



Episode 20 Transcript

Release Date: Monday, June 12, 2017

The Weird, Gritty World of Contest Prep

Nick Collias: Hello, everyone. Spring has sprung out here in the desert. The wildflowers are blooming. The animals are taking their after pictures and calling each other out on Instagram for not being natty. The first biceps of the year are *peaking* out from their sleeves. It's all about the cycles of life at Bodybuilding.com. I'm Nick Collias, and welcome to the podcast. We've had an interesting run of guests of late, if you haven't heard. There was Kris Gethin, talking about his epic foray into triathlon training; John Rusin, a great strength coach, last week, talking about squats and how to improve yours. We had the Buff Dudes talking about how to force feed Klondike bars to bulk. You can go to our archives on your podcast thingy of your choice to listen to any of those, but in the meantime we have some new developments here as well in the studio. Krissy Kendall, our beloved science chick, has departed for Australia, and in her old seat we have the new podcast co-host and Bodybuilding.com's newest editor, [Heather Eastman](#). Hello, Heather.

Heather Eastman: Hello.

Nick: Now, you've only been here for a couple of weeks, but already have a few bylines. There was one about the Rock's butt that I really liked.

Heather: Yes. That was a really fun one.

Nick: Why his butt should be the example for your butt, why the butt should be the priority on leg day. Glutes are the new pecs. We've talked about this.

Heather: Yeah. Glutes are the new pecs. Definitely.

Nick: But, aside from that, *ass-ide* from that, you're not exactly new to the fit life. Right?

Heather: No.

Nick: You've been a physique competitor, judge, coach, trainer for a million years.

Heather: All of the above. Absolutely.

Nick: Tell us a little bit about yourself and your fitness origin story, as it were.

Heather: Oh my goodness. Well, it's not as glamorous as you might think. I was finishing my degree at UCLA, and I kind of wandered into a group ex room, and said, "You know, I'll try this out."

Nick: You'd never exercised a single bit in your whole life up to that point.

Heather: I mean, in high school I was that girl that was doing three sports at once. I started running cross country to stay in shape for soccer, because I was also doing volleyball at the same time as soccer practice, so I needed something to keep my conditioning up. Then I really loved running, so I kept running and started winning state championships.

Nick: Sounds high energy. You sound like a high energy individual.

Heather: I don't know if you can tell by my general pace of speaking, but I am a very high energy kind of girl. Anyways, I walked into my first class on the UCLA campus and loved it. At the end of the class they said, "Hey. We have this program that we're offering through the university to anyone who wants to become either a group exercise leader or a personal trainer. It's a nine-month course, and we're going to take you through workshops and show you how to perform exercises, how to coach others, and kind of take you through every step of the process. At the end you get to sign up for the national certification exam," and it was the NSCA Strength and Conditioning Exam. And you become a certified trainer.

Nick: Okay, which is one of the good ones.

Heather: One of the good ones for sure. I mean, not to brag, but why not? I, of course, couldn't decide which one I wanted to do, so I did both, which meant instead of two nights a week, I was doing four nights a week in addition to my full class load my senior year. It should be party time, but here I am studying my butt off, learning about squats, learning about exercise technique, learning about posture. Basically what happened is I fell in love with it and just decided that rather than continue on and become a teacher, which would have made my parents happy ... Hi, mom and dad. I decided that I wanted to be a personal trainer and to really focus on fitness. I think the change for me was I watched my grandmother, who lived to be 93 years old, I watched her deteriorate, and it had nothing to do with her mental fitness. It had to do with her physical fitness. I remember thinking to myself, "You know? If more people put time and energy into exercising, we could all kind of stay young and fit longer." It just was a really striking example in my life of how important fitness is and how important exercising is. I wanted to share that with the world.

Nick: Okay, but that's why you're in school. Once you're out of school everything changes. When you found yourself in a gym or actually out there coaching for the first time, who did you imagine

yourself working with, and who did you actually end up working with, because there's often an interesting conflict there.

Heather: Yes. You have this textbook, and everyone in the textbook has perfect posture and perfect form. I remember in my first few months as an actual trainer I was horrified by what I was seeing in the everyday kind of average person. What I mean by that when I say horrified is they did not have perfect posture, and they did not move correctly, and so all of a sudden you have to completely throw out everything you know and start working with real people who has real postural deviations, real strengths and weaknesses, and it really forces you to be on your toes, and work with people, and throw out the textbook, and throw out the rule book, and just kind of say, "Okay. What is *this* person's needs?" The one thing I say about personal training is it's in the name. It's personal. It's not a one-size-fits-all program. It's catered to each individual need. Now, once someone has kind of been to me and gone through the logistics of how to move, how to squat, how to lunge, all of those things, then it gets pretty easy and the cadence picks up, but those first few sessions are really critical, so I urge any new exerciser to at least go and see a personal trainer for a couple of sessions, just so you can get familiar with how your body is moving and what you need to correct.

