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A Conversation with World Bodybuilding Champion and IFBB Professional bodybuilder, Dr. Lance Dreher. By Dr. Michael Dusa

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The Dusa Interview Series

A Conversation with World Bodybuilding Champion and IFBB Professional bodybuilder Lance Dreher. By Dr. Michael Dusa onal bodybuilder, Dr. ⁄lichael Dusa



MD: Hi Lance. First, I just want to truly thank you for agreeing to speaking with me.

LD: I am happy to, Mike.

MD: Please tell me of your path in the game.

LD: Mike, I know you know of the times in which I had my beginnings in bodybuilding. I began in our garage as a kid, as my father had weights at home that he had used earlier. In the 1950's, he had nineteen inch arms, a 500 pound bench press. Once, he did enter the Mr. Illinois, but he didn't really do well. In general, I wasn't encouraged to lift. Bodybuilding was considered weird, done by freaks. The gyms, in general, were dungeons, filled with crude equipment.

MD: Your father sounded like a powerful guy. How did your body respond to your early training? Did it seem you had some of your father's genetics?



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Sporting 20" arms at age 17 circa 1973

LD: Mike, as a freshman in high school, I gained 1.5 inches of muscle on my arms in one week. I gained 15 pounds of bodyweight in two weeks. By the time I was 17 years old, I was carrying 20 inch arms. This is before I even knew what dianabol or any of that was. I am getting ahead here, but the late Bob Kennedy, publisher of Muscle Mag International, wrote in his book, I believe it was "Beef It," that myself, Casey Viator, Mike Mentzer and Tim Belknap were true "naturals." He meant that we had ideal genetics, bone structure and the like that allowed us to go so far by genetics alone.

MD: Those are astounding measurements! I'd think you'd have been a natural for ball sports.

LD: I played football in high school and three years of college. I played fullback in high school, and was on the "A" team. I did blow my knee out, wrecking my ACL ligament, but retained great speed and power and instead of halfback, I was switched to fullback and a blocking running back. I played three years of football at North Central College, but, by the time senior year had rolled around, I was at odds with the head coach, so that was it for my gridiron career.



Aged 17 and training with his dad's weights in a garage gym in Illinois

MD: The nascent days of bodybuilding were rough ones for many reasons. Since the general populace seemed so averse to the whole idea of lifting weights, was it difficult for you to find someone to lend you guidance in your iron pursuits?

LD: Its true about people looking at lifters with disfavor. The football coaches-they didn't want the weights to take away from football. At the age of 17, I was fortunate to meet Bob Gajda, who, as you know, was a great bodybuilder as well as AAU Mr. America and Mr. Universe. I'd train at his facility and, understand, I'd be around all kinds of professional athletes whom he'd be training. He'd sit me in his office regularly for hours after I'd be done training and just teach me so many things. I will tell you, right off the bat, I was around the best, and Bob was certainly ahead of his time. Mike, to this day, when you hear the term "core" used, that's



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Bob. He coined that term many years ago.

MD: Amazing. I am happy to say I have Bob scheduled for interview. I must say, with the size and results you were making so early on in your training, I'd guess you were competing by this time?

LD: My first show was the Mr. Chicagoland when I was 17 years old. I was training with my friend, Frank Palkoska, in his bedroom at his house. As an aside, Frank later was in the Army and he was the one who put their physical training program together. We'd train, and then have dinner at his house. I'd then take the bus home to my house and have dinner again (laughs). So, I entered the show, and Bob Gajda was the head judge. Soon after I arrived, who walks in but none other than Sergio Oliva! I just announced to whomever was standing near me that I was going to simply walk up to him and ask him about his gigantic arms. Sergio told me he would do 200 pound skull crushers. I was like, that's fine, so I set out to do the same. I got up to 265 pounds in this lift, doing sets of six reps. I'd lay on my bench, do a pullover with the weighted bar, and do extensions with it.



1981 IFBB World Championships heavyweight comparison with Reid Schindle and Gunnar Rosbo

MD: Thus, your legendary, gigantic arms. How did you fare in the show?

