

THE TITAN OF THE FITNESS INDUSTRY

Over the past 25 years, former *American Gladiators* star **MIKE “TITAN” O’HEARN** has been one of the most successful men in fitness—a bodybuilder, powerlifter, and model with more trophies and media appearances than even he can count. Now, at 46 years old, he’s not slowing down—he’s in overdrive, getting bigger, stronger, and more ripped than ever before. And he claims to do it all as a **100% NATURAL ATHLETE**. Believe him or not, he has transcended *Gladiators* to become one of the world’s true fitness icons.

BY MATT TUTHILL /// PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL NEVEUX



T ALL SEEMS LIKE TOO

much. The perfectly coiffed hair. The millions of dollars—stashed away from years of TV and hundreds of photo shoots.

The veritable castle in sunny Southern California. The loyal huskies who come to the gym with him every day, walk on the treadmill beside him, and never seem to bark. The self-satisfied smirk in all those social media pics (and God knows he posts enough

of them). But if you looked like Mike O'Hearn, you'd probably be smirking all day, too. Because at 46 years old, the 6'3" O'Hearn is a rock-solid 262 pounds of perfectly shaped muscle, shredded right down to a year-round body fat percentage of six.

Yet for all the gifts that have been bestowed on Mike O'Hearn, the rest of us mere mortals can always take solace in the fact that we know how he really got these muscles and what he does to

maintain them, right? Nudge, nudge. Wink, wink. Except Mike O'Hearn swears up and down, on the bible, and on the grave of your choosing, that he is and always has been 100% natural.

When they hear it, would-be fans turn away in disbelief. They take to message boards and cry bullshit. Because most of us have our own ideas of what one man can have, and by any standard, O'Hearn has too much. You can't be one of the most celebrated fitness models of all time, with strength to match your aesthetics and fashion-model face—and longevity to top it all—and still be natural.

"I was 270 pounds as a 16-year-old," O'Hearn says with a laugh. "I've been hearing 'you're on steroids' my whole life. I was always the same weight, really. What I learned how to do over the years was take the fat off while keeping my muscle."

If classmates wondered about him at 16, the rest of the world's been wondering about him—and eager to knock him down a peg—ever since he appeared as Thor on the first run of *American Gladiators* in the early '90s. Many of O'Hearn's cast mates later admitted to using steroids, thus implicating him by association. But O'Hearn always maintained that he was natural, even though he was bigger and stronger than his juiced-up colleagues. When he went on to become the only member of the original cast to appear in the 2008 reboot—this time as Titan, and in even better shape—it made you scratch your head even more.

The world can keep wondering. The only confirmed fact is this: O'Hearn has never flunked a drug test, and he's taken nearly as many piss tests as he has selfies.

Drug tests for the *Gladiators* reboot ("NBC tested for EVERYTHING," he says) as well as drug tests he took for natural bodybuilding shows, turned up nothing. Nor did polygraph tests, he says, an extra step in some natural bodybuilding and powerlifting federations. And with a trail of clean drug



and lie detector tests in his wake and a trophy case full of hardware—O'Hearn is a four-time Natural Mr. Universe and in the Natural Bodybuilding Hall of Fame—he's still dogged by haters who jump in with sarcastic comments on nearly every social media post.

Nature produces freaks with regularity. Just look at muscle-bound Belgian Blue cattle and humans with myostatin deficiencies who grow muscle without lifting weights. But when we've seen

so many athletes turn out to be frauds and liars, we don't leave room for any genetic freaks in sports, and especially not in bodybuilding.

So the comments pour in: "Yeah, right!" "No way!" "How could he possibly say he's natural?"

And that's just what we can print.

The funny part is that O'Hearn doesn't even consider himself a freak of nature. He sees his body as a by-product of his life story—one that's been played out almost entirely inside of a gym. For the most cynical, it might help to see pictures of him playing high school football (he was a three-year

starter and All-American) in his hometown of Kirkland, WA. It's not hard to pick out O'Hearn in team pictures. He's nearly a foot taller—and a foot wider—than most of his teammates. He's a solid 70 or 80 pounds heavier, too.

The mass started piling onto his frame as early as 11 years old. That's when his father, Patrick O'Hearn, a natural bodybuilder himself, started bringing Mike to the gym. Giants lurked in every corner. Among them, powerlifting legends Doyle Kenady, Doug Furnas, and Jeff Magruder.

