
30 Minutes With Bill Pearl ***His Training & His Beliefs***

By: Dennis B. Weis



Dennis: Bill, I have followed your bodybuilding career extensively as you won your first Mr. Universe title in 1953 as well as your additional Universe wins in 1961, 67 and 71.

You seemed to look more sensational than the last at each of these contests. I am wondering if your contest preparation was the same for each of these wins or if you made

some slight changes during each of these preparation periods to look your best ever?

Bill: "I have always trained the same. I train **hard**, I train **steady**. My **attitude** has been the same since the first contest I entered and up to the last contest I entered. I just want to do the very best I can. I use the same basic training program **today** that I did back in 1953. Nothing has changed only time and the age factor. I think the first time I won the Mr. Universe title I was 22 years old, and the last time I won it I was just turning 41. I was just as dead set about winning the first one as **winning** the last one."

Dennis: What were some of your inner most feelings as you won your first Mr. Universe title as opposed to your last win in 1971?

Bill: "Well, that's something I can help you with. When I was a youngster competing in contests I was proud of the fact that I went over to London and won the Mr. Universe contest. I did like the recognition and I thought it was **tremendous**. I thought I had the world by the tail. It was a real boost to me and something I could train on for years and years and years, but at the last Mr. Universe content I won in '71 I felt old and embarrassed about being on stage at my particular age (41) and competing with the younger guys.

I had been badgered into entering the contest as it was. I did want to do well, but if it had been left up to me I would have **never** competed, I would **never** have entered. After the contest was over I just wanted the thing to be done with, over with, forgotten, I don't think I even did any exhibitions till about 7 or 8 years after that '71 Mr. Universe. I just, wanted people to **leave me alone**.

Dennis: Though you mentioned that you were badgered into entering the contest in 1971, did you have any secondary motives while preparing for the contest?

Bill: "Yes, I was not taking **steroids** and I wanted to prove that a guy at my age of nearly 41 could get in there and still compete with everybody and not have to take a lot of steroids and go totally **wild** to win contests."

Dennis: Since there were some rather lengthy intervals between your Universe wins, tell the readers what your activities were during these intervals.

Bill: "Well, I managed Health Clubs, I was raising a family and doing everything that everybody else does to earn a living. I continue to enter physique contests not for the sake of winning a contest, but to keep my **enthusiasm high** so I can continue to train, that's really all there is to it. It's like brushing your teeth or going to bed, It's something I am going to do till the day I die."

Dennis: You have won your Mr. Universe titles over some tough competition, would you care to comment on some of the top men you have victories over?

Bill: "I can't really **remember** probably 99 percent of the people I competed with. It really didn't make a lot of difference to me and I didn't really compete in the contest to see who I could beat or who was there, or who I could knock over then look down my nose at them.

That wasn't my intent of entering the contest at all. I was mainly more **concerned** about me doing the best I could possibly do. That was it, but I have competed against several people like Frank Zane, Sergio Oliva and Reg Park, plus tons and tons of Mr. America's and Mr. Universe's, but really that had no bearing on my success I have had in the

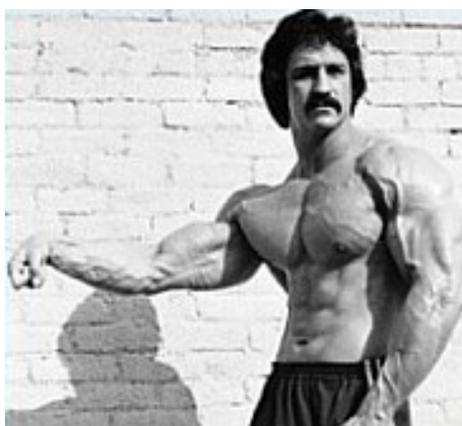
sport. I am just **thankful** to God that I have been able to train as long as I have and did as well as I did."

Dennis: Bill, it is common knowledge that you have trained many top physique stars in the course of your career as a gym owner and instructor. Some that immediately come to mind are Jim Morris, Clint Beyerle and Chris Dickerson. How about giving the readers your insights into some of these men?

Bill: "Well, I have probably trained more top physique stars in the world today than anyone individual regardless of what anybody else wants to say, I mean on a personal one to one basis I have probably helped more of these guys than anybody. The sport has been so good to me that if I can relay some of my information and help them out, I am all for it.

I happen to like Jim Morris as a person. I like Clint Beyerle as a person. I like Chris Dickerson as a person. Ray Routledge is another fine example. I have helped Dennis Tinerino since he was 16 years old. I have helped Boyer Coe out. Even years ago Frank Zane came and asked me for advice as well as Arnold, Dave Draper, the Mentzer brothers and Tom Platz.