Nick: No. That's interesting. I like that. I've recommended that to other people as well. Even if you're going to follow a program right out of a book, even if you saw something online and you think, "I want to do this," a little bit of personalized perspective, even in just figuring out what your biggest weaknesses are, can help.

Heather: Oh. Absolutely. Yeah. We're all different. Trust me. Even though I've been doing this for 12 years, I don't even move correctly all of the time. I still have people kind of pointing out to me, "Your back's arching."

Nick: Do you find though that it's still really easy to go down that slippery path into what John Rusin called last week "corrective purgatory," where you're just stuck in corrective exercises forever, because it seems like that's what ... You see a lot of people just sort of sleepwalking through these epic warmups that you can tell they just hate.

Heather: I don't call myself a corrective exercise specialist, because it is a rabbit hole, if you will, something that you could just fall down and get lost in. I know that no one's ever going to move perfectly, and my job is not to sit there and try to get them to be perfect. My job is to do what I can to make sure that they're getting the most out of their workout. Other people might disagree with me, and that's totally fine. That's just my viewpoint. I think that there's so much more to be gained from doing an exercise 80% correctly versus trying to get 100% correct form every single time. You know, I think that even if you are a little bit off, just the fact that you're moving, you're burning calories, you're having fun, you're enjoying yourself, that's really the bottom line.

Nick: Okay. 80%. I think that's a good benchmark to aim for. Right?

Heather: Yeah. As long as you're 80%, you're good.

Nick: So, 80% would be, what, you're safe. You can lift kind of heavy-ish for at least 10 reps or so, and things aren't springing all over the place. There aren't parts falling out of the bottom of you as you're walking around the gym.

Heather: Right. I'm going to go ahead and say there are a couple of exercises where I tell my

clients, "I'm going to be on your butt about this exercise. If you're not doing it the way I want you to do it, we're just not going to do it," and particularly ...

Nick: Curls. It's curls.

Heather: Curls. It's the deadlift. The deadlift is my number one. We sit down. Everything comes to a screeching halt the first time we do it, and I say, "Look. We're going to start with a PVC pipe before we go anywhere else, because I need to just see how you move." There's so much that can go wrong in a deadlift, and yet there's so much that can go right. It's such a great posterior chain exercise and one that is really easy to screw up, and yet everybody does it every day. You pick things off the ground every single day, so knowing how to do it properly is so, so important. Every human should be able to squat and deadlift, bottom line.

Nick: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So somebody who maybe has had some feedback in the past, but doesn't go to a coach anymore, doesn't go to a trainer anymore, is it still worth it for them to get an extra set of eyes on their deadlift, to video? What do you think the path, the best route is for somebody who still wants to be accountable on that sort of thing, because we all are flawed in those.

Heather: I think that's a good question. I think the number one thing I tell people is, "There are mirrors in the gym for a reason, and that reason is not to admire your biceps. Those mirrors are there so you can check your form." Now, the deadlift is tricky, because you're trying to look at yourself sideways through the mirror, or you're facing the mirror when you're doing a deadlift, so you can't see what your back is doing, but definitely having an extra pair of eyes, filming yourself, all of those things are really great. Like I said, the example I gave, I don't always deadlift correctly, because I have a little bit more of a swayed back than most, and so I need to be really careful, and just having an extra set of eyes on me at the gym when I'm lifting heavy is incredibly valuable, and I would definitely recommend that.

Nick: So, could that set of eyes just be YouTube commenters potentially, like you put your PR up there and they tell you when it's wrong?

Heather: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, you start getting into comments and there's ...

Nick: Don't get into the comments. That's our number one rule.

Heather: There are some comments that are more valid than others. I would say just take every comment with a grain of salt.

Nick: That's very diplomatic of you. Obviously you're new around here. So, let's move forward in your progression a little bit. When did it go from, "I don't just need to teach this," but, "You know what? I kind of want to compete, too," because you have competed at least once. Right? A few times?

Heather: I've competed four times. I would say as a young twenty-something year old trainer working in a big box gym, whose logo we all know and ... Well, it's the gym with the barbell.

Nick: Oh. That guy. Sure.

Heather: Yeah. That guy. Anyway, working in a big box gym and you're there with a bunch of other trainers that are young and in their twenties, and they work out all the time, and they're ripped, and everybody's excited, and it's part of the culture, you know, pretty soon somebody asks you, "Hey. Have you ever thought about competing?" Usually you say no, because you've never heard of it before. You know what bodybuilding is, but you always think Arnold Schwarzenegger, "Oh. I could never do something like that." And once people around me started competing, and once I saw a couple of shows, I was like, "Yeah. That looks like something I might want to try."

Nick: Really? Watching their prep didn't just terrify you?