"When you're 11 years old and you see guys like that every single day, that

ANGLE OF ATTACK

"You can overload and keep the pressure on the quads with partial reps, or you can go superdeep and involve your glutes and hamstrings. I would alternate each workout."



warps your idea of what's normal, of what's possible," he says. "If you train at 24 Hour Fitness, a 315-pound squat is going to seem really heavy to you. That's just a fact. Being in an environment where 800-pound deadlifts were normal made my belief different from that of any other kid."

By the age of 14, he was competing in natural bodybuilding shows. He won the Mr. Teenage Washington at

a height of 5'9" and a stage weight of 172. During the next two years, puberty went full throttle as he grew to 6'2" and gained an unfathomable, if not entirely lean, 100 pounds.

All the while he was learning the basics of what he would later fine-tune and market as power bodybuilding—a

system that builds strength and size by satisfying the needs of the strength and physique athlete: Heavy weights done for only a few reps but for a lot more sets. Whereas a classic bodybuilding rep scheme is three sets of 10, a classic power bodybuilding scheme may be seven or eight sets of three—not counting any warmup sets required to get to a heavy weight. (See O'Hearn's power bodybuilding leg routine on page 126.)

He credits this system, more than any of the myriad genetic factors that might be working in his favor, as being the key to his success in bodybuilding.

"Everybody does the same thing when they get ready for a show," O'Hearn says. "They go from heavy weight and lots of calories to cardio, light weight, lots of reps, and a calorie deficit. It's common. You get stringy and small. It happened to me, too. But I figured out early on that if I kept pounding the weight, I kept the muscle. When you are dieted down, you have less fluid in your joints and you're more prone to injury, so I slowed down the reps. It's harder to do—a loaded bar feels a whole lot heavier when you're dried out—but I accepted it, and you wind up with a fuller, denser muscle."

QUADZILLA

O'Hearn's leg workout begins with a simple warmup of extensions. "I want some blood in my quads before I start anything else," he says.

TITAN TOUR

For a man who came into the public eye on a TV show that's long been canceled, it's interesting to see that his biggest fans are young. For every 40- or 50-something who lined up to see him make a booth appearance at the Arnold Sports Festival in Columbus, OH, in March, there were a half dozen teenagers and 20-year-olds. The contrast is just as stark at a group training session held a few blocks away from the expo at Metro Fitness.

There, a group of seven young men and one man in his 40s are gathered around O'Hearn, who is dressed in red denim jeans, black loafers, a snow cap, and a "Titan Tour 2015" baseball T-shirt bearing his power bodybuilding logo—the letters "PB" stuffed inside a Superman crest.





NO FLUCTUATION

"With hardcore bodybuilders, you see what happens in the off-season," O'Hearn says. "They shrink. You don't see me losing 20 or 30 pounds and gaining it back. I know it doesn't matter to people that I passed drug tests. It never matters unless you fail."

Finishing up a tutorial on squatting, O'Hearn says, "OK. One at a time on the platform." He observes each guy, pointing out flaws in technique and holding nothing back. The personalized attention comes at a price; as one guy gets his pointers, the rest wait a considerable amount of time. From the outside, it seems like a nuisance. The clients, though, each of whom plunked down \$250 for the session, unanimously say it's money well spent.

"It's absolutely worth it," says Jacob

Pauley of Nicholasville, KY, who made the trip just to train with O'Hearn. "I trust what he says more than most other fitness icons. He's a four-time Natural Mr. Universe, and not many guys are natural. Something's obviously working for him if he's in his 40s and still squatting 700 pounds."

On this Saturday afternoon, Metro Fitness is crammed with Arnold Sports Festival attendees getting in a workout before the bodybuilding finals that night. Moving around the gym is as tough as navigating the expo floor, which is to say nearly impossible.

When O'Hearn's group comman-

deers a power rack for deadlifting, the two enormous meatheads who had been working in the area—and momentarily stepped away—return to find they've lost their spot. Their looks are grave, and they seem eager to jump in and give Titan a piece of their minds. One grabs O'Hearn by the arm.

"Hey, man, do you mind?" the guy asks—then produces a cell phone, "if I get a picture?"