I am thrilled to death to share this advice with anybody I can, they are all wonderful guys. Some I consider as very close friends. I like Jim Morris as a personal friend. Chris Dickerson was our house guest for six weeks and finished off his training for the Mr. Olympia contest.



Clint Beyerle, well, I like Clint. I was never as close to him even though he trained at my club for several years, Clint would never take instructions like the other guys, I could talk to Clint, but he would never listen. He had his own way of training and so on and more power to him, but as a person he was one of the greatest guys I ever met."

Dennis: Who is the 'strongest' physique competitor you have ever worked out with?



Bill: "Well, there again, it's a difference in people. I have trained with Clarence Ross and I have seen him for example Clean & Incline Press a pair of 150 pound dumbbells. The guy cleaned them himself and pressed them and he **only weighed** about 198 pounds.

I have worked out with Ray Mentzer a couple of times and I have seen Ray handle some stupendous poundages on 'curls' and so on which were just mind boggling. There are a lot of tough guys out there. I have never trained with Franco Columbu, but I wouldn't doubt, pound for pound, as a bodybuilder that Franco Columbu is the strongest bodybuilder in the business today or any bodybuilder we have ever had.

I had a very good friend by the name of Buster McShane from Belfast, Ireland who died in an automobile accident a few years back. I had personally seen him do a bent arm pullover and press with a barbell of 450 pounds. The guy weighed about 163 pounds. That's a **lot of weight**. There are lots of guys out there like that."

Dennis: For some of the avid readers who have followed the careers of some of the men you have trained whatever became of Jerry Wallace?

Bill: "Jerry is not training as extensively as he has in the past, but he still trains to keep in **shape** and rides a bicycle. He is a captain of a fire department in a small suburb outside Los Angeles.

Jerry has been a very **successful** business man and a multi- millionaire and has owned health clubs, bars, restaurants, and so on. He still stays fit though not in competitive form. He looks like a million dollars. There again, I am still very good friends with Jerry."

Dennis: Bill, you are considered a master at posing and physique presentation. Who was instrumental in teaching you the finer points of posing?

Bill: "Leo Stern was probably as instrumental in helping me out on my posing routine as anybody else, As far **as coaching** me as far as weight training itself is concerned in keeping me on the right track this fellow Leo Stern from San Diego has been more responsible for that than anybody because he took the time with me.

He'd be glad to help me out and spend hours and hours with me to do this. He was extremely critical, never complimentary, always critical, telling me I could always do better, I could always do better. This is the type of thing you have to have. He would get

me on the ball and get me off my butt and make me work out **hard** and make me practice my posing. If you're going to be a master poser there 'Only' one way you are going to get that way, and that is to **practice**. That's it!!"

Dennis: You are known to have tremendous strength potential. As close as you can recall, mention some of your best maximum single efforts in some of your favorite lifts.

Bill: "At one time in my bodybuilding career I was very strong. At a bodyweight of 218 pounds, my best Bench Press was 450 pounds, I Squatted over 600 pounds. I have done the two seated Press Behind Neck with 310 pounds. These were comparable lifts I was doing at the particular time. I was 27 or 28 years old. I never did specialize on any specific lift like the Bench Press or the Squat or the Deadlift or anything. This was done in a total bodybuilding type of routine."

Dennis: Are you suggesting that one should train with heavy weights?

Bill: "I think if a person wants to get a **lasting physique** where you have mature 'hard core muscularity' that's going to be with you year after year after year, this heavy type training has got to come into play.

I don't think you can be a '**pumper**' and just pump your muscles day after day with light Mickey Mouse weights and so on and retain the muscle that is going to stay with you 25 years later. "I have trained **hard** and **heavy** all my life and I still train **hard** and **heavy** now.

That's just what I enjoy doing. I admire guys like Reg Park. I saw Reg Park when he was a younger man and he just looked like a giant plow horse who could walk through a wall. Well, that's what I like '!!

I like a guy like Mike Mentzer. Mike is a heavy, rough, tough guy, maybe not personality wise, but he is appearance wise. I enjoy it, I like **masculinity** and I don't like anything feminine about a physique. I want **size** and **strength** and **power**. That's one reason why I admire Arnold.

Arnold didn't look like a sissy. Arnold looked like a tough guy who could take care of himself if he got into some type of a scrap. Maybe he could, maybe he couldn't, but he appeared that way. That's all right. I'm not out to beat up anybody, but I like masculinity, I enjoy it!!!"

Dennis: During the course of your career you included a repertoire of some feats of strength. How did you get interested in these various feats of strength to begin with?

