

Interview with IDFA Overall Men's Open 2x Champion Erik Alstrup

SC Thanks for the interview Erik. Can you please tell us a little about yourself?

First off, Thank you Shaun for the invitation to share a little about myself...The IDFA has so many great male and female competitors involved, that I consider it an honor to be asked!

I've always had a passion for exercise. I knew as a teenager that I wanted to be involved in the fitness industry and I can remember as a young boy being fascinated by muscles of my dad.

As kids, my brother and I would lift anything that looked heavy, in hopes of getting bigger and stronger. We actually piled rocks into a plastic bag one day and lifted it, thinking this would make an effective weight but the plastic bag split instantly...we were pretty young and didn't really think that one through!

Today, I work as a Personal Trainer and thankfully have refined my approach to developing strength and fitness. I'm motivated by a desire to help others succeed where they previously or currently believe in their own limitations.

Hence my approach to my own fitness career and the desire to continue to raise the bar for myself. (no pun intended..)

SC How long have you been into bodybuilding / weight training?

I started lifting weights when I was 20 years old. I was about 160 lbs and super skinny! I went to the gym every day for months and made lots and lots of mistakes. Fortunately I did learn through trial and error and I also spent a lot of time reading as much as I could on the subject. I consistently looked at photos of bodybuilders in the magazines and books and tried to develop my physique to match those I saw in the magazines. Those pictures provided lots of inspiration for me and gave a consistent mental image to focus my training on.

I woke up and thought about bodybuilding and went to bed and thought about bodybuilding and my workout for the next day. I was truly hooked!

Lifting weights made me feel strong and confident...something that I was lacking in my earlier years.

I gained about 30 lbs my first year weight training and another 20 lbs my next year and ate 2 pizzas almost every day. Unfortunately, about half of that weight gain was around my mid section!

SC What or who inspired you to begin competing in Bodybuilding?

I remember being into the look of fitness and muscularity from a young age. My brother and I would go to the bookstore as kids and look at pictures of Arnold and Franco training at Venice Beach, California.

I was so skinny growing up and weight training really began to instill some belief in me. As I trained, grew and felt more confident, I just decided to compete after seeing a poster of a show that was about to be held a few months later. A friend was competing as well, so we trained and competed together.

That first show was such an overwhelming experience that after it was over, I was unsure whether I would ever compete again. It was one of the hardest things I'd ever done. A few weeks later and after lots and lots of carbs, my mind came around and I started training for the Eastern Ontario Championships being held in my hometown, in which I

won the Overall title. I was so inspired by the process, the feelings, and the other athletes that I knew this was what I wanted to pursue.

As a competitor, there is a mutual respect for and among other competitors. Each can appreciate what fellow competitors have to go through to get prepared for the stage. A comradry exists and that is inspiring.

SC I wanted to congratulate you on winning the Overall Men's Open Bodybuilding Titles at the 2009 IDFA Montreal Classic and 2009 IDFA Toronto Classic. Any plans on moving up to the IDFA Pro Division? As the Overall Men's Open Champion you are eligible. The fans want to see you go up against the IDFA's Best.

I saw the IDFA Professionals compete in the Toronto Classic in July 2009 and I must say, there are some formidable natural competitors in the Pro ranks! That being said, I am considering the Pro option carefully:

There are a few things for me to consider other than the obvious need to continually improve my physique to be competitive on the Pro stage, such as my desire to continue running marathons, doing the occasional triathlon, playing golf and practicing yoga. These activities, especially running, make it difficult to hold on to muscle mass and in order to be competitive as a runner, I like to change my body composition by losing some muscle to become faster.

So, competing as a Natural Pro against athletes who are likely solely focussed on continually improving and growing vs. myself who is losing muscle and then going back to weight training & playing catch up makes it a challenging decision to take the next step.

Also, I am uncertain about whether I will pursue a shot the IFBB Natural Canadian Championships, which I have to qualify for. I'm a little confused about my eligibility for this competitive stream if I compete as an IDFA Professional.

In the meantime, I really do enjoy having the "two way" option to participate in highly aerobic events like marathoning and being able to switch gears, train for a few months hardcore and still be competitive in the natural amateur bodybuilding scene.

SC How did it feel stepping on stage in Montreal for the first time in over 10 years? Why did you decide to compete again after such a long layoff (or retirement)?

It really was a retirement. It happened shortly after I won the 1998 Overall Title at the Canadian Championships. I had dreamed about competing on the National stage since my very first thoughts about competing. I just wanted to be good enough to say that I made it to the highest competitive level in the country. As I advanced through the ranks and enjoyed some success, I began to see the potential of challenging at the National level and then eventually entertaining the idea of winning the whole show and turning pro. When it happened in 1998, I was so excited and ready to realize my dream of becoming an IFBB Pro, that I jumped right in.

Then reality set in...I prepared for the 1999 IFBB Toronto Pro International and just 6 months later I was on the same stage with the guys I spent hours reading about in the mags.

