

## **In Conversation with Dorian Yates**

**With Brian D. Johnston**

BDJ: Your first serious application to exercise, being brief, intense and infrequent training, was highly influenced by Arthur Jones and Mike Mentzer. What led you to choose that direction as opposed to more traditional methods?

DY: I'm a very logical thinker and the information from both Jones and Mentzer came across in a logical manner. I'm also the type of person that if I'm going to do something, I will look into the nature of the action first, analyze it, and obtain as much information about it as I can. I don't recall how I came across all the information necessary to make my decision, but I did try to collect as much data as possible, decipher it and see what made sense. I then combined that information with practical experience and listening closely to my body. I quickly found that once I surpassed a certain level of volume or frequency, I experienced the signs of overtraining, i.e., you're not recovering, you don't sleep well, your nervous system is run down, and you no longer make progress. That clearly indicated to me that I needed to cut back and alter my approach slightly.

Over the years I refined my program based on the principles and relationships of intensity, volume, frequency and adequate recuperation. So, although I read information by Jones and Mentzer, and having spoken to and trained with Mentzer a few times, I took what they said and combined it with traditional methods and created my own hybrid of high intensity training. I do not agree with some of the things stated by Jones and Mentzer, including training the whole body in one session.

BDJ: I concur. After training legs, I'm pretty much spent... if not physically, at least mentally.

DY: Yes... it's just too much. Some things sound fine in theory, but they don't work out in practice. So, you have to combine the two. This is where you read or think about the theoretical approach, then apply it to your training, making adjustments along the way. If it doesn't work out practically, then there's your answer. You don't beat yourself up and say, "well, why is it not working?" You have to move on and look at something else, but while adhering to the principles of high intensity.

I have taken whatever information I have found useful and discarded the rest. I have done this with people from the lowest ranks of bodybuilding all the way to the top, including Mentzer and Jones. I'm always willing to learn something new. But in all, no one has ever been my trainer or nutritionist. Rather, I listened to suggestions and took what I wanted and discovered what did and did not work for me. That's what appealed to me about bodybuilding... that I was responsible for winning or losing.

BDJ: Did you apply any particular training tactics or intensity variables to lagging muscle groups?

DY: That's pretty much what I would do. For lagging muscle groups I would train them at the start of a workout or close to the start, when my mental and physical energy levels were higher. I would also use different intensity techniques, but not all at the same time. Obviously I would train to failure, then include forced reps and additional negatives some times.

I did always emphasize the negative since it is just as important or more important than the positive portion, which a lot of people forget as they concentrate only on lifting the weight. Damage primarily occurs during the negative phase, which is responsible for the growth response. When I did negatives at the end, they were done on machines due to better control.

I would also sometimes do a modified rest pause, training heavy for 5-6 reps, resting for about 10 seconds, then squeezing out another 1-2 reps. I also did drop sets, performing 6-8 reps to failure, dropping the weight down a bit, then going for another 3-4 reps to failure, or even partials at the end of the set. I tried pre-

exhaustion, but it did not work for me... an example of traditional high-intensity methodology that sounds good in theory, but did not fare well in practice. People often make the mistake that if they have a lagging muscle group that they should increase the volume or frequency, and that's not going to help.

BDJ: Regarding pre-exhaustion, I know of some individuals who obtained excellent results from the technique. Obviously it comes down to the individual. You, for example, probably have an extremely high rate of fast twitch throughout your body and a very fast rate of fatigue.

DY: I did perform pre-exhaustion in the past, but only in a straight set fashion. For example, I would start off my leg work with leg extensions, then follow that up with a rest before moving on to leg presses. I found traditional pre-exhaustion to be more aerobic... much more of a cardiovascular workout and not enough of a muscular workout. Doing traditional pre-exhaustion was one of the hardest workouts I ever performed... I could hardly breathe... but I did not feel it gave me optimum muscle stimulation. I had to vary the method and rest sufficiently.

BDJ: Did you find that it was a need for physical or mental rest?

DY: It was more physical, but it was also mental. While you're doing leg extensions and you know you will soon be doing leg presses, your focus becomes divided. In the back of your mind you know that you have to jump off one machine and head over to another. I like to stimulate, annihilate, then rest. I don't believe in rushing between exercises. To me, rushing the sets is an aerobic workout. Moving quickly from one exercise to another will often result in cardiovascular failure, especially for the leg muscles since they are so large.

