

# Local Teen Transforms from Bullying Victim to Bodybuilding Prodigy

By Brian Hickey | Newsworks.org

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Brad Larrison

Nixlot Dameus, the 2013 Mr. Philadelphia Junior Teen bodybuilding titlist, gives some tips on exercise technique during his 'Summer Superman Camp' in Olney.

When his family moved to the Olney section of Philadelphia from Port-au-Prince, Haiti seven years ago, Nixlot Dameus faced a difficult transition.

As a nine-year-old, he only spoke Haitian Creole, so he watched PBS Kids programming for hours on end. Regularly wielding the "what does that mean" question, he picked up the English language in about a year.

Learning the language in a quest for assimilation did not help him escape bullies who targeted him for being different, though.

Chief among his being-bullied memories was the time he got jumped for wearing a Lawncrest youth-sports shirt while walking through shopping plaza in Olney.

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"There was a whole bunch of them," he recounted Monday, while talking in the neighborhood's Fisher Park. "I got away from the first group, but eight of them, they got me. To this day, my parents still don't know about that.

"That's when everything flipped. I thought, 'Maybe getting bigger and stronger will make it stop,' and it did."

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Bigger and stronger is an understatement for what he's gotten in the time since that day, a span that includes an "Art and Craft of Poetry" class at Delaware Valley Charter High School (DVCHS) inspiring him to break his silence.

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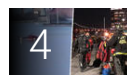
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It was then, fueled by those memories, that Dameus — now 16 — committed himself to weightlifting and bodybuilding.

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He got so good at both, in fact, that he won the 2013 Mr. Philadelphia Junior Teen Title.

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The only thing that kept him from representing the United States at the International Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation's World Championships in Slovenia in June was a rectified-too-late visa issue.

Those are the types of events that suit teenagers who casually, but confidently, mention an ability to bench press 405 pounds, squat 455 pounds and deadlift 525 pounds.

While Dameus' story has been covered before, that visa issue brought about the next step in his evolution. He's used the money raised for the trip to start "Summer Superman Camp" in the park off Sixth and West Spencer streets.

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It harkens back to the poetry class of Catherine Kang, a woman who Dameus considers "the glue that held this project together." It inspired his thought of giving back to the community.

While he doesn't talk about bullying during the cardio- and strength-training exercises he leads three mornings a week, it's certainly the underpinning of how the sessions came to be.

"I never wanted to talk about it when I was getting bullied," Dameus said. "Instead, I'm working to start a brotherhood where everyone is comfortable with one another, and where they are confident in themselves."

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A man at age 16

Neither his chiseled physique nor the manner in which Dameus comports himself belies the typical 16-year-old.

Sounding like someone who learned English around the time he picked up crawling, he discussed the value of leadership and example-setting. He also made note of his desire to earn a criminal-justice degree so he can one day work in law enforcement, specifically for the FBI.

His reflections on how he got to this point — including recollections of benchpressing 225 pounds as a beanpole 13-year-old who played the cello — and what he's learned along the way are equally as sharp.

"You build confidence by lifting weights," he said before leading five camp attendees in a cardio workout on the Fisher Park tennis courts. "I also lift weights to get my anger out, thinking about something someone said and imagine that weight being them."

Asked whether that's a peaceful way to work out one's aggression, Dameus quickly replied, "It's not very peaceful for the weights."

What they're saying

Among those on hand for Monday's 8 a.m. session was Kahree Steplight, a personal trainer from Body Challenge Fitness Center in Hunting Park who helped lead the early exercises.

He recalled what he thought the first time he saw Dameus.

"I never would have guessed he was 16 when I saw him," Steplight said. "I respect what he's doing, and I hope [the attendees] keep it up."

For his part, DVCHS Principal Ernest Holiday lauded Dameus of a shining example of students giving back to their communities.

He recalled talking to Dameus as a freshman about where he wanted life to take him. Not coincidentally, that's around the time that the school launched a weightlifting program, which is now in its second year.

"He's shown people how to respond to adversity in a positive manner," Holiday said, noting that Dameus is on "a pedestal" in how other students see him now.

"Some kids tend to respond to bullying by bullying someone else," he continued. "But, like we try to preach in our school, you always have a choice. They can make it a great day or not. The choice is theirs."

If anything bums Dameus out, it was having to tell people who donated to his Slovenia trip that he wasn't going. He worried that they would think he just made the whole thing up, which he didn't.

That, and imparting one specific lesson, is what makes the "Superman" camp so important to him.


Already focused on qualifying for next year's International Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation's World Championships, Dameus shared what he hopes people take away from his story:

"Don't let anybody take you away from what you want to do."

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