

Rosana Amaro

Shaun Turner

English 101

2/19/14

Duane Brickhouse

Life of a Men's Physique Competitor

Duane Brickhouse is an IFBB Men's Physique Pro, winning 1st place overall in two competitions, and top 5 overall in three other competitions. One Saturday morning, Brickhouse drove for about 26 minutes from his house in Columbia, Maryland, in the anticipated traffic to Baltimore with his wife and kids. Once he reached his destination-the NPC Shawn Ray Baltimore Grand Prix competition, he successfully found a parking spot in the already crowded lot. As he gathered his things, he noticed other competitors-both men and women-making their way into the building. He exited the car with his family and walked through the large glass double doors. It was swarming with competitors and their families. They ranged from the bulky bodybuilders to the female bikini models. Before he went backstage to prep, I asked him what it is like to compete. "At this stage it is all business," he told me. "Everyone wants the win so they can automatically

qualify for the Olympia. But with that being said, it is mostly a friendly atmosphere. You spend so much time with your fellow competitors that it is easy to build strong friendships, so ultimately it ends up being a lot of fun. Everyone works hard and makes a lot of sacrifices to compete, so it is hard not to be happy for whoever wins”.

Brickhouse had wanted to compete in bodybuilding for several years as a result of following the sport in magazines and being an avid lifter. However, he knew that he would never get the massive size of a pro bodybuilder and nor did he want it. He started to befriend local competitors who introduced him to the world of bodybuilding. One specific event intrigued him immediately--the Olympia. The Olympia is a huge competition where many can compete for the title of Mr. or Ms. Olympia, Figure Olympia, Fitness Olympia, Bikini Olympia, and Physique Olympia. In 2010, he and his wife flew to Vegas to attend the Olympia. As he sat in the audience and watched all the competitors walk on the stage and strike their poses with large smiles as cameras flashed repeatedly. As he watched the competition come to end to the final judging, he pictured himself on stage, increasing his desire to compete even more.

Brickhouse's first competition was one of the best moments in his life. He and his wife went to Vegas and hadn't told anyone he was competing

until they got there. He learned how to pose backstage from other competitors and he was only focused on getting on stage and having fun. "I try not to let my nerves get to me," Brickhouse said, reminiscing that very first competition. "I focus on performing how I practice. The goal is to get on stage and confidently show your personality. Also, I remember that I deserve to be there like everyone else, so have fun". There were over sixty competitors with varying levels of experience, so he was extremely intimidated. As the competition narrowed down from 60 to 16, and then to 5, he was surprised to find himself being the overall winner of his division. This shows that you may be surprised by the amount of things you can do if you just try.

While being a physique competitor definitely keeps you in shape and eating healthy, there are also downsides to the sport. "It's a costly sport," Brickhouse states. "It costs a lot for all the food that I eat weekly and then you have to consider the time you spend making it". He eats approximately six meals per day. He primarily has oatmeal and eggs for breakfast. The next five meals consist of a combination of a source of protein (chicken, fish, turkey, ground bison, or lean cut steak), vegetables (asparagus or spinach), and carbohydrates (brown rice or baked potato). Brickhouse has to make sure he gets all his food in so he doesn't lose any weight. On the occasion

though, he gets the opportunity to step outside his normal meal plan. He also takes supplements that help him through his diet. Brickhouse prefers products from BPI sports-creatine, a fatburner, a pre-workout and a few other products. He also uses a protein powder when he doesn't get enough from his diet. The diet is one of the hardships of being a physique competitor; the diet can be tough and it is costly to get all the food he needs weekly. I asked him how difficult it was to change his diet. "Much easier than I thought. I thought the diet was going to be the most difficult, but once I got used to it, it became second nature. It really is true that you don't know what you are capable of until you try".

Another difficulty of being a men's physique competitor is that as it gets closer to competitions, the daily workouts can be time consuming. Brickhouse has a schedule that allows him to get to the gym and work out one body part per day. His routine constantly changes so he can keep his muscles guessing, but some exercises remain the same (pull-ups, dumbbell incline press, single arm lat pulldown, lunges). The day before the Baltimore competition, Brickhouse worked out in his at-home gym and worked on his fitness poses that he planned to do once he hit the stage. Later on he applied a self tanner, something that all fitness competitors do before a competition.

It was now almost time for Brickhouse's performance. I watched the competition progress in the audience, going through the different divisions. They started the show off with the pre-judging of men and women bodybuilding. The MC announced each competitor's name and they would walk onto the stage. They would do about three different poses, and stand off to the side. The judges narrowed it down until they announced the overall winner of the bodybuilding division. After a slight break, the MC announced men's physique, class B. The first person they called out was Brickhouse. He came onto the stage with a bright smile, turning around after changing poses to give the judges different views. Cameras were flashing repetitively. I could hear Brickhouse's wife among countless others yelling his name in support. After all of the competitors in the men's physique division had their turn, the judges narrowed it down to remaining five that they liked. Brickhouse was announced the overall winner.

Duane Brickhouse motivates himself with positive statements. "I focus on being better than I was the day before. I may never win another show, but as long as I keep improving, I'm accomplishing my goals. Secondly, motivating others motivates me. Hearing someone say that I inspired him or her to do something means the world to me. When you hear something like that you can't help but keep going". While competing is a

very enjoyable sport, it has its downsides--the cost of traveling to shows (flight, room, show expenses, etc.) can add up quickly. "Also for me traveling to shows usually means more time away from my family which is a definite downside," he added. I asked Brickhouse if he had any advice for any aspiring fitness competitors. "I would advise anybody that wants to compete to go see a show before signing up to do one," he said. "Also, reach out and talk to someone that has competed. There are a lot of little details that you would miss if you just sign up and show up. Lastly, practice posing. The best physique does not win, the person that shows their physique the best wins".