BDJ: Did you ever implement training protocol that proved detrimental to your progress?

DY: My biggest mistake was probably trying to use the same weights and same intensity (i.e., training beyond failure) right up to competition. High-intensity techniques are great for stimulating growth if you have sufficient calories and rest. But when you get ready for a competition, your goal should shift toward maintaining muscle and reducing the injury factor. This is especially true if your energy and body fat levels are low and you're pushing your muscles and joints hard. Also, when dieting and training hard you don't sleep so well, which means you can't focus as well. All those factors increase your risk of injury. This also increases your risk of being catabolic because you're applying all that stress, and lack of calories and rest make it harder to recover. If I were to do it all again, I would downshift to training to failure only, or even subfailure, stopping 1-2 reps short of all-out effort. This would give enough stimulation to maintain the muscle while you concentrate on reducing body fat.

BDJ: I understand you have a preference to free weights.

DY: No, not particularly. There are a lot of core exercises that are ideal with free weights, but if you analyze my routines over the years, it's been a combination of machines and free weights. I think both have their advantages and disadvantages, and a combination of the two is better than exclusively using one.

BDJ: Do you find that you can perform less exercise with machines? I find that there is more direct and greater stimulation with machines, making for greater inroads since there is no effort utilized in balancing the weight.

DY: Not necessarily. Primarily, I find that machines better isolate the muscle and you don't have to expend energy balancing the weight, unlike free weight training. But one of the disadvantages of machines is, they produce a set plane of movement... a set pathway. Whether I use it or you use it, it's the same pathway. But if I perform a dumbbell curl, then you performed a dumbbell curl, and it was analyzed on a computer and video screen, you would see that both followed a different pathway. Each follows a more natural and individual set of biomechanics.

BDJ: Neurologically, free weights probably have an advantage in that regard.

DY: Yes, and that is why I find they are so much better for strength and power training, and athletic training. Consequently, there are some things you can do with machines and not free weights, and some things you can do with free weights and not machines, and vice versa. The best situation is a combination of both.

BDJ: What psychological techniques do you employ prior to and during your workouts?

DY: I keep a training and nutrition diary. Every workout would be logged, such as exercises, weight used, etc. Before I go to the gym I would review the last workout, the weight, reps, and visualize what I wanted to do that day, to the point of wearing certain clothes on certain days, just to get myself in the right frame of mind. I would visualize how much weight I was going to lift, for how many reps, and how I was going to do the exercises. By the time I got to the gym I would be totally psyched up and know what goals I wanted to achieve. I would then replay that mental tape while going through the workout.

BDJ: I don't believe there are many bodybuilders, including professionals, who track their progress or maintain a training log.

DY: I've had certain bodybuilders ask me questions on training. I would ask them what they did last time, or last year. They would reply, "I'm not really sure... I can't really remember." You're never going to learn anything if that's the case. If you keep a record you can see how you progress, how your body reacts, what works and what didn't. That allows you to refine it. But if you leave it to guesswork, it's like a captain on a ship without mapping out a course, floating out there and hoping to get where he wants to get.

BDJ: Perhaps two of the most common questions asked professional bodybuilders are: What drugs have you used, and how much did you spend yearly on drugs? Do you care to answer?

DY: I get asked these questions whenever I do seminars. There exists a fine line. I don't want to be evasive as if I'm trying to keep secrets. But I also have a responsibility where I do not like to recommend or speak of doses because a lot of people read the magazines including young kids. Certain magazines, and certain people who write for the magazines, are being very irresponsible in recommending certain things, or that "all the pros do this and that". In one article I was even horrified to read what the pros supposedly do. It gets to a point where it is believed that it has nothing to do with the way the person trains or genetics, but drug use. Then the kids read that, believe it's true and think all they need are the drugs. I will say that I did not use anything that was not accessible to any other bodybuilder. I took nothing out of the ordinary. But, with me living in England in an isolated area and breaking barriers in muscular size, all kinds of rumors were started. I used the same thing as everybody else... deca durabolin, testosterone, orals... they've all been out there for 20-30 years. People think that they can take this stuff and make incredible gains. It doesn't work that way. Steroids help the muscle building process, but they are not solely responsible. You still need to train hard, eat well, and get sufficient rest.