Getting ready for the pro debut was a tough process as I was going through a personal "re-assessment" phase. My priorities were changing and that was reflected in my mental state and condition the day of the show.

Truthfully, I just wasn't ready. The guys at that level are huge. To be competitive amongst them requires even more commitment to a hardcore way of training, dieting and supplementation. I just couldn't do it anymore.

I knew what sacrifices and decisions I had to make to get there and it was like I was back at the beginning again, having to re-establish myself in the pro ranks with the stakes being raised even higher this time.

After months of personal reflection leading up to the IFBB debut, I knew I needed a change.

I made the decision after prejudging that I was done with the sport.

That being said, the decision to come back and compete again slowly evolved as I felt I someday wanted to have one more crack at it.

10 years was a long time for me to think about whether I was content with my decision and the terms in which I decided to leave the sport.

For years after I had absolutely no interest in weight training and bodybuilding. I was not lifting weights anymore, just running and yoga.

Then, earlier this year I trained an athlete for her first figure competition, the 2009 IDFA Novice Classic and was her backstage coach as well.

And then all of a sudden...I made a decision.

I was so impressed with what I saw from the IDFA that I made a mental commitment to compete in one of your upcoming shows. I found the next one on your contest roster and started really training hard.

The Montreal Classic after 10 years away from the sport felt phenomenal !!

I was a little nervous leading up to it because I was unsure about how I would stack up to the competition. So much time away from serious lifting with only a few months of weight training under my belt.

I decided my focus would be about bringing myself in my best shape possible. It would be about training and competing with a different intention...enjoying the process, the diet, training, the final week, backstage, being under the lights and the support from family and friends.

At the same time it was also a message to other athletes, friends and to my personal training clients that the body is an amazingly resilient masterpiece and if taken care of, can naturally produce whatever you need to meet the challenges presented to it.

I initially planned for one show, soaking it all up, enjoying the process and then moving on again

Though, once I started pumping up backstage, it felt like I was home again!

If you love competing or enjoy a good challenge, then do yourself a favor, prepare wisely and step on stage! You won't be sorry.

SC I have heard that you kept very busy with other interests during your layoff from Bodybuilding. Can you fill us in?

Absolutely!

After retiring from competitive bodybuilding in 1999, and still having a competitive urge, I wanted to challenge myself in a totally different way. I decided to go in the opposite direction and start running, cycling and at that time also entertaining the idea of doing a triathlon. The only problems were that I was 240 lbs, had no cardiovascular fitness and I couldn't swim!

I started slow, losing about 10-15 lbs of muscle per year and hired a swim coach. Later that year I ran my first marathon and within a couple of years did my first triathlon. Since then I've competed in over 100 races, done 20 marathons, lots of triathlons including 2 Ironman Triathlons.

I also took up Golf which was a completely different experience again. I loved the challenge of it and went into intensive study of that sport as well.

I still plan on playing lots of golf and will begin training for the 2010 Boston Marathon after the competitive bodybuilding season ends.

This summer though has been all bodybuilding focused and when I get around to it, I want to finish editing and publish a bodybuilding specific posing guide called: "Polished Posing"

I have attended so many entry level and amateur shows and seen such a wide variety of stage posing and presentation, some of which does not present the athlete's physique to its highest potential. I felt that there needed to be a short instructional guide on how to present yourself and your physique on stage and how to practice if you are a first timer or need some guidance.

My first show, I had no idea how to pose and it could have been so much easier if I had a guide such as "Polished Posing"

It'll be available on my website: alstrupfitness.com.

SC What is your favorite body part to train?

I really do like them all, and it does change from time to time, but lately I'm enjoying the challenge of putting some size back onto my legs. With thousands of miles in my legs from running, I lost most of the muscle I put on over the years of weight training. I got down to about 160 lbs from a high of around 240 lbs.

It took about 7 years to lose all that muscle, so every body part is a challenge to train and rebuild, but I'd have to say that leg training is the most gratifying. There's something about the soreness in your legs the day or two after that feels like you've really accomplished something.

I guess I could also add another favorite body part to train:

My Lungs!

Breathing heavily in the midst of a race is also quite a rush...It takes some time to get to the point where you can tolerate and then eventually enjoy this but like a set of squats or presses which hurt initially and don't feel great sometimes, you get to like it and then look forward to it.

SC Do you have any advice for anyone looking to compete for their first time?

Don't do it!

Kidding!! Actually, its just the opposite...if you have a desire to step on stage, definitely go for it. I've met so many aspiring bodybuilders and figure athletes who want everything to be perfect before they compete.

I totally understand this position because everyone wants to represent themselves at their highest potential, but competing is about process. You can learn and improve every time and that's why you do it. It's literally a transformative experience...give yourself the chance. You never know what you can achieve and what level of quality lies underneath that initial layer of body fat.

