

HOW STEVE REEVES TRAINED

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Yes, we saw Steve Reeves change from a “skinny” bodybuilder to a Mr. Universe winner in just seven weeks! It was in 1950 when we invited him to come and train with us in York, and since he expressed a desire to compete in the Mr. Universe contest again, York Barbell Club was willing to sponsor him.

Of course it was only a year earlier when he placed third in the Mr. USA contest, which I won, and openly declared for the third and final time that I would no longer compete in any more physique contests no matter who hurled the challenge at me. I further stated that if any further challenges would be issued, Steve would be the man to accept them on my behalf. Because of this, Steve kept me well informed about his training progress, and I gave him whatever encouragement he needed. I knew, of course, that he wanted to compete in the Mr. Universe contest again, and I assured him that York Barbell Club would send him over if he would stay in shape. He was very interested and he kept in contact with me regularly. Then several months lapsed when I didn’t hear a thing from him, and being busy at the time I dismissed the thought from my mind. Therefore it was quite a surprise when a few months later, on Memorial Day to be exact, he and George Eiferman suddenly arrived in York. We discussed his training and about the coming Mr. Universe contest. He was very enthused and anxious to get started. We had dinner and then found them a place to stay since both were a little tired from the long trip and wanted to start training the following day.

The next day just before noon he and Eiferman walked into the old barbell building where the York gym was located, eager for a good workout. George Eiferman, of course, had trained with us many times, but this was Reeves’ first visit to “Muscle town.” Nevertheless he didn’t have any trouble acclimating himself to the surroundings, but later asked whether a special T-bar could be made for him so that he could utilize the Hack squat principle. This proved to be no

problem for machine shop manager Jules Bacon. Jules was able to make this gadget for him and Reeves was able to utilize it for his leg work. Later we fashioned a long cable rowing pulley device which he wanted to exercise his latissimus dorsi and arms. But he took a special liking to our home-made incline bench on which he performed his curls, and about which he later wrote a small feature—“My Favorite Exercise”—for *S&H* magazine—August 1950.

After about a week of training he began to regain some of his shape. Earlier some members of the gym, who saw him on his arrival, were not impressed by his development. It was obvious that he had done little if any training for some time (during the time I lost contact with him) but now he was beginning to shape up again. A number of visitors, who used to drop in at the old gym and watch us train, remarked their disappointment in the Reeves’ physique. And even I had to admit, upon seeing him change into his training clothes, that he did not look like the Reeves that I had competed against only a year before. This Reeves looked like he had lost everything except his legs, which still appeared fairly impressive in spite of his weakened condition. But his arms, shoulders, chest and back lacked any semblance of previous muscularity.

The accepted opinion of the fellows in the gym was that he didn’t have a chance of even placing in the Mr. Universe contest let alone winning it. I, too, had my doubts at this time, but we underestimated Reeves’ ambition and drive. Each workout he took he put everything into it, and continued to do a little more each week, so that after a few weeks he showed amazing improvement. He seldom sat around talking and killing time. Instead, he went from one exercise to another. He would repeat each exercise until he couldn’t do another rep, and on several occasions while he was doing his incline curls I saw him kick up the weight with his knees and then strongly resist as he lowered the weight. He put a lot of concentration into

each and every movement and after he was finished training he achieved a terrific congested condition and looked twice as big!

During training he had no regard for time but worked until he had completed his routine, which took anywhere from two to four hours. Of course he came to York to train, so all his time was devoted to training and resting and this paid off for him because he did win the Mr. Universe title as he planned.

Training in York agreed with him. Within four weeks he began to show remarkable improvement, and at the end of the fifth week he began to look like his old self again: big, massive with good muscularity.

His training in York included a lot of variety. However, each week he would increase his training, doing more reps, more exercise, more sets or a combination of all these. By the end of the sixth week the Hercules of Muscledom had recovered his large, sinewy arms, and a fuller, rounder chest. His back looked wider and more massive. Even his shoulders looked thicker, and his abdomen showed more detail and muscularity. Those who saw him training noticed the dynamic effort he put into every workout. He knew the time was getting short before he would be vying for the Mr. Universe title, so put everything into his training. There was no more whispering in the gym about whether he could win the title. Everybody agreed that it would take a darned good man to beat him now . . . if he could be beaten! Yet only seven weeks before it was very doubtful if he could place in the first five . . . how did this change happen?

I already mentioned that he trained with clock-like regularity. As a rule he employed high repetitions, and usually starting with a weight that was near his limit and gradually employing lighter weights but still using maximum repetitions. I also pointed out that he seldom if ever sat around talking between exercises but shifted from exercise to exercise, sometimes repeating the exercise in sets or using a similar movement for the same muscle area, or switching to a completely different exercise altogether. He would rest only after he finished his training and had his shower . . . then he would carry on with the fellows.

One of his favorite exercises in Muscletown was the curl on incline bench which he did regularly in every workout, and after a few weeks his arms showed the effect of such curling. He

also favored the long cable rowing exercise, a gadget we made for him. However, he did the exercise differently from the way most of us performed it. He would bend his body forward and maintain this position while he pulled the bar to his chest by arm and lat power alone, and then resisted the pull of the weight even slower. And though he wore training clothes his lats and biceps bulged while he performed the exercise.

The other favorite exercise he enjoyed was the Hack lift. He fixed the platform exactly the way he wanted it, and then after Bacon made the long T-bar for him he was able to utilize this principle and improve the detail in his legs. No doubt he enjoyed working out in these surroundings as well, or better for that matter, than any other place he ever trained because he really put in plenty of effort.

And now that he was achieving his best possible shape we spent several evenings a week developing a suitable posing routine for him. In time we worked out a very good posing routine which, no doubt, helped him to his victory.

But now the time was up and, to our way of thinking, Hercules was ready. He took one final workout and then asked us to appraise his posing. As we watched him shift from one pose to another it was evident that here was the winner. The improvement he made was amazing. He had worked hard and long these past seven weeks and now he was ready for the *Big Competition*.

The following morning I drove him to New York where we spent the night with friends, and on the morrow took him to the airport and saw him off. Couple days later I got word of his victory, and was back in New York to greet him at the airport, congratulating him as he disembarked. We were just as happy over his victory as he was, so we threw a banquet in his honor to celebrate his victory. He seemed delighted. After a couple months of loafing and taking an occasional workout, he bought himself a Ford convertible and began the long drive back to California. He soon started to get his first break in movies and stage productions after this.

Yes, we have watched many Mr. Americas and Mr. Universes train in our old gym, but none whipped themselves into championship shape in less than two months except Reeves. And this happened in York in 1950.