#BDJ: Your before and after photos in the early 1990s are legendary and very impressive (see photos to left). Was that a period when you first experimented with gH?

DY: Actually it wasn't. I used it before then. The reason that I made such progress that year was due to the fact that I knew Haney was retiring and I needed a slight edge over the other competitors who were smaller than myself. I wanted to come in super hard and super conditioned and bigger than ever. And in previous years I sacrificed too much muscle and came down too much. I was pretty much in contest condition 5-6 weeks out, but kept dieting and coming down... trying to get harder and harder. I then analyzed and realized that I needed to rectify the problem and knew I could come in much bigger and in the same condition without sacrificing as much muscle. So, it was a nutrition change I made from 1992 to 1993 that made the difference. I know that is hard for some people to believe, but that's the way it is.

BDJ: I understand what you're saying since the effect can be dramatic on a short-term scale. For instance, eating certain foods, combinations or amounts can make you look more full and thicker or look worse within hours.

DY: And if your body fat gets very low, it's that much easier to burn muscle tissue, which is what I decided to avoid.

BDJ: On to business! You offer books and a video, as well as a supplement line and personal training services.

DY: Yes. I have my own website, [www.dorianyates.net](http://www.dorianyates.net), which has information on phone consultations and personal programs, as well as learning resources. My supplement line, Dorian Yates Approved, is doing very well in England and Europe. We recently started in the States. The supplement line is centered around protein and a meal supplement. How it began is that I have a friend in England involved in the supplement industry. He had the idea of getting together and starting a line of products. But if I was to be involved, it was agreed from the start that I would have a say in product standards, materials, research and development. The protein and meal supplements are unique and the most effective on the market in that they contain undenatured whey protein, unlike some products that are the result of cheese manufacturing. Our undenatured proteins have retained the important growth factors that are necessary for building lean tissue. Our products also contain probiotics, which have an effect on the intestinal system and general health. Those using it are sticking with it because they are getting results. It took us over a year to research and develop our protein and meal supplement products. Your readers can visit our supplement website at [www.propeptide.com](http://www.propeptide.com).

BDJ: Can you give an overview of your training when you first started, versus your Mr. Olympia years and your current protocol?

DY: When I first started training, it was based on the more conventional (magazine routines), but quickly realized that it wasn't working that well and I was overtraining. The tendency was for everyone in the gym to follow what everyone else was doing, or what the guys at the top were doing and what the magazines were recommending. Combined with the literature from Jones and Mentzer, I devised my own routine. From what I recall, my first high intensity routine was a two-way split, training three days a week. For example, on week one I performed upper body, lower body, upper body. It wasn't exactly that, but it will give you an idea. The following week I performed lower body, upper body, lower body. I alternated in this fashion, training each muscle group twice every second week and only once the other weeks. On a longer scale, I hit everything twice every nine days. That worked well for me. By the time I got to the first Mr. Olympia, I was doing a four-way split... two days in the gym, one day off, two days in the gym, one day off, etc. I found that as I got bigger and stronger, I could not work half my body in one session and had to split it up even more. Here, again, we're deviating from what Arthur Jones was recommending, and to a lesser degree Mike Mentzer, doing the whole body or half the body in one workout. Even though I wasn't doing a tremendous volume, it was still too much to be doing several muscle groups at once. I do believe that you require a certain amount of volume, in terms of different exercises. I don't think you can go in the gym and train your chest or back adequately using only one exercise.

BDJ: That is a good point. What I've noticed with a lot of HIT followers is that they're going toward the extreme of a consolidation routine, i.e., squats, deadlifts, bench presses, dips, pulldowns. With myself, I increased strength tremendously by performing very few core exercises, but I progressively looked worse.

DY: Some people say that when a muscle fires, it fires... and that the need to train at different angles is irrational. But this does not make complete sense. We all know that when you perform certain exercises, you can see the results... a physical change. It is apparent that if you only performed shoulder presses, versus shoulder presses, lateral raises, bent raises, cable raises, etc., all at different angles, that the shoulders look different in each instance. Similarly, if you only perform decline or flat chest presses, you get more in the lower region of the pectorals, but not much in the upper region. It should be apparent then that different exercises at different angles affect a muscle differently and affect how your physique looks. So, you should train with a variety of exercises, and at different angles.