Find a solid novice contest or a show that is at your level, like the IDFA Novice Classic, for example.

Go and watch first and see what looks good, what the judges are looking for, who places well and then ask yourself why those competitors did well. Then get to the gym and put what you learned in place.

Do your homework, learn good stage presentation and please practice your posing! It makes a huge difference on stage and you will feel much more confident when you are under the lights....choice between two or more physiques that are similar in quality, size and condition will almost always go to the athlete with better posing and presentation. Sometimes great posing can simply outright win a show!

SC *Do you train on your own or do you have a training partner?*

Most of my workouts are solo. I like the concentration and focus I can settle into when I'm training.

I change things up so much and move quickly through my workouts. I like to change anything in the moment based on how my body is feeling or depending on my mood. Sometimes you can't do this as effectively with a training partner.

Also, I'm more of an instinctive athlete. It has always been tough for me to pick a specific time to work out and stick to it. I have a general idea when I'll train that day and I usually need a little time to get myself focussed.

SC *What about supplements? What are your favorites?*

Training for the last two shows, I used creatine, glutamine and a good quality protein supplement as well.

I take good quality basic vitamins including a Multi vitamin, Vitamin C, Calcium/ Magnesium and Vitamin B and relied heavily on sound training and nutrition to bring me into contest shape.

There's a lot of value in supplementation, and it really becomes effective the more structured your diet and training. They are meant to assist the training process and will be as effective as your program allows them to be. You have to have a solid training / nutrition foundation to capitalize on the potential benefits of your supplements. That being said, if you are doing things correctly you do not need to use a lot to see good results.

SC *Any final words?*

Yes... I'd like to thank you Shaun and Desmona and the IDFA for your commitment to promoting drug free bodybuilding and figure events. The growth in this area of the sport is evidence that people are looking for an alternative to the traditional approach to bodybuilding competition.

Competing is such a great way to challenge yourself and it is truly a win-win situation: You have the chance to get in the best shape of your life, find focus, structure and purpose in your training for the show and be an inspiration for others including family, friends and co-workers.

You can be sure that you'll be training harder than ever knowing you're going to up on stage in your posing suit!.

And finally, at the end of the day, competition is really about you vs. you. Set your goals and be proud of your efforts.

Its really about knowing that anything is possible. Your commitments to this provide inspiration for others and ultimately make the experience well worth it!

SC Thanks for the interview Erik.

Its been a pleasure! Thanks again Shaun...and by the way, when will we see you back on stage?

PROFILE INFO.

Full Name: Erik Alstrup

Nick Name: lately... "Champ"

Date of Birth: June 06, 1971

Place of Birth: Kingston

Residence: Toronto

Occupation: Personal Trainer

Eye Color: Brown

Hair Color: Brown

Height: 5'9"

Off-Season Weight: 185-190 lbs

Contest Weight: 175 lbs

Age Started Training:

Years Training: 20

Measurements (optional):

Chest (contest): ?

Arms (contest): 16 1/2

Waist (contest): 30

Bench Press (1 rep max.): ? Don't do 1 RM lifts

Squat (1 rep max.): ?

Barbell Curl (1 rep max.): ?

Deadlift (1 rep max.): ?

Education: *Queens University, CHEK Institute, ACE, CAN-FIT-PRO, TITLEIST Performance Institute, American Academy Post-Rehab Specialist.*

Bodybuilding Goals:

Previously in the late 1990's my ultimate bodybuilding goal was to win the Overall title at the Canadian Championships, and win my IFBB Pro Card!

Today, my goals are to be an inspiration and positive role model for the bodybuilding / fitness community.

To educate and share what I have learned over my competitive career and be a spokesperson for natural bodybuilding as an extremely viable and gratifying option available to those who love to train, diet, and compete.

Biggest Influences:

In the world of fitness it would be athletes who continually raise the standard of excellence, while exemplifying class...Roger Federer, Phil Mickelson, Sidney Crosby, to name a few...there are many!

In my personal life I'd say Dr. Wayne Dyer, Course in Miracles, L.S. taught me a a lot too...

Words of Wisdom: *Be open to the possibilities...*

Favorite Body Part to Train: *Legs*

Favorite Exercises: *Front Squats*

Favorite Cheat Food: *Chocolate, cookies, ice cream*

Favorite Sport: *Love 'em all for different reasons!*

Competitive Highlights:

(list your top 3, more if necessary)

****1998 Canadian Bodybuilding Championships, Heavyweight & Overall Champion
IFBB Pro Card recipient***

****My 20th marathon in personal best time 3 hrs, 07 minutes...qualifying for the Boston Marathon.***

****Ironman USA, Lake Placid, 4km swim, 180km bike and 42km run...***

Trained for this race totally solo, competed solo and had the best experience!

****Shooting my lowest golf round to date...81***

****2009 Montreal and Toronto Classic Bodybuilding Championship
Back to back Overall Champion***