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Natural bodybuilding contest attracts clean competition

BY COLE YOUNG
Special to the Star



April 25, 2017 01:55 PM

As a competitor, John Arnold has seen all sides of the bodybuilding world.

Arnold chose the natural side.

He's not the only one. The Natural Southern States Classic prepares for its 21st annual competition on April 28 and 29 at the Liberty Performing Arts Center.

Arnold, who got involved with promoting the event when it began in 1997, has seen the competition grow from 30 entrants to an expected 250 this year.

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“A lot of people will test the waters outside of (natural shows),” Arnold said. “Then they’ll come to our show. I always get compliments saying they appreciate what we are doing here. It’s always a situation for the appreciation of the fact we are giving them a platform to compete fairly and excel.”



What sets the natural bodybuilding world apart from other bodybuilding types is the strict adherence to testing for performance enhancing drugs. Competitors must submit to a polygraph exam before the event. Additionally, top finishers in each class must also do a urine test.

The testing provides a level playing field, something Arnold didn’t experience when he competed in other shows before helping start this event.

What he found was an almost necessity to take steroids or other performance enhancing drugs in order to compete at a high level – something he wasn’t willing to do.

“Trying to compete without it, against it, you just can’t,” Arnold said. “It’s not a fair playing field. Believe me, after six years of trying to compete doing that, I knew I had no chance to actually succeed and go to the pro level.”

What Arnold and his wife Becky, who is also in the bodybuilding world, found was they were not alone in wanting the fair playing field. They’ve seen the event grow from one category to the seven that will be in this year’s show.

The categories competitors will participate in this year are: Figure, Bikini, Classic Physique, Men’s Bodybuilding, Women’s Bodybuilding, Men’s Physique and Women’s Physique.

Arnold said the majority of new competitors he sees are former athletes looking to find a way to stay competitive. As a former college track athlete and then power lifter, he turned to bodybuilding after suffering a back injury.

He encourages those who might be interested in the event to check out one of the two days.

“You might think, ‘I could fall in that criteria. I want to look like that. I might not want to look like a bodybuilding woman but I want to look like one of the figure competitors,’” Arnold said. “Summer’s coming, give yourself a little motivation. Give yourself a little push in the gym. Learn something about a new sport.”

The event begins Friday at 6 p.m. and continues at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday morning.