LD: Not well. But Bob did tell me that he'd train me, and that he felt I could go to the top in bodybuilding. I soon started winning. In the Junior Mr. Rockford, I was in the top eight and earned my first trophy. I also annexed best arms and best back awards. I took the Junior Mr. Chicago. I started winning. It's funny, looking back, guys started calling me and saying straight out that they'd beat me in the next show.

MD: What do you mean? They'd just randomly call you on the phone and call you out?

LD: Yes, crazy, huh? I'd just carry on. You must understand, I kind of came out of nowhere.

MD: People feel threatened by change, newness, and assault on their station. You were still very young at this time, and, as I understand, still playing football. What was your training and nutrition like?

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LD: Even during football season, I'd hit the weights, usually just three times per week to maintain my mass. In college, I was the only player to have a "training table," which essentially meant that I was able to go in the cafeteria and pick my own menu. I'd just eat big, Mike. Meat, milk, eggs. I'd ingest wheat germ, liver tablets, Rheo Blair's protein powder. Oh, then there was the famous Bob Hoffman "Protein of the Sea." It tasted worse than rotten tuna. I bought that once and threw it out.

MD: BoHo! I had one bottle of Protein of the Sea and it sat in my high school locker my entire senior year. I'd always live by the mantra of "Just say no to taste,"



LD: (laughs) Yup. That was it. I used Hoffman's weight gain product, it was loaded with fats and protein, and with it I gained 15 pounds in two weeks as I had said earlier.

MD: I played some high school football, and also tried to train with weights at the same time. I just felt beat to hell all the time. It was tough. I am intrigued you were able to pound it on the gridiron and also maintain your muscular mass with the weights at the same time.



At the 1983 Mr. Olympia in Munich, Germany

LD: Mike, there were very few who lifted weights in conjunction with football. I competed in bodybuilding right through college, and won the Collegiate Mr.

America title along the way. Around this time, I met Tom Platz. It was at the Teenage Mr. USA, and it was Tom and me, but nobody knew who the heck I was. We both had big legs, and the judges that day even heartened us to downplay our leg training, lest our physiques become bottom-heavy and assymmetrical. Well, I laid off, he didn't. The winner that day was Steve Borodinsky, with Tom in second and me in third. In 1973, I showed up at the AAU Teen Mr. America, and this was won by Dan Tobol, Platz second, me fourth. I approached the head judge, Ralph Countryman, and basically told him that what I was witnessing was not fair. These guys were obviously jacked up on stuff. Ralph just told me to soldier on and not to get discouraged.

MD: Well, the collegiate America is nothing to sneeze at.

LD: That's true. In 1977, I did the AAU America for the first time, and I remember the Weider brothers were there for the event. Joe was there to convince all the bodybuilders to affiliate with the IFBB. We said no, and Joe was pissed. He went on about how bodybuilding in the AAU was just like a poor, second sister to weight lifting, and if we'd come under the stewardship of the IFBB, bodybuilding would be given it's deserved, singular attention as a separate entity. Still, we voted this idea down. Ultimately and insidiously, he infiltrated his people into the AAU, and, in the following few years, the AAU was completely removed. By 1981, we were competing under the auspices of the NPC. Wayne Demelia, Jim Manion, yeah. They took the title, but little of what was promised was delivered.

MD: Upon mention of Joe, I must ask, since you enjoyed his delightful protein so much, did you have any dealings with Bob Hoffman?

LD: When I won the Mr. Collegiate America in Wisconsin, I did meet Bob. By this time, he was pretty old, but he still was a big guy with a big frame. I remember him approaching me, shaking my hand, and saying, "Where the heck did you come from?" Other than that time, I never interacted with Bob.

MD: You started to have great success nationally, which brought you to the world stage.



1981 IFBB overall World Champion

LD: I took third in the <u>1980 Mr. America</u>, with Gary Leonard and Greg Deferro placing ahead of me. Gary did very poorly in the World's following that, and Manion called me because Weider was pissed with Gary showing up in such bad shape. They wanted me to replace Gary as a representative in the next show, but this never happened. Here is an interesting story. In training for the 1981 Mr. America, Tim Belknap came for a visit at my gym. He approached me and declared he would win the upcoming America, to which I replied, "Well, whomever is best will win." Belknap, went on, "No, Weider is running it, so I'm gonna win." Well, soon after this, there we were, on stage, with the final announcement to be made for overall winner. The emcee literally started to say my name as winner, but in mid sentence changed it to "Tim Belknap." The crowd went nuts, booing. The top four, me. Belknap, James Youngblood and Ken Passariello, were sent to

