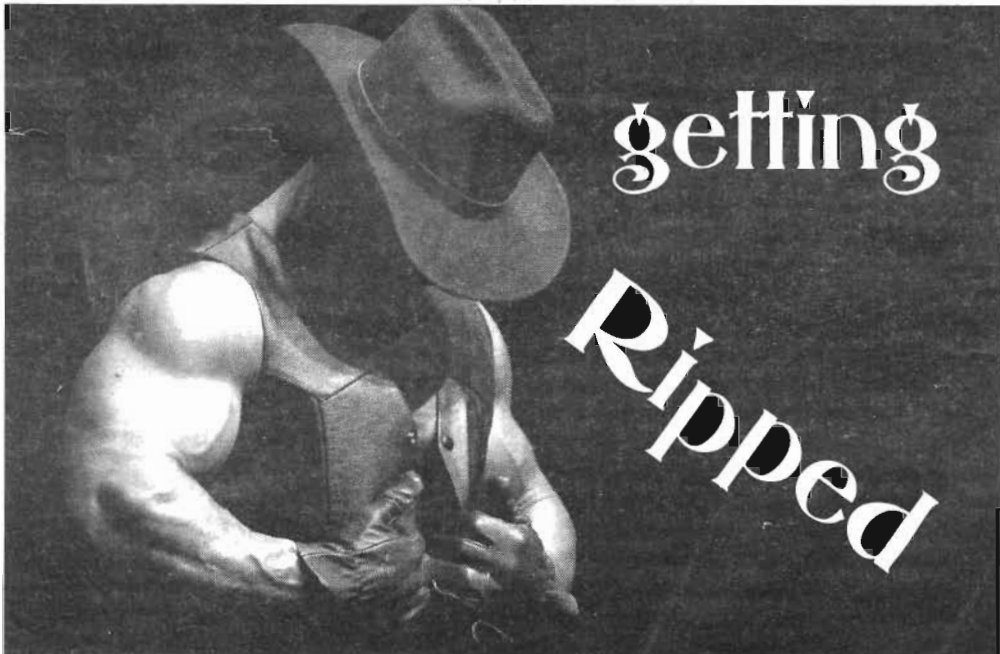


Montana Kaimin

Staying clean and...



Professional bodybuilder Terry Baldwin flexes his biceps during the Glacier States National Body Building & Fitness Championship at the University Theatre Saturday.

Quinn Riedy

Montana Kaimin

Bodybuilding isn't just about steroids and freakishly large mutants.

The World Federation of Natural Athletes, or WFNA, a Missoula-based organization that promotes drug-free fitness, held its second annual pro-qualifier bodybuilding competition on campus this weekend. Breaking bodybuilding stereotypes is one of the group's goals.

Nineteen WFNA athletes from the Northwest — 11 from Missoula — competed in the University Theatre Saturday night as part of the Glacier States Natural Bodybuilding & Fitness Championship.

One of the athletes won twice.

Ken Meriwether, an enormous man with shoulder-length hair, won first place in the open-men category.

Meriwether, who looks significantly younger than his 42 years, won with a short "Conan the Barbarian" themed routine. During the performance, Meriwether swung a silver sword and displayed his muscle arsenal

for the six judges.

Next, Meriwether narrowly defeated Jess Edens to become the night's overall champion by one vote, qualifying him as a professional.

And he can say he did it all naturally.

"I never have and I never will take steroids," Meriwether said.

The WFNA is trying to level the playing field for a sport that has become increasingly unfair since the proliferation of performance-enhancing drugs began in the early 1980s.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse's Web site says, "Steroid abuse has become so widespread in athletics that it affects the outcome of sports contests."

For that very reason, the WFNA requires all of its competitors to pass a polygraph test to prove they've been drug-free for at least seven years.

Any athlete who fails the lie-detector test is required to submit to a urinalysis to prove their status.

The winner at the pro-level must also take a urinalysis.

Tim Kupsick
Montana Kaimin

Troy Bertelsen, WFNA's president, said his first bodybuilding contest took place on the University Theatre's stage in 1981 as part of Missoula's Big Sky competition. By the next year, Bertelsen said, anabolic steroids began to inundate the bodybuilding scene.

At the time, steroids were not yet included in the federal schedule of controlled substances. The Anabolic Steroid Control Act of 1990 made the non-medical use of steroids illegal. The substance was added to the same legal class as amphetamines, methamphetamine, morphine and opium.

In 1983 a friend's suggestion led to Bertelsen using the muscle-enhancing drug for the first time.

That year, with his "unclean edge," Bertelsen said, he defeated Terry Baldwin — an advocate for natural bodybuilding. Baldwin is the first professional bodybuilder

to come from Montana and the owner of Missoula's Baldwin Fitness.

Through drug-free natural fitness training, over the years Baldwin has claimed bodybuilding titles such as: "Mr. Montana," "Mr. Big Sky," "Mr. Pacific Coast," "Mr. Rocky Mountain States," and "Mr. Northwest America."

"Terry's a great example of an all-American hero," Bertelsen said. "He kept training, getting bigger and better."

Although he wasn't competing Saturday, the gigantic Baldwin performed a cowboy-themed routine to country music wearing a black vest — which he shed early in the presentation — a black cowboy hat, black Speedo and black gloves.

Bertelsen quit professional bodybuilding in 1986, he said, after competing in the U.S.A. Bodybuilding Championship in Beaumont, Texas. The top five winners in that show, including Bertelsen, were all on steroids, he said.

"I figured I'd taken enough steroids to kill a horse," Bertelsen said, adding that other bodybuilders at the time "took 10 times as much" as he did.

Steve Reeves was Bertelsen's good friend and a fellow Montanan. A famous bodybuilder and actor in movies such as 1959's "Hercules," and 1950's "Mr. Universe," Reeves is thought of by many as having had one of the most perfect looking naturally-built physiques of all time.

For years, Reeves wanted to clean up the sport of bodybuilding.

He authored a book about natural bodybuilding and in the mid-1970s wrote a letter to Arnold Schwarzenegger, trying to convince him to use his power in the industry to demand drug testing

of athletes.

In the letter, Reeves wrote, "As you are well aware, the state of bodybuilding is in crisis. Competitors are killing themselves taking drugs that they believe they need to win shows ... Arnold, let's work together to put this derailed train back on the tracks and take this sport back to the glory and prestige it once enjoyed and can enjoy again."

On May 1, 2000, while recovering from treatment he received for lymphoma, the 74-year-old died as a result of a blood clot.

"Steve Reeves literally died in my arms," Bertelsen said.

"He was a huge proponent of natural bodybuilding."

In the summer of 2000, just a few months after Reeves' death, Bill Anderson and Ondra Galloway, (the WFNA co-founder/head judge and WFNA founder/athletes' representative,) asked Bertelsen to join them in creating a natural bodybuilding organization.

The timing was right and Bertelsen signed on.

"Steve (Reeves) would've been all over this," Bertelsen said. "So I said, 'OK, I'll help you out.'" Meriwether, Saturday night's overall champion, said that organizations like the WFNA are crucial to the future of bodybuilding because natural athletes can't compete with drug-users in mainstream shows.

Natural bodybuilding clubs provide an opportunity for more people to get involved, he said.

"(Conventional bodybuilding) leaves out a lot of aspiring guys and kids because there's no place for them to go," Meriwether said. "I wish there was something like this when I was younger."

The more organizations there are on the natural side of it, the more it's going to grow," he said.

He added, "We need to keep it rollin."