The session goes on for more than three hours. Some of the guys specifically want help with their form. Others pick his brain for diet advice as they prepare for bodybuilding shows. The

nuts and bolts of training, though, aren't the main attraction. It's clear that the group—and everyone else in the gym—just wants to spend time with him. The ever-growing fan base, O'Hearn says, is due in a big way to social media.

"Social media's allowed people to come into my life a bit," O'Hearn says. "With all the columns I've done, it was all about this barbaric dude who has no limits and attacks everything. But when my dog Bunny died, and I was unafraid to share that—and other un-alpha moments like that—people really responded. I had guys coming up to me at the expo saying they were from India, or Dubai, or all these far corners of the world—and tell-

ing me they were praying for me when that happened. They sat in line just so they could say, 'I was crying when you were crying.' That was pretty special."

NEVER TEMPTED

Growing up in such a hardcore environment, exposure to steroids came quick enough. And not just in the gym. The youngest of nine kids, O'Hearn says two of his brothers and one sister took steroids. Rather than tempt him, he says it had the opposite effect.

"If you've got brothers, there's an instant rivalry," he says. "Whatever they did, whether it was drinking alcohol or staying up late, I wanted to do the opposite or do it better. With steroids, I was too young to understand that anything else was going on when

it came to bodybuilding and powerlifting. Then people started telling me, 'That's what everyone in the magazines does. That's what all the bodybuilders do.' I said, 'If that's what everybody does, then let me beat them without it.'

"With steroids, there is always an up and down," O'Hearn continues. "I would see my brothers enhance to a much better level than me. In a deadlift, say, they would jump up to 500 pounds, and I'd be at 400. But when they came off the sauce they'd drop to 450, and then I'd catch that. Then they'd jump up to 600. By then I'd be at 500, and they'd drop back down. I'd say, 'What is this pattern? Why get better and then get worse? If I'm going to spend this much time doing it, I want to be able to keep what I've got.'"

HAMMERING HAMSTRINGS

"At this point in the workout, your hamstrings and glutes should be on fire," O'Hearn says. "This is the best way to finish off the day and really work that glute-ham tie-in at the top of the leg."



His eventual PRs would wind up being as staggering as his physique: An 815-pound squat, a 600 bench (along with 500x2 on an incline), and a 775 sumo deadlift.

"Could I have set records with steroids? Yes. Would I be as good as I am now? No. Steroids age you. Your connective tissue breaks down. Over time, something will inevitably tear."

Temptation was easy to avoid, he says, thanks to quick success.

"When you get discovered by Joe Weider—he walks up to you at the Mr. Olympia and says, 'I need you on the cover of my magazines,' and you're a 20-, 21-year-old kid—I realized whatever I had been doing up to that point was good enough. Would I have been tempted if I didn't find success? I hope I wouldn't have, but then again, I never wanted to be a 300-pound Mr. Olympia. I wanted a pleasing physique. I think of my body as an art piece, and it's my art piece."

Back in the gym, O'Hearn is delivering his final tutorial of the day on benching. At that moment, he's interrupted again—a hand on his shoulder, too desperate to wait. He turns to find a slight man, sheepishly apologizing.

"Excuse me," the man says, "but I am from Jordan, and I am also very fond

of you. May I have a photograph?"

The man is sweating, nervous with anticipation. O'Hearn merely smiles, says, "Of course," and puts an arm around him, posing for a series of rapid-fire cell-phone pics. The man had traveled from the other side of the earth, hailing from a culture that could be described as our polar opposite. But when he sees O'Hearn, none of that matters. It fades away into something basic and pure—an admiration that doesn't adhere to cultural boundaries.

A smile frozen on his face, O'Hearn poses with the man, not surprised in the least to meet yet another fan, however unlikely this one might seem.

This kind of thing happens to Mike O'Hearn every day, and at this point in his life, it's all perfectly natural. **M&F**

LIGHT WEIGHT DOESN'T COUNT

"If your working weight is going to be 315, then whatever it takes to work up to 315 does not count as part of your working sets."

POWER BODYBUILDING LEGS

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Leg Extension*	4	12
Squat	7	4
Leg Press	4	8-15
Hack Squat Machine	4	10
Leg Curl	4-6	8-12

*Performed as warmup

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