Cairo for the World Championships. Let me tell you something, Mike. When Belknap won the America, he ran to all the newspapers and press, trumpeting his win to them. In Cairo, well, you know I won the overall and Tim was relegated to second to Jaques Neuville of France in his class. All Tim could do was plead with me to not tell anyone back home that I had beaten him at the World's. That's the truth. I also recall sitting with Tim's father, and him saying that Tim would definitely have to win that year, because he was concerned with all the insulin he was taking. You know he was a diabetic and needed the insulin. But, I can tell you he'd take much more insulin than what was prescribed.

MD: And then Weider and the pros called ...

LD: I became an IFBB pro the following year. You know, I was training in Illinois when Joe called. He wanted me to come out to California, and I told him I'd consider it but really wasn't sold on the whole idea. Soon, Mike Mentzer called me. Then Boyer Coe. They sang the virtues of transplanting to California. In the summer of 1982, myself, Robby and Platz were guest posing at a show in San Jose. Mentzer was covering the show for Weider, and he told me that out of the three of us, I could win the Olympia, but I'd have to move to California. Mike, I had a house payment to make, responsibilities. At the same time, I had heard of guys going out there to do the Weider thing, and they'd end up becoming bums. I remember doing a photo shoot with Kike Elomaa, and Joe was supervising the shoot. He said to me, "Lance, look. People want the blue-eyed guy, the blond, the guy like this with the great physique. People don't want blacks, they certainly don't want foreigners. He mentioned that even while using Sergio Oliva to spark his marketing, products wouldn't move like they would with a guy like me. I'd only go to California for photo shoots. Joe did make me an offer, and it was for a salary of two hundred dollars per week, along with free advertising space



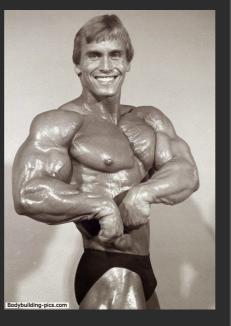
in his magazines. Well, I hadn't products to sell, so I didn't go with this. Boyer Coe, a great guy, told me, "Lance, you are done in the IFBB. Nobody says no to Joe." I knew my long term future didn't include bodybuilding. I was disappointed because I really thought I could win the Olympia, but it became hard to get motivated. From that point on, I knew they wouldn't let me do well in his shows.

At one point, I was contacted by a fellow who ran independent shows. They'd benefit the Royal Society of Mentally and Physically Handicapped. He wanted me

to become involved, and I contacted the IFBB and related how great this would be and how my participation would bring a positive light to the organization and to bodybuilding in general. They told me if I got involved, I'd be summarily suspended. This is when I resigned from the IFBB. It was 1984.

MD: But you were not done, switching over to NABBA.

LD: Yes. In 84 and then 85, I took third in the NABBA Universe, losing to Ed Kawak and then Brian Buchanan, respectively. I did win the NABBA Pro Universe in 1986, and then retired. I did take another shot with the IFBB, and, upon Ben Weider reinstating me in 1988, I placed sixth in the Chicago Pro Championships. This was a curious situation, however. Richard Loresch was one of the judges, and he had me in second place. Well, he was cornered in an elevator at the event venue by Jim Manion and his people, and asked why he'd placed me as he did. "Because that is the placing Lance deserved." After that, Rich was out. No more judging for him.



I did the Arnold in 1989, which was won by Rich Gaspari. I got eighth, and shared a locker room with Samir Bannout. Samir and his coach looked at me and said people would fall to me that day. They thought even Rich would be subject to loss to me. At prejudge, I wasn't even being called out. I talked to Joe who was there and he merely said I'd been gone for a while, hadn't competed. It was the same old story.

MD: Lance-at the time, what did you think of bodybuilding?

LD: Mike, generally, up to 1988, at this time, nobody really had an ugly physique. Up until the early nineties I'd say this held true. Now? Things are lost.