BDJ: Yes, and this can be done on a rotational basis. You don't have to perform all the exercises in one workout. I also find that a person requires enough of the variety, in terms of set volume. For example, if one were to enter a 12-week physique transformation contest, you cannot make dramatic changes by simply performing a handful of exercises once every 7-9 days, a la consolidation training.

DY: No you can't. You can't get the whole physique. You will increase strength and get basic development, but you will not get full development of all muscle groups. It just isn't possible. You can't develop your lat width and thickness, rhomboids, trapezius, and lower back with just one exercise.

BDJ: Even in respects to metabolic conditioning and reducing fat stores, there must be enough volume. Casey Viator made a comment in the Summer 2000 Exercise Protocol that he often approached overtraining by the time he competed. He had to do so much to get into the condition he wanted to be in and that it was that different from off-season mass building training.

DY: I don't agree with that. Obviously if you do more activity you're going to burn more calories. Building muscle is exactly that, and maintaining muscle is basically the same thing. The idea is to reduce body fat by having a negative calorie balance and by increasing your calorie burning expenditure. I don't believe increasing the volume of weight training workouts is an efficient way of doing it. It will work, but I prefer an aerobic approach, being more of a pure fat burner.

BDJ: How do you apply your aerobic training when preparing for a contest.

DY: The weight training I did in the off-season and in-season was pretty much the same. So, to burn the fat, besides lowering calories, I performed aerobics up to one hour a day. I did half-hour in the morning and half-hour in the evening, or as needed. It wasn't high intensity aerobic training, but low in intensity, so I used primarily fat for energy. You can lose fat by increasing exercises and sets, but you run the risk of being more catabolic and losing muscle tissue. It makes it more difficult to recover from a higher than normal volume of training as well.

BDJ: How is your training today? I assume you're still working out?

DY: Yes, I'm still working out and pretty much on the same schedule. The intensity is a little bit lower, mainly due to my triceps injury. I have to be very careful because there's an imbalance between the left and right side. Consequently, I do tend to use more machines, and for my upper body especially. There's another advantage of machine training... allowing you to work around injuries without worrying about coordination and balance.

BDJ: Sergio Oliva has fairly bad arthritis throughout his entire body, necessitating the need for mostly machine training. He finds free weight training, and all the balancing that goes along with free weights, too aggravating to the joints.

DY: In an ideal world, and if I didn't have any injuries, I would use more free weights. I wouldn't want to train exclusively with machines, but that's not where I'm at right now. So, I just do what I can do and what I have to.

BDJ: I assume there's no chance of coming out of retirement, that you've had it with competition?

DY: I made the decision to retire, mainly because of the injury and because I've been competing for a long time. The only thing left to achieve was if I could better my physique. But with the injury and all the rehab I went through, I knew that wasn't going to be possible. And I definitely didn't want to go back and be anything less than my best.

BDJ: Exactly. Regarding dieting, it seems the final week before competition is most crucial. Bodybuilders become mentally stressed, believing they look much worse than they actually are.

DY: That's definitely true. You can look in the mirror one minute and think you look great. Then ten minutes later you're not so sure. Obviously things didn't change, but your mind can play tricks on you. A lot of people tend to do crazy stuff the final week because they're in that state of mind. They do everything consistently, looking better and better, then during the last week or last few days they do something to completely screw things up. Although you have to be flexible, you need a plan and must and stick to it.

BDJ: Have you bothered with carb depletion and loading or altering water intake?

DY: I've always worked with my carbs and it works very well for me. It doesn't work for some, and perhaps different physiques respond differently to macronutrient intake. I have refined it over the years to know exactly what was working, what wasn't working and why. There wasn't too much hit and miss, although sometimes when I look back I could have increased a little here or there to be in slightly better condition. I always kept records, tracking everything I did, right up to the last week before competition. I would then look over my records and compare the information to how I looked and then made adjustments.

BDJ: With nutrition in general, what were your protein, fat and carb ratios?

DY: My first concern was making certain I had adequate protein in regular intervals throughout the day. I averaged 1.5 grams per pound of body weight. Then it was just a matter of balancing the rest of the calories I needed between fat and carbohydrates. I'm not sure of the exact percentages, but it was probably around 30-40% protein, 50% carbs and 15-20% fat. It varied, but I saw the fats and carbohydrates as energy foods, and of course the necessity of essential fatty acids for the nervous system, etc.

