

Master Trainer

Lifetime Bodybuilding and Masters Athletes

Volume 11, Number 5

October, 2001

Goodbye Mike

Mike Mentzer died in early June from an apparent stroke or heart attack.

Tragically, Mike was not yet 50 and seemed to be really perking up after a series of health problems. In an email a few days before his death, Mike told me he was developing a new career as a fiction writer and showed me some of his work. It's apparent Mike was an excellent writer and likely would have achieved success in his new career.

I'm sure many people who got to know Mike will echo my words. Mike was always very kind and encouraging to me. He really got me to think more critically and to search for principles and mechanisms when trying to explain different phenomena. Such perspectives are invaluable in many different areas and Mike's influence on people goes far beyond bodybuilding or for that matter even the philosophy that he espoused.

Some people may say that in his most recent training books and articles that Mike went too far and that he was taking a sound approach to an extreme. Time will only tell if that's the case and points of criticism of Mike's work are after all recognition of the central role he plays in these debates.

Mike had the intelligence and persistence to articulately challenge prevailing paradigms of training and develop a virtually new paradigm. Few people in any human endeavor are capable of such feats.

Mike will truly be missed.

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I won't claim that this issue is a tribute to Mike. Yet, in one way or the other, many of the articles reflect on points that Mike got many of us to think about. Perhaps, we're not as certain about everything as we were a few years ago and few of us would now agree that's there's one "magic bullet" routine. Some of Mike's ideas and applications will stand the test of time and some won't.

Here are only a few such points and attendant questions from articles in this issue:

How much training intensity is really required to produce results?

Is there really one best way to train?

Is gaining strength the royal road to physique development?

Are weight gain and huge muscles the barometers of success for resistance training programs or, particularly for mature athletes, are there really other critical barometers?

If it's true that you are likely to maximize your muscle mass in a matter of a few years, then does it make sense to continue to train in ways that presumably are designed to add more muscle mass such as using a great deal

of resistance in a very limited number of exercise movements and training very infrequently?

Will training very infrequently perhaps maximize strength but undermine health benefits of resistance training?

Even if it is likely that muscle mass and strength gains are maximized in a few years, if you want to train for a lifetime - regardless of how much more you can improve - how can you do that most safely?

Planned progressive training is critical, but should you occasionally deviate from your plans and provide yourself with some unique challenges?

Some people are clearly "naturals", genetically blessed to be very tolerant of exercise and certainly, by definition, very responsive to exercise. Naturals have been dismissed as hardly being templates for how the average person should train, much less what they should expect to see as a result of their training. But, can naturals, in some cases, offer some reasonable exemplar of what to shoot for particularly if they train drug-free and they present a lean "human-like" physique? ♦

Master Trainer focuses on information about lifetime bodybuilding, master athletics, and health and fitness. Information reflects the author's opinions as well as summaries of books, articles, and recent scientific news. This publication does **not** provide medical advice for specific medical problems. Medical advice should be obtained from medical personnel.

*"Mike Mentzer's
influence will
be lasting."*

Challenges: You're Never Too Old

by Matt Brzycki and Fred Fornicola

In this joint venture, we discuss the importance of challenging yourself regardless of your age.

Matt's Challenges

I've always enjoyed challenging myself physically. My earliest memories of this date back to the mid to late 1970s when I was a young Marine stationed in the Mojave desert at a base in 29 Palms (California). In January 1977, for instance, our detachment of Marines went on a 15.5-mile "conditioning hike" (aka a "forced march") – basically walking at a very fast pace – through the desert wearing helmets and backpacks and carrying M-16A1 rifles. In order to make an already grueling effort even more challenging, I volunteered to "hump" the radio (which weighed about 30 pounds) on my back. During a 10-mile conditioning hike through the desert in March 1978, I chose to wear five-pound weights around each of my combat boots. (I was a notoriously poor eater even back then and "celebrated" the completion of this challenge at the base bowling alley with seven grilled cheese sandwiches – one for every blister on my feet!) On another occasion, I recall going on a lunchtime run of about 4.5 miles through the desert wearing combat boots and carrying an iron pull-up bar. (The worst part of this was figuring out how to carry the darn thing while running!) And in preparation for Drill Instructor School in the early months of 1978, I usually ran through the desert in the early afternoon – the hottest part of the day.