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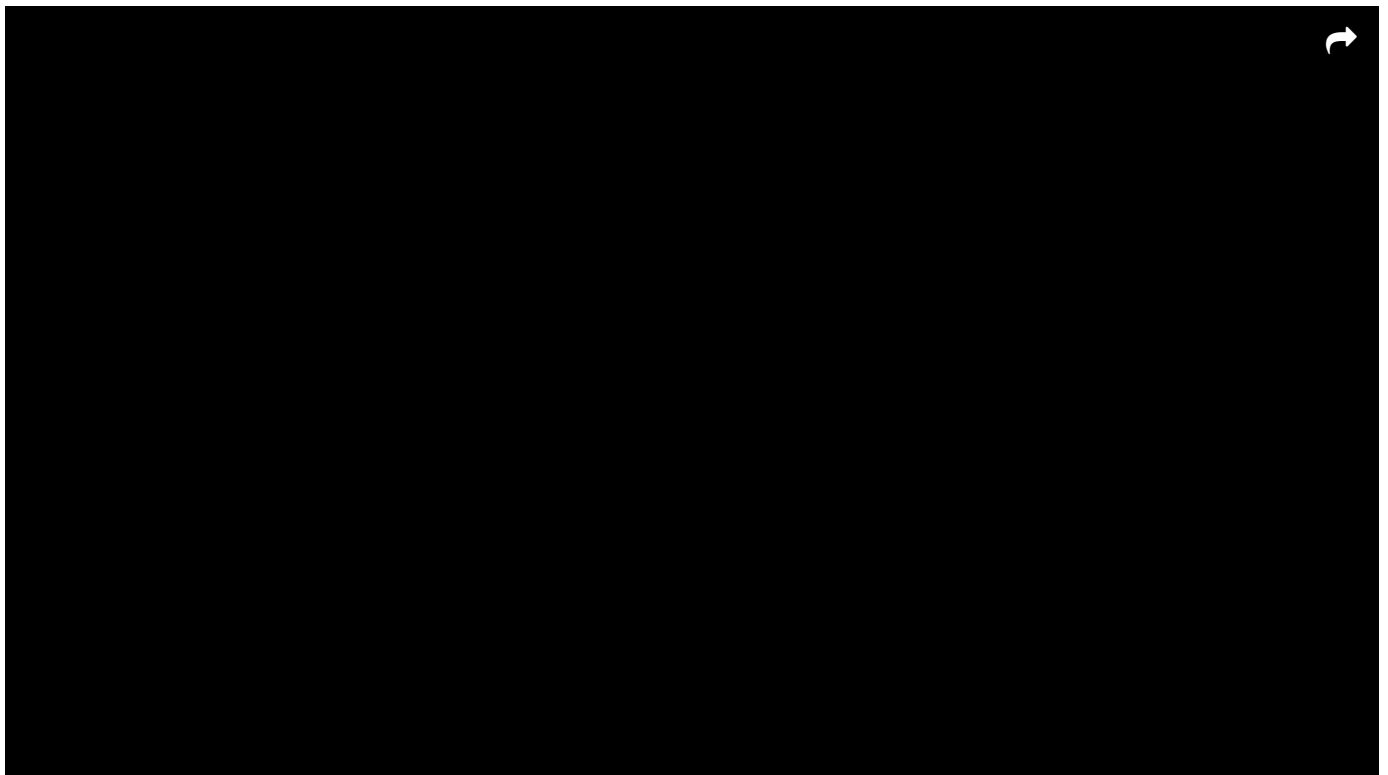
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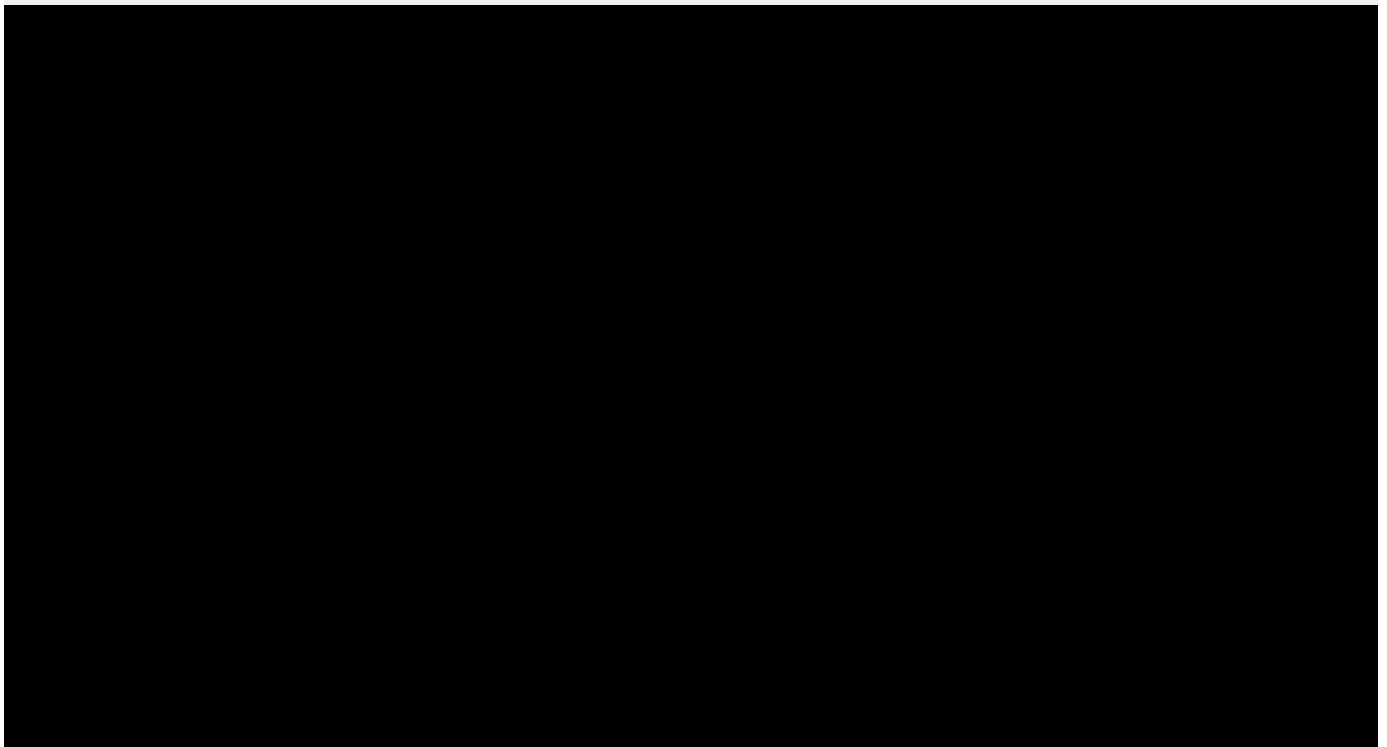
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