BDJ: There seems to be a move toward very high protein and fat and very low carb.

DY: Again, that may vary with people's metabolisms and how they respond to insulin produced by carbohydrates. But, for me, my diet was fairly high in carbohydrates. When low in carbohydrates, I lost size, my physique flattened out, and I would lose energy very quickly.

BDJ: I also noticed all the above effects. I once went on a very high protein diet for several months and my body never did adjust to it. I had to eventually increase carb intake to around 40-50%.

DY: Even carb depleting for me meant almost 200 grams of carbs a day. That was low for me, and it was pretty rough after 2-3 days on that. But for others that would be considered moderate.

BDJ: I noticed that about your diet... that you did not take carb depletion to extreme. Rather you introduced a reduction to 'some' extent, which was sufficient to be a deficit.

DY: The general rule was to decrease my carbs by 50%. I averaged between 400-450 grams per day, some days being a bit higher or lower than others. When I decreased carbs to 200 grams for about three days, I would increase volume slightly to accelerate glycogen depletion. I was also careful in increasing protein and fats so the overall calorie level was the same. Not only do some people reduce carbs too much, not having much for energy, but they don't replace those lost calories and begin to burn muscle tissue. Prior to competition I would then up my carbs to about 1000 grams per day. During the off-season it was around 700-800 carbs a day, so the slight increase above normal made an additional difference.

BDJ: Your caloric intake must have averaged around 5000-6000 per day.

DY: It was around 5500-6000... yes. Of that, my protein was around 400-450 grams per day.

BDJ: You're currently working with Ernie Taylor. How is that going and how does he train?

DY: It's going well. His training is fairly brief, particularly compared to the other pros. I think that once I won the Olympia in 1993, and it was publicized about the kind of workouts I was doing, it produced an impact in the sport. I'm not saying that everyone began training the way I did, but the volume and frequency among the pros has reduced quite a bit from ten years ago to today. Nearly everybody was doing 3-days-on-1-day-off, 3-days-on-1-day-off, etc. They trained each body part twice a week. Now, most guys are training each body part once every 5-6 days with reduced volume.

BDJ: Except Lee Priest, who claims to be training up to 30 sets per muscle group.

DY: Yes... but he's got a great physique.

BDJ: He's also young. I had a lot of energy when I was his age, and did some pretty wild workouts. I look back on those days and don't know how I did it.

DY: Yes... I look back, and I used to train chest, back and shoulders in one workout and probably more volume than I do now. But it still produced results.

BDJ: What you would change about the sport of bodybuilding?

DY: Education. People don't really understand what goes into creating a great physique. If you watch a sport, like basketball, you can see and appreciate the ability of the athlete. With bodybuilding competition you only see the end product. If you're into it, you can appreciate the physique, but to the average person it looks like something strange and extreme. They don't know the dedication or hard work... or the knowledge of nutrition. They should combine television coverage with actual documentary on the person's training and what they do to get ready. When I was competing in the Olympia, I got some requests from television shows, and that is always what I wanted to do... to talk and discuss what is involved in the sport. And when people become educated on the process they appreciate it and look at it differently. But my experience with TV people is that they were not interested in that... in sitting and talking about it. They wanted me to come in the studio and pose, then ask some questions. I wouldn't go for that. I said "that if you had another athlete come in, a sprinter for example, you wouldn't have him run around the studio... or have a basketball player bounce the basketball. Rather, you would sit the person down and talk to him. And that's what I'm prepared to do." That did not interest them. But to have a bodybuilder come in wearing trunks and posing... that person becomes an object and a spectacle.

BDJ: Do you find you have actually obtained the notoriety from your country that you deserve?

DY: Definitely not in England. I'm more recognized in the States.

BDJ: Is that due to bodybuilding not being very popular in Great Britain?

DY: It's not really popular. It's got a good hardcore following and there are quite a few decent bodybuilders in England, as you probably know. But it's a very small community... an underground thing. It's not something that doesn't cross over to the general public... not like in the States. There, I find I'm more widely recognized over a much broader cross section of people... people who are not necessarily bodybuilders, but who go to gyms... who are into fitness, health and nutrition and appreciate bodybuilding much more. I get people from all walks of life in the States who recognize me.

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