Bill: "I found out years ago it was a heck of a lot easier to carry a hot water bottle, some spikes and some horse shoes and chains around in a brief case than it was to haul a 500 pound Olympic set on an airplane. So I'd put everything in my duffle bag and take off. I'd give a show and exhibition and do a lot more than if I'd press or squat my guts and no one even understands what you're doing anyhow.

I got to the point where I would perform feats of strength such as blowing up a hot water bottle, bending 70 penny spikes and horse shoes, breaking chains and ripping license plates and so on. I used to practice each one of these feats **every day**, except blowing up a hot water bottle because it was so costly. Every day after my workout period I would practice these feats of strength just as part of my program. That's just what you've got to do.

You've got to get yourself **mentally** prepared for this type of thing. Get the strength up and hold it fully well knowing that under any circumstance that you're at or wherever you're at, **these things you can do** and it comes automatically. So you just have got to add it to your regular training program if that's what you want to do."

Dennis: Bill, you and Chuck Sipes possess the most rugged forearms in bodybuilding. Naturally, I am curious as to what your measurement of this body part is and the type of program you followed.

Bill: "O.K., the best I think I've had my forearms up to was 15 1/8". If you really want to measure a forearm, just stick your hand out in front of you as if you're going to shake hands with somebody and crank your wrist down and let somebody measure your forearm and that's the best way to tell how big it is.

As I mentioned, my forearm was 15" at a body weight of 218 or so. I did heavy wrist curls forward and backward year after year. It's just like any other type of an exercise; I worked my neck for years and years. I wanted to get total body development and my forearms responded well."

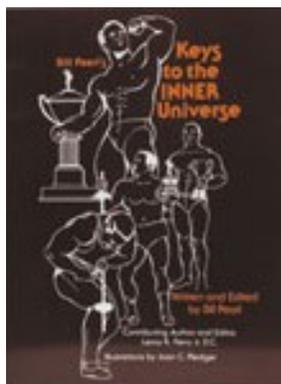
Dennis: Do you have any future aspirations of entering just one more Mr. Universe contest or maybe even the Mr. Olympia? Just think what a sensation you would cause if you won either of these contests at your age.

Bill: "Well, I tried it at age 41 and the only sensation I got was the bills when I got home. I wouldn't enter the Mr. Universe or the Mr. Olympia today if I knew for absolute fact that I could win it, I would not do it. The reason of it is, if it means even at this age of my life where I am nearly 50 and am still competing I have not progressed on the sport one iota from being a competitive bodybuilder.

I would like to **think** that the last 30 years in the business I have learned more than just how to compete in physique contests. I get a great deal more thrill, Dennis, out of

having a person like yourself get in there and have you in the contest with me coaching you than with myself winning it. So I wouldn't enter either of those shows under any circumstances."

Dennis: With regard to your book 'Keys to the Inner Universe,' mention the research and preparation that went into it.



Bill: "Well, I worked on the book for over 4 years getting it started. My original concept was to use it as a home training course so I could retire and use the book as a manual for everybody to know the type of exercise that I wanted them to do.

With that knowledge I can sell the book to say, a person in Kansas City, who could write to me for a home training course and I could help them. The book was such a big success and got so huge that I started selling it on an individual basis. It's probably one of the best financial endeavors.

I have ever been involved with. We are currently into the third printing and I don't doubt that we may sell as many as 100,000 copies before it's over. It's the most expensive book ever written about weight training and I think it probably has been received as well as any book that has ever been written on the sport.

The research that I have had and the 30 years of continual records that I have kept on myself and running a gym for the past 25 years, **that's** the research I have put into it. My wife helped me on this thing and I actually sold my gym in Pasadena, California because I couldn't do both at the same time.

My wife and I went down to a printing company and took up space in the layout department there and learned the printing processes to help put the book together. She and I worked in the printing plant for 11/2 years to get the book out. So it was a horrendously big job and a very costly job along with that. I had over \$250,000 into the book before I even got one copy sold. It was an expensive endeavor!!"

Dennis: You mentioned earlier in the interview that your training has been basically the same since you won your first Mr. Universe right up to your last Universe win in 1971. Would you care to give Iron Man readers an idea of the type of routine you follow?

Bill: "I am going to give you an idea of the present routine we are doing right now. (Author's Note: Chris Dickerson was Bill Pearl's house guest in Oregon for six weeks as he prepared for the 1981 IFBB Mr. Olympia.)

Today we are training six days per week. We train twice per day and the workouts last anywhere from 3 to 3 1/2 hours including both workouts. We're doing abdominals twice everyday for a 1000 total repetition of abdominal movements.

