

'All-natural' bodybuilders don't use performance-enhancing drugs

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ST. LOUIS - When Keith Hunter competes in a bodybuilding contest, he actually wants to have a polygraph test and urinalysis. That way he knows he'll get a fair shake.

The tests are administered at a growing number of "all-natural" events to detect the use of steroids, testosterone, [human growth hormone](#), diuretics and a long list of other banned substances.

If they indicate that Hunter, 52, of St. Louis, has been doping, he'll be barred from competition for up to seven years, depending on the federation promoting the event.

About 30 years ago, the world of bodybuilding split into two types of federations: Those that do not (and never did) test every competitor before their events, and those that do. The later call themselves all-natural.

Today, there are about half a dozen international all-natural federations, with pro and amateur divisions. Each of those divisions has dozens of regional and local promoters staging events.

The difference in aesthetic between competitors in the two types of federations is noticeable, Hunter said. For instance, female [bodybuilders](#) in all-natural events still look feminine, while those who compete in sporadically tested events sometimes have bigger muscles than he does. They also often have manly jaw-lines and deep voices, he added, traits

that don't go away when they stop using steroids.

According to Rich Fitter, chairman of the International Natural Bodybuilding Federation in New York, those differences are growing.

"If you look at the physiques of nontested bodybuilders 30 years ago versus now, it's become a lot more extreme," he said. "Where someone was impressive at 230 pounds back then, now you have them competing at 300 pounds and they have less [body fat](#) and are more defined. They keep pushing the envelope, and it's scary."

Very few natural athletes, even at the elite level, Fitter said, go above 210 pounds, and in many cases they're far below 200 pounds.

Hunter stopped entering bodybuilding contests for three years during the early 1990s. He couldn't compete against the hulking 300-pounders without doping and hadn't heard about the all-natural groups yet.

Hunter said he's never used steroids but has seen the toll they've taken on others over time.

The human body can only take using the drugs for so long, he said. It starts breaking down with injuries to ligaments and muscle tears. Hunter said he knows a lot of steroid users who have damaged livers and kidneys.

Then there are the moral issues.

"I have a son who plays college football. How would I explain that to him? It's cheating. It just is," he said.

Many of the banned substances are also illegal. Big-name competitors including Hidetada "Hide" Yamagishi, Eddie Moyzan, Greg Whiteley

and Brian Chamberlain, have been arrested for selling or possessing anabolic steroids.

Hunter now promotes all-natural events. On July 9, he'll stage the St. Louis Natural Bodybuilding, Figure and Xtreme Fitness Championship at The Roberts Orpheum Theater. All participants must pay \$40 in cash for a polygraph test, in addition to their registration fees. Licensed professionals will perform the tests.

When he's not preparing to compete, Hunter works out 90 minutes a day, four days a week. Each workout includes an hour of weight lifting and 30 minutes of cardio. When he's preparing for an event, he trains four days on, one day off. He doubles the weight he lifts and does two 30-minute cardio workouts a day.

He also eats a high-protein, low-carb diet, drinks protein shakes and takes supplements including creatine, amino acids and essential fatty acids.

Ken Johnson, 60, of Waterloo, Mo., is among the oldest men on the bodybuilding circuit, and he credits steering clear of banned substances for it.

"It's like the turtle and the hare," he said. "Do you want fast results or do you want to do this long-term?"

Johnson, 6 feet and weighs 185 pounds, hopes to still be competing in 10 years. Skin elasticity is an important part of that.

"Once (bodybuilders) get off steroids (for health reasons), their skin elasticity is gone," he said. "It's like with obesity and losing weight; they have folds of skin."

Competitors in all-natural competitions must submit to at least one test as determined by the federation sponsoring it.

At some events, it's just a polygraph test, and only the winners have further testing. Other times, all competitors must submit to a polygraph and urinalysis. The natural federations also randomly test between competitions.

Those who fail tests are banned for specified periods of time.

Denny S. Kakos, president of the International Natural Bodybuilding Association in Los Angeles, goes a step further by banning users for life and putting their name and picture on his website's "Hall of Shame."

Testing guidelines are much looser with federations that don't claim to be all-natural.

According to the group's website, The International Federation of BodyBuilders, which stages the Mr. Olympia contest, can randomly test competitors during weigh-in and registration at events. Or they can randomly test competitors chosen from among the top finalists. Or they can target test athletes that they suspect have used banned substances. The rules don't specify that must do at least one.

They also select bodybuilders from among top finalists at their world championships to be tested between events.

In March, about 200 participants competed in the National Physique Committee's Midwest Classic at St. Louis University. The committee is the U.S. arm of the International Federation of BodyBuilders. None of the contestants was tested, said promoter Jack Titone of St. Louis.

"When you talk about drug testing, the eye really comes in to play," he

said. "An 18-year-old kid who's over-developed and looks like a grown man, he's probably doing more than powder protein. If someone looks like they're on steroids, we'll test them."

Many of the competitors competed in the bikini and physique divisions which cater to participants with smaller, more natural physiques, Titone said. And the Midwest Classic is a novice event, whereas Hunter's upcoming one is for pros, so testing is more warranted.

The natural federations are upset that "the big boys" get more money and exposure in muscle magazines and from promoting supplements, said Titone. "So they created this theory that everyone has to be doing drugs."

A lot of natural competitors and promoters readily acknowledge that they're frustrated.

They think it's hypocritical when manufacturers of all-natural supplements and magazines only sponsor non-tested events and pay only 300-pound bodybuilders to promote their products. Beyond that, they have no problem with steroid use or randomly tested events.

"I don't drink, I don't smoke or use drugs, but I also don't walk into a bar and say you shouldn't be doing that," Fitter said. "I just want to keep our side of the sport clean. There's an arena for those who want to compete in events that are not tested. What we've done is created a level playing field for those who want to compete naturally."

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