

Diary of a National Fitness Competitor, Part 1

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This year, I decided to do something different in my account and report of my experience at the Ms. Fitness USA Finals, a national fitness competition. I kept a journal, following my progress so as to give a little more "raw" insight to the slings and arrows of competing. Here is the first excerpt from my entries:

Monday, July 30, 2007

My God. I must be crazy. But yes, it's true. After spending way too much time hemming and hawing, dragging my feet, putting off the decision "until later" (and then assuming "later" would probably never come anyway, and thus I'll just have to miss nationals this year)..... I have finally confronted and made my choice: I'm going! It will be my third time competing at the Ms. Fitness USA Finals in Las Vegas, but my first national competition since my shoulder surgery back in April 2006. I had qualified for participation in USA's way back in November of last year at the regional show in Denver, so no issue there. But I really should have had my head examined, to be taking this on so eleventh-hour. Normally, just to get ready for a regular (local) fitness competition, one needs a minimum of 8-12 weeks to train and prepare, not unlike many athletic endeavors. More over, with national fitness competitions, you really want to do a few local shows within the couple of months of the "big" event, if only for the mental and physical rehearsal it provides. That I'm forgoing all of that and have given myself a mere FIVE weeks to prepare....is sheer lunacy. But here I am, faxing my forms and calling the powers that be to ensure they can add my name to the roster. Something tells me this is going to be one heck of a ride!

Friday, August 4, 2007

My first diary entry alluded to the need for a long prep time for a competition, but stopped short of offering any details. Perhaps in an effort to remind myself of all that I must accomplish between now and a month from today (September 4 is the first day of the 3-day competition/TV taping? YIKES!), I will elaborate on a portion of the to-do (and have-done) list:

- Choose routine music/theme, choreograph fitness routine
- Procure routine costume, do some test-runs wearing it to ensure you won't be pulling a "wardrobe malfunction."
- Add "Horse Training" to your weekly exercise line-up. This is slang for the self-pummeling...I mean, drills.... that help prepare the body for the demands of a fitness routine. Examples would be mountain climbers, lunge jumps, sprints, handstands, every form of push-up, gut-busting bicycle crunches, etc. Consider a "good session" to be one that leaves you collapsed like a slug.
- Practice the fitness routine....over and over and over and over....
- Pray that one day you'll actually once again LIKE the music you've chosen for your fitness routine, and not associate it with extreme mental and physical duress.
- If applicable, find and buy your posing suit, which is a "fancy" bikini used for the physique round. In the case of nationals, they supply this suit, which is not always a good thing (sort of like the hit or miss of a bridesmaid dress).
- Start to care about details that normally aren't important in the overall scheme of life, such as, "If I wear a bikini, and I am facing away from someone so that they have a full view of my backside, do I look like I have any cellulite?" or, "Are my shoulders and arms sculpted in good proportion to my legs?" or, "Has my body fat percentage dropped to the single digits?"
- As an addendum to the above, add the question, "Should I be wearing some "helpers" in my bikini top, now that my body fat – in all places, not just the desired ones – has dropped to the single digits?"
- If it hasn't been done already, go to "that kind" of store, and try on a bunch of clear stiletto heels, to wear with your glitzy posing suit in the physique round. Explain to the bored sales girl why you need them,

reassuring her in impressively tedious detail that it's NOT for "that kind" of competition! Try to act nonchalant when staring at the "impulse buy" trinkets while being rung up at the register. Resist the urge to ask what they are for.