1983 seminar. Madison, Wisconsin Sporting 23" arms

MD: As we discussed, I remember you in 1980 doing a seminar I attended at Cheach's Gym in North Haven, Connecticut. You were gigantic, in shape, huge arms, articulate. You had a carved, detailed, tapered waste. Who'd have thought of the devolvement of bodybuilding as we see it today?

MD: How about your family?

LD: My father is now 83, and he is in good health and shape. My mother, not so, I am afraid. She is dependent on many medications, and she is quite frail. She is sadly a part of our very broken health care system. You know, with all of the health care tomfoolery you hear about, its a very tangled web. Sorry to get a bit off track here, but this involves my mother. It involves everyone, actually. The health care system was going bankrupt, and the powers that be knew they couldn't let this happen. So deductibles were raised. My family deductible is six thousand dollars per year. I pay \$1,200 a month for my family for health insurance. Now...well, there are record profits for the insurance companies because they don't pay anything out. You know, the driving force for the high cost of health care today is obesity and smoking. It's out of hand. Did you know the average cost, just for yearly medications, for a diabetic is fourteen thousand dollars per year?

MD: Insane. I am sure you see this first hand and regularly in your business. You have your master's degree in nutrition, and your PhD as a nutrition counselor. You work directly with the brilliant bob Gajda.

LD: I do. My business involves nutritional consultations and some physical training, as well. Most of my clients are from physicians, and we work hard at reversing processes that have gripped them and caused them sickness for often prolonged periods of time. We witness many food addictions in clients. It is interesting that women have a proclivity to be addicted to carbs, men, it's alcohol. These stimulate the same centers in the brain. Clients text me their food journals, and doing so gives them accountability. We attend to and recognize the emotional effects of food as well. Both myself, and my wife, who works with me, are certified life coaches. The majority of our clients receive programs of coaching for the nutrition aspect, and exercise as well.



Here is an interesting story. In 1981, the VP of the Chicago Health Club arranged a meeting for me with Don Wildman, who was the president of the Health Tennis Corporation. I told him that the next big move in the fitness industry was personal training, and that he should let me head the charge into this new world. Well, he was one of these rich guys who would let you know that you were a poor guy. He was like, "I am right. You are wrong." He disagreed with me. Of course, Don was wrong.



issue of Muscle Training Illustrated

MD: It must be interesting to work with and be friends of a guy like Bob Gajda.

LD: Bob and I are putting together two programs. One will be to certify PHA trainers, and this will be only offered to those individuals who have a college degree. We are also looking into training centers offering PHA as well as nutirition programs.

MD: PHA?

LD: Well, I can tell you Bob Gajda will go into great detail about PHA with you when you talk to him. All I can say is be prepared for that (laughs)! There are 696 secondary pumps to the heart in the body. The muscles. The premise is to move and mobilize lactic acids in the body, facilitating recovery. A deconditioned person can handle a PHA workout, the heart rate is controlled. There is much less soreness in the ensuing days. Bob will go into great detail about this with you.

MD: I'd better study up prior to my call to him. How are your workouts today, Lance?

LD: I go relatively heavy, five days per week. I can still do 100 pound dumbbell presses. I did have both knees replaced not long ago. You know, I had surgery on my clavicle some time ago, and during it they found that I had Valley Fever. I didn't know I had this for four years. I was told my life would change upon this diagnosis, and that I'd have to adopt a low carb diet. High carbs would give the noxious microorganisms an ideal environment to thrive in, and low carbs facilitate a healthier immune system. So this shapes my diet to this day.



Married for more than 30 years with wife Debbie

MD: It's hard to believe you just turned 60 years old! You still look forever young, Lance. And I know your wife and you have four children.

LD: Thanks Mike. My oldest son is 30 and he just got married in our back yard last week. He is Lance, Jr., and he is 6'5". My son, Nathan, lives in Kansas City, and he is in great shape. He'd do well in bodybuilding if I coached him. My son Ryan is 6'1", is in ROTC, and is a sophomore in high school. My daugfhter, Alyssa, is 16 and a freshman.

MD: Fantastic, Lance. It's always great to see the results of a life well lived. I really want to thank you for your time and words. Please tell Bob Gajda to take it easy on me when I call him!

LD: (laughs). Oh, I will Mike. And thanks for thinking of me for an interview. I just want to say, for the young people especially-bodybuilding is not a career. People

