pump, so I kept doing it," he says. Interestingly, it's a favorite exercise of Jay Cutler's, too. "I'm a big believer in trying subtle little shifts in angle or hand position to help you find the best ways to do an exercise for your particular body," he tells us. "We all have different structures, muscle bellies, etc., so it makes sense that we all need to find our own groove with exercises that are safe and productive."

Dips

Finally, dips are a staple in Evan's arm-training repertoire he feels has served him very well over the years. He eschews dip machines in favor of the real thing, strapping on a couple of 45-pound plates and going to work. "I know a lot of guys love close-grip bench presses, but dips have always done the trick for me," he adds. "I don't know why more bodybuilders don't do them. A complaint I hear a lot about close-grip presses is that bodybuilders feel them more in their chests and front delts than they do the tri's. With dips, as long as you keep your torso upright and don't let your elbows drift too far out from your body, you shouldn't have that problem at all. You should be able to blast almost pure triceps. It's such a basic, bread-and-butter movement that I can't imagine not doing it."

Tri it out for Yourself

I'm all about keepin' it real, so as usual I won't blow smoke up your ass and tell you you can do what Evan does for his triceps and expect the same results. The kid is a true genetic freakazoid the likes of which only comes down the pike every few years. The reality is that most bodybuilders could train for 30 years and still not get their arms as big as Centopani's were when he graduated high school. Trust me, I've cried a few tears of self-pity over this myself. I even asked him to spare me a few inches off his arms, since he would probably never even miss them. He laughed, as he didn't realize I was serious. But we can all be inspired by his photos and get some ideas on how we can improve our own triceps. I know I'm going to take a quick glance at the shots here of this young gunslinger and use them for mental ammunition the next time I head to the gym to blast triceps. How about you?

SIDEBAR

Three Triceps-training Mistakes Evan Sees all the Time

- 1. Not knowing that cheating has a time and place.

"One thing I think keeps a lot of guys from getting the results they could is that they go too strict with their form. You should keep your form tight for most of the set, but at the end, you can extend the set and work the muscle harder if you loosen up the movement just a bit. Cheating is bad if it's a technique you use from rep one just to be able to handle a heavier weight, but used properly, it can actually help you stimulate more muscle growth."

- 2. Not feeding the muscles.

"I don't care how great your workout is, if you don't provide your body with the right nutrients it needs to repair and rebuild, you won't see the results you should be seeing. You need to get a jump-start on that immediately after the workout, because that's when the muscles are really like a sponge and will soak up amino acids and glycogen. I have a shake with 50 grams of whey isolate plus 10 grams of L-glutamine peptide and eat two bananas as soon I'm done training. Most guys will use dextrose or maltodextrin for their carbs and add them to the shake, and that's fine too, but I feel food works better for me. Steve Reeves was big on bananas too, so they must be good!"

- 3. No compound movements.

"I see guys doing tons of cable pushdowns and dumbbell kickbacks, but not enough skull-crushers, dips and close-grip bench presses. Dips and close-grips in particular are something that every bodybuilder should be doing at least one of every time they work triceps. Extension movements will only give you so much growth in the muscle. If you want to get huge triceps, you have to include movements that allow for huge weights. Dipping with 200 pounds of bodyweight plus 100 pounds extra resistance is going to build a lot more triceps size than doing kickbacks with a 20-pound dumbbell."

SIDEBAR

Off-season Triceps Routine

Cable pushdowns	4 x 8-12
Superset with skull-crushers	4 x 8-12
Single-arm overhead dumbbell extensions	4 x 8-12 (each arm)
Superset with weighted dips	4 x 8-12

SIDEBAR

Precontest triceps routine

Rope extensions	4 x 12-15
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- Superset with weighted dips 4 x 12-15

- Dumbbell kickbacks 4 x 12-15 (each arm)

- Superset with single-arm overhead dumbbells 4 x 8-12 (each arm)

SIDEBAR

Training Split

Monday: Chest and abs

Tuesday: Back

Wednesday: OFF

Thursday: Shoulders and calves

Friday: Arms

Saturday: Legs

Sunday: OFF

Complete Contest History

2005 Bev Francis Atlantic States Heavyweight and Overall

2006 Junior Nationals Super heavyweight and Overall

2006 NPC Nationals 2nd place Super heavyweight Class