Those were just several examples of numerous ways that I challenged myself when I was younger. I wanted to see how far I could push myself and, frankly, I also wanted to subject myself to harsh demands and adverse conditions that I knew most others wouldn't even consider let alone attempt. The satisfaction derived from completing these challenges was well worth the blood, sweat and tears.

As I got older, I continued to challenge myself physically albeit a bit differently. In March 1985, I began using HIT on a regular basis. Shortly thereafter until July 1990, my lifting partner was Andy Foltiny who was, during those years, the assistant wrestling coach at Rutgers University. (Incidentally, Andy is 1+ years older than me.) We essentially assaulted each other in the weight room on a regular basis three times a week in the early morning hours. Andy and I pushed each other to our physical limits but the most challenging workouts came on holidays and other special occasions (such as birthdays) when we really upped

the ante. I recall a number of times when one of us was nearing the end of his first set to muscular fatigue and the other said something like "Hey, wait a minute . . . isn't today your birthday?" Or "Here comes Santa Claus." Within seconds, the lifter would be summarily punned with numerous post-fatigue reps (such as negatives and forced reps) or simply extra sets/exercises. And you did whatever the spotter said without question. As time went on, however, we got so well conditioned and fearless that we actually taunted each other, basically implying, "I can handle whatever you throw at me." This despite the fact that the lifter knew the payback for mocking the spotter would be swift and ruthless.

More than a decade later and entering my mid 40s, I still enjoy a good physical challenge. Since December 2, 1998, I've been doing the so-called "3x3" as my mid-week workout (usually on Wednesdays) and have completed more than 125 of them. In its most elementary form, the 3x3 is essentially three multi-joint movements: one for the hips, one for the chest and one for the upper back.

These three exercises are done in that sequence and then repeated two more times – that is, a total of nine movements – all done to the point of muscular fatigue with as little rest as possible between exercises. Only those who have experienced a 3x3 can appreciate the demands of this type of workout.

Several months prior to my 44th birthday, I thought about doing a special challenge to commemorate the occasion. As fate would have it, my 44th birthday fell on a Wednesday – the same day that I normally did a 3x3. Because I would be 44, my plan was to do a 4x4 and, for added symbolism, do every rep at a 4/4 speed. When the day arrived, my training partner – Tony Alexander – went through his 3x3 in 13:20 (13 minutes and 20 seconds). While on the subject, Tony has increased his muscular strength to mind-boggling proportions. In a recent workout, for example, Tony's first set in his 3x3 was 321.5x8 in the trap-bar deadlift with each rep done at an 8/8 speed – that's 128 seconds of TUL! And that was without a warm-up of any kind. Recently, he's also done 10 dips with his 235-pound bodyweight plus an additional 147.5 pounds and 5 reps of negative-only chins (at 8 seconds per rep) with his bodyweight plus an extra 122.5 pounds.

At any rate, after Tony did his 3x3 I told him that it was my 44th birthday and, to celebrate, I was going to do a 4x4. Tony's face broke out in a smile that was reminiscent of devious movie characters. Think of an ax-wielding Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. He asked me what three exercises I was going to do during my fourth time and I said, "No, I'm gonna do a 4x4, not a 4x3." Tony said, "Oh . . . OH!"

"Special occasions merit special challenges."

In brief, the 16 sets in the 4x4 were as follows (sets in parentheses): trap-bar deadlift (4), MedX incline (4), MedX bench press (2), chin (2), MedX seated row (2) and lat pulldown (2). And this is the sequence that I used during the four "circuits": (1) deadlift, incline, chin, bench press; (2) deadlift, seated row, incline, lat pulldown; (3) deadlift, incline, chin (negative-only), bench press; and (4) deadlift, seated row, incline, lat pulldown.