- Practice walking in your clear, not-for-what-you-think stilettos on a hard, slippery floor, preferably in front of a mirror, to ensure a) your movements don't bear an uncanny resemblance to the Robot on Lost in Space ("Danger, Will Robinson!") and b) your facial expression is not just one notch up from "deer in headlights."
- Familiarize yourself with words and phrases such as "Hey, GIRLFRIEND!" and "Sistah," since these are what you'll likely hear from many of your long-lost friends, many of whom are either from California or New York. Remind yourself to be friendly when you reciprocate, but to NOT try to use such jargon yourself, lest you come off sounding like a Midwestern Frasier Crane attempting to be "hip."
- Become a favorite customer ("You, again?") at the local tanning salon, to get the deep-dark base tan over which you'll then be applying the deeper-darker oozy bronzer. Drink coffee beforehand to avoid falling into such a coma-like sleep that you keep on snoozing even after the machine shuts off.
- Find this year's evening gown after trying on 37 dresses at various clearance racks. Thank yourself for having the common sense to decline the lime green dress that made your body look like you actually indent at the waist.
- Hunt down the accessories for the above evening gown, noting the irony of spending more on these than you did on your clearance-rack dress.
- Write your speech, avoiding over-used words like, "philosophy," "inspiration," and "buff." Practice delivering speech without sounding overly perky.
- Take your regular training routine, and crank it up substantially: more cardio, more strength training, more stretching. You need it all!
- Make fast friends with butter spray, Sweet-n-low, cinnamon, protein powder, cottage cheese, yogurt, apples, Boca Burgers, steamed vegetables, oatmeal, tuna and white fish (throw in coffee and lemon water, just for fun). At least, if you're me. Other items you might consider, if you're one of those competitors who are far more disciplined than I, are egg whites, chicken (plain), egg whites, chicken, egg whites, and chicken. Variety is definitely not the spice of fitness competition prep, but it sure spells "relief" when you're standing before a panel of judges in what basically amounts to your underwear!

Tuesday, August 14, 2007

A good day today. Given I'm three weeks out of the first day of the event, I'm dropping into what I call my "Safety Zone" nutrition, where everything I eat has a purpose, be it muscle-building or calorie-sparing or sharpening my mental focus (pretty much eliminates all the fun stuff, doesn't it?). I must admit, every time I fall back to this particular mode of eating, part of me wonders why I ever stray. It's very comfortable, gives me plenty of energy, kills my cravings, yet leaves me feeling satiated and not deprived. And it keeps my body lean. But it's rather limited in scope. And with each passing year, I find myself increasingly intolerant of the way it impedes on enjoying the bigger world of great food, socializing, etc. And it's tough to go at it "half cocked." This one is pretty much an all-or-nothing proposition, mainly because you have to absorb your mind so wholeheartedly into the process of finding as many ways to explore "squeaky clean" as possible. Which means you have to eliminate even the thought of foods outside of this perimeter as remote options for yourself. What price one must pay for their body to be in its peak fitness!

I think I'm finally getting the hang of walking in the stilettos. I cringe when I think back on my first year of competing. I'm sure I thought I was hot stuff strutting in them, but I think I way overcompensated, instead coming off as a parody of a supermodel prance. Part of the hazard of having a dance background: you CAN quite easily learn how to walk in these without killing yourself, which is quite dangerous as now you can take your movements wherever you want to. And get someone with as much excess in personality as me....and you can only imagine what happens. At least now I feel much more calm and centered, and relaxed. I'm not trying to keep it so tight so as to look like a "jock on stilts," but I'm also not trying to be the ambulatory embodiment of "flirt with the camera!" The image, interestingly, that I'm using as I practice is more like, I'm hosting a party (in stilettos? OK, just work with me here), and having greeted arriving guests, I'm gliding across the room to fetch some beverages. Hey, whatever works, right?

Wednesday, August 15, 2007

Sipping my morning coffee, thinking about the training ahead of me today. Generally, I dedicate about an hour to my strength training, three times a week, but in competition season, that number goes up to 65, 75, even 80 minutes at a time, to allow for more intensity and added sets. Plus, I have to really punch it up with my abdominal training. My legs and arms are coming into focus, but the only time I see any shades of a six-pack is when I lean back, jut my hips forward, let out all the air from my lungs, and contract my midsection as hard as I can – oh yeah, and I do this in just the right lighting conditions. In other words, the abs aren't popping yet. My husband, having been through this dozens of times, says I look about 1-2 pounds out of my competition leanness. Maybe, but if so, then about 90% of what needs to come off is right there on top of my abs. This is when I'm unfalteringly amazed at body types, for most of my fellow competitors struggle with the opposite; their abs come out of hiding long before their butts, legs and hips choose to cooperate. How funny that we're never quite satisfied and the grass is always greener elsewhere! Not really. I realize I'm very fortunate just to be in such a "luxurious" position to be able to worry about such a pointless detail in the overall scheme of life. Still, there's a certain satisfaction in taking on the challenge. The next three weeks are all about bringing the physique into its full, sculpted glory (insert your "cough cough" here), despite those reluctant body parts that seem to have an agenda of their own!

More diary entries to come!

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