I am going to give you a sample of our program. In the morning we work Chest & Shoulders, and maybe Legs at night. The next day we might work Back & Triceps, then that night Biceps. We are going through a **hard strenuous type** workout program. I have followed that type of training, not the twice a day type of thing, but the six day per week thing. I've trained more like that than any other way. It's just been hard, heavy concentrated training all the time. I train the same if I'm competing in a contest or if I'm not competing. For competition I just become a little more concentrated on my efforts.

I watch my eating habits more closely. I get more sleep and I take all the things that bother me and I get them out of the way. I just zero in on the particular thing I have in mind.

Currently because Chris Dickerson was training for the Mr. Olympia I was training just as though I were going to compete, other than the fact I am not watching my diet, or getting the sun and I am not doing the things Chris was doing because at this stage in my life it's just not necessary.

We were doing 20 to 24 sets per muscle group and the repetitions were around 12. Now this is a little high for me. I'd probably do 20 sets per muscle group and I'd keep the repetitions between 8 and 10. However, Chris likes higher repetitions so at this particular time we were doing higher repetitions."

Dennis: The size and shape of your forearms have left a definite impression with me. What type of poundages were you capable of in various wrist curl movements using barbells and dumbbells?

Bill: "Well, I have done wrist curls with single dumbbells over my knee with the palms facing up with 70 to 75 pound dumbbells. I've done tons and tons of those and that is as high as I've gone, but with barbells I've done 225 pounds and as high as 250 pounds at that time. On reverse curls I have handled 135 to 140 pounds."

Dennis: Getting back to your strength potentials again, why it was your best maximum efforts in the barbell curls, press over head, triceps pushdowns and deadlifts?

Bill: "I've done a 250 pound barbell curl in an odd lift contest. I've done a 320 pound press over head. Triceps Pushdowns? I really can't begin to tell you my best, maybe 150 to 160 pounds. I can press anything I can hold down. On deadlifts I have done 650 pounds. I can't come near these types of weights at my age now. I don't handle weights

like that anymore, but I can give anybody who comes into the gym a run for their money, rep for rep, set for set and pound for pound.

I don't concentrate on specific movements like that anymore. I'm not against it and I think it's great and I think there is a time to do that, but I find as I grow older, if I get an injury like a bad shoulder or bad knee it just doesn't go away, it continues to reoccur and reoccur. So the best thing for me is to keep the repetitions fairly high and I handle weights I can handle. Often times I'll need spotters, but it's on a very rare occasion I'll need a spot, because I will quit before I get into trouble."

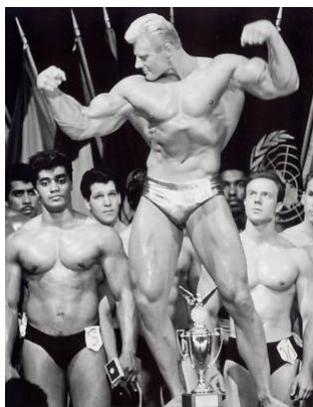
Dennis: Earlier you mentioned some top name bodybuilders who came to you for training advice. I am particularly interested in the advice you gave to Boyer Coe and Dave Draper.

Bill: "Well, Boyer Coe and I have been very good friends for several years. He is a protégé of Red Lerille, who's an extremely good friend of mine. Boyer would write and ask me about contests and so on. I'd help him with his mid section program and training for his abdominals and just give advice to the guy on how to work rear delts. that sort of thing. Things that had been a trouble spot for him.



Boyer takes advice extremely well. I don't just give advice to anyone. I don't just sit there and blab the stuff out. I try to give everybody who asks me my opinion, constructive criticism. I am not out to paint rainbows for these guys and I don't sit around telling them how good they look.

Everybody in the world is going to tell them that. I tell them what they should do to improve their physique and how to do it. There's nothing in it for me. If Boyer could win every contest in the world, it's not going to change my lifestyle one iota, so I do it because I like the sport and I like the guys and that's it!!"



"Dave Draper, when Dave came out from New York and wanted help, he was being pushed very heavily by everybody. He was trying to get into shape for the Mr. Universe contest. Dave could not pose. He had only entered a couple of contests and Dave knew nothing about posing whatsoever.

So he came to my gym on Manchester Blvd. in Los Angeles and I helped Dave with his posing routine and so on. I would get the guy up and tell him what he needed to work and what he was lacking in and what would be the best to work those particular areas.

Even way back then Dave was a very sensitive person, who did not have a high esteem of himself and had to have his image continually bolstered all the time.

I felt sorry for Dave he wanted to train for himself and the health aspects of it and everybody was pushing him to become Mr. This and Mr. That. This isn't what he wanted at the particular time. What happened years later I just don't know."