All repetitions were timed (with Tony counting cadence out loud using a stopwatch as a reference). As a result, I could determine the ratio of the actual time that I spent lifting and the time I spent "recovering." I completed the 4x4 in 18:51 and did a total of 93 reps at 8 seconds per rep (either 4/4 or, in the case of the negative-only chins, 0/8). This meant that I lifted for 744 seconds or 12:24. This also meant that, after the first exercise, I spent 6:27 between the remaining 15 sets – or about 25.8 seconds of "recovery" between sets. (On average, the time that it took me to do each set was 46.5 seconds.)

Keep in mind that the weights I used were quite challenging for me and all sets were done to the point of muscular fatigue. (Immediately after the workout, my heart rate was 148 bpm.) As a side note, my performances in the four trap-bar deadlifts in the sequence that I did them were (weight x reps) 289x12, 269x7, 249x6 and 229x6 with all reps done at a 4/4 speed. (My bodyweight was approximately 178 pounds.)

I experienced a great deal of muscular soreness that began early Wednesday evening and lasted until Saturday. Nevertheless, I was extremely satisfied that I was able to complete such a demanding challenge.

So you don't have to be young to challenge yourself. Nor do you have to be young to train in an intense fashion. Indeed, legendary guys like Ken Leistner, Ken Mannie, Wayne Westcott and Richard Winett have been practitioners of HIT for decades. They're all more than 50 – with the exception of Ken Mannie who isn't too far behind – and can train with more effort than most individuals who are half their age. And you don't have to be a well-known strength-and-fitness personality to challenge yourself or work hard into your later years. I assist a 46-year-old gentleman named John Quigley who challenges himself with extraordinary efforts on a regular basis – mostly with grip work, cardio training and flexibility. When John is done with his workout, he is literally soaked from head to toe – despite the fact that he trained in an otherwise comfortable, air-conditioned facility.

Shortly after I did the 4x4, I received a phone call from Fred. As improbable as it sounds, he mentioned to me that his 40th birthday was coming up in June and he wanted to do something especially challenging. I briefed Fred on the "gift" that I gave myself for my 44th birthday, encouraged him to be enthusiastic about his effort and exchanged a few ideas.

Fred's Challenges

When I spoke to Matt (in fact, I believe it was actually on his birthday) he told me of his onslaught in the gym to commemorate his special day. My first reaction was one of amazement; then my second immediate thought was that he finally lost his mind! I have participated in 3x3s in the past and know of the intensity that this particular training protocol demands and to put it mildly, it is a painful experience. The fact that Matt does this on a weekly basis (personally I think he enjoys the challenge more than anything else) is a testament in its own right. But taking this to the higher level of a 4x4 left me with only humorous thoughts of how painful the next few days of soreness would be for him. While speaking with Matt about his extreme efforts, we tossed around some ideas about doing something a bit out of the ordinary to memorialize my birthday. I was about to cross over to a new "age-group category": an era of 40-somethings that are usually full of excuses instead of desires. I felt that this was the perfect opportunity for me to "feel my age," which by the way is one with an extremely youthful attitude. Like Matt and others in the 40 and 50s crowd in the fitness world, age is not an excuse to back off from efforts or challenges. If anything, it is even more of a flame of encouragement to push us to new limits, new personal records and goals as well as an opportunity to stand and conquer new challenges.

During our conversation, we started to get nostalgic about our past challenges, how we set out to journey into unknown territory, hoping to make it through victorious. I think it's always been "death before dishonor" when it comes to pushing myself beyond my physical, mental and emotional limits. Ever since 1976, when I started training with Nautilus equipment for the first time, I pushed myself extremely hard – sometimes until I literally fell off a machine – and I was deeply proud that I never gave up. I, like Matt, started to recall the undo pain that I imposed on myself once a challenge had been made. I can vividly remember one day when my training partner and I walked into the gym to squat and deadlift. This gym had its own room in which squats and deadlifts were done and the owner saw us nearing it to commence our workout. He quickly approached us and asked, "Hey, do you guys want me to put you through your squats?" My partner and I looked at each other and smiled because we knew what we were about to agree to one severe ass kicking. We began our workout with a warm-up. Afterwards, we did the following squat workout (sets x reps): 2x6, 2x12 and 2x20 with each set being taken to positive failure. After the onslaught, deads weren't even a consideration so we crawled on back home. I can only say that I was so sore that any – and I mean *any* – activity other than lying down was extremely painful for an entire week.

I can think of numerous occasions where I've made a workout (inclusive of conditioning) more difficult in order

to challenge not only my body but also my mind. I thrive from the challenges that I or anyone else can impose on me. About a year and a half ago, I visited Matt and he put me through a session, one of which was challenging - but not intimidating - because I actually knew that I could accept and handle whatever challenges he presented. He put me through my paces and as the session became more demanding, he asked me to go further and I did not hesitate to push on. This is what invokes those feelings of challenging yourself.

After some consideration as to what my game plan would be for my "birthday bash," I decided that some of what I did would be symbolic of my turning 40 while other activities were merely additions to my workout. First, I weighed myself that morning and tipped the scales at 175. As a symbolic measure, this would be the resistance that I used for my first exercise: the trap-bar deadlift. (Incidentally, in this exercise, I elevate my feet for a better range of motion.) I completed my goal of 40 reps with 175 pounds. When the 32nd rep rolled around, it seemed as if each rep was taking forever to complete. Even though I wasn't doing them any slower than the previous reps, it just seemed as if time was standing still and I was never going to get to 40. As I approached my 38th rep, I locked out at the top and my left leg involuntarily started twitching and shaking like I was a dog getting its belly rubbed. After what seemed like an eternity, I finally got to 40 that thank the good Lord, was failure. I quickly found a comfortable seat on the concrete floor of my garage. Prior to starting this set, my heart rate was 100 bpm; after completing the set, my heart rate was 159. (My resting heart rate is actually around 56 bpm but my anxiety took over prior to the set.) Oh goody, I still had more to come!

Next up was the standing overhead press with a 2-inch thick bar. I had hoped to work up to 175 for a single but as I got to 155, I felt it was safer to stay with that weight due to my wobbly legs. So I got 155 for 5 singles with only one minute of rest between sets. From there, I went to pull-ups and did 6 reps with my bodyweight. Next on my list was the narrow-grip bench press. I only used 115 pounds in this movement but did 6 sets of 41 reps as follows (with a mere 40 seconds between sets): 18-8-5-4-3-3. By now, my metabolic system had kicked into high gear. Because of this, I did curls with a 2 ³/₈-inch thick bar using 25 pounds and got 25 reps, rested 40 seconds and did another 15. Again, all of these sets were taken to failure and the fact that I hit 40 reps isn't merely a coincidence - it was a brutal effort to complete them and had to bust my butt to get 40. From here, I did 40 crunches with 55 pounds of resistance. I finished my workout with single-leg calf raises, doing 20-15-5 with each leg while taking little rest in between sets.

The Challenge Awaits You

In closing, we challenge you to challenge yourself. Accept the challenge. ♦

Naturals

Naturals are people who have a gift for specific kinds of endeavors so that once they are matched with those endeavors, they are likely to excel almost immediately. Some people may have a great gift and never know it simply because they somehow missed getting involved in some endeavors that they are especially suited for such as a specific kind of sport, or music, writing, in fact, almost anything.

Sports are particularly interesting because different sports can require quite different skills and functions. For example, Lance Armstrong is absolutely uniquely suited for cycling but by his own report is fairly uncoordinated and not very good at most any other kind of non-endurance sport. Michael Jordan may be the greatest basketball player ever but he showed that he was at best a mediocre baseball player.

In some cases, a person may have spent decades in one type of sport such as long distance running, achieved minimal success, and then try something totally different such as bodybuilding, and discover that all along their gifts were in strength and hypertrophy and not running long road



Ron Walters has developed a super lean physique in a very short time.