Heather: No. No. The food doesn't ever scare me. It's the lifting weights. That's my dirty, little secret is I'm not a big fan of lifting weights, but I know how important it is to get resistance training into your program. So I kind of started slow. I did a couple of local shows. Then my last big show that I did was down in Los Angeles, and I think that once I got to a level where I was starting to compete with people who were, you know, very competitive on a state and national level, and here I was just this little girl from Boise, Idaho, total fish out of water, I think that's when I was like, "Okay. I don't know if I want to commit 100% of my attention to training myself," but what I took from that and what I then kind of ... The next progression in my career was I started coaching athletes to compete, so instead of being the actual competitor, I became their coach. Really that grew out of my nit-picky nature. I hated going to competitions and seeing people pose incorrectly. It just drove me nuts, because why would you spend 12 weeks, six months, a year getting ready for this show, and then you walk up on stage and look like you have no idea what you are doing? I couldn't handle that. I started out as a posing coach, and then competitors would come to me for posing, and then as soon as we were done posing they would say, "Well, could you help me with my diet?", or, "Can you recommend an exercise for this?", or, "Do you mind if you just give me a few pointers on that?" That's how that kind of progressed into a full-on competition prep coach. Then you're going to shows. You're helping your competitors. People keep seeing you over, and over, and over again. The next natural progression was, "Hey. Would you mind helping us judge these shows?" The way that I had to become a judge was I had to go through three rounds of what they call kind of practice judging, where you're at the show. You're writing down your scores, but they don't count towards the show. They're using that to see if you're seeing the same thing that the other judges are seeing. You're not completely ...

Nick: You're taking notes, as well.

Heather: Yeah. You're taking notes. They just want to see if your eye matches what everyone else is seeing. Gosh, I think that was four or five years ago that I started doing that. We just had a show here recently, and sure enough, the promoter calls me up and says, "Hey. We need one more judge. Are you free?"

Nick: It's interesting hearing you talking about posing, because we hear people talking about the big, national shows, sort of bemoaning that posing isn't the art form that it once was, and there are people in every gym who are probably preparing to compete, but you don't see them doing a lot of posing practice. It's fairly rare. Maybe they're hiding in the back room, in the yoga room you see it or something like that. What is going wrong with people's posing, and is the solution just practice more and don't be ashamed of yourself?

Heather: You know, it's kind of the same thing that goes wrong with people exercising, is that they're so in their own little world and in their own little way that they move that they don't even realize that you've got one elbow that's wonky and it's making your whole back fall flat. If you just had an extra

set of eyes, and even more than that, an *experienced* set of eyes, looking at you, it's not that hard to get the average competitor to really perfect their posing and really show off their body. Posing, believe it or not, is a criteria that we're judging on. You can't just go out, and stand on stage, and say, "Judge me." You have to hit the correct poses. The reason is it gives up as judges a kind of uniform sample to look at. If everyone's standing slightly differently, how can we compare and contrast body types, so we try to put people in uniform posing, and that way we can really look at their musculature, look at their symmetry, look at how conditioned they are, and it doesn't make our job harder. It makes our job easier when everyone poses correctly.

Nick: That's interesting. Yeah. I like you pointing out that wonky elbow, because, yeah, maybe people don't even realize that they don't have control as much as they think over certain muscle groups, but posing, as I imagine, when that really comes out, like all of a sudden you think you're flaring your legs. You're not flaring shit.

Heather: Exactly.

Nick: That's interesting. Do you find though that as people practice that more and get better at posing that it actually helps them to fill out their physiques as well? Because some pros swear by posing as a component of exercise.

Heather: Oh. Absolutely. I actually tell my girls to pose in-between their sets, because it's a good way to kind of see if you got that muscle. You know, you've already got that pump going, so you can kind of ... (I'm sitting here posing as I'm talking about this. It's ridiculous.)

Nick: That's all right. This is the one podcast you can do that on.

Heather: No. You can kind of pump up, and flare out your lats, and flare out your shoulders, and see, you know, "Okay. This is what I'm going to look like." It really lets you feel that muscle. There is such a thing as a mind/body connection with your muscles, so you can do a lat pull-down incorrectly and never ever touch your lats.

Nick: For years. For years.

Heather: You know? Then once you learn how to flare your lats out when you're posing ... There I go doing it again. But once you learn to flare your lats out, it will absolutely change your pull-up form, your lat pull-down form, because now you know where that muscle is. You know how to kind of throw it out there and pull it back. I always joke I have secret wings that nobody knows about, because I don't pose my lats in my everyday life, but if you ask me, I could pop out an extra three inches of lats that you had no idea was there.

Nick: Three inches. An extra three inches of lats. That's a wing. Okay. This is something we've discussed with a number of other guests on our show, but what role do you feel like competition serves in the progression of somebody's fitness life? Who needs it, and who doesn't? I remember, Lais DeLeon is a really well-known fitness model who we had one. She has millions of followers, but we asked her, "Do you ever think about competing?" "No. No. That's not for me." But then Evan Centopani, who's an elite pro bodybuilder, he loves the dirty, nasty prep, the suffering. It's just wired into him. What is it for you, and where does it fit in the progression of somebody's arc?

Heather: Oh, gosh. I think you just hit on the two top types of people that gravitate towards this

sport. As someone who used to be a distance runner, I was intrigued by the endurance of it. It's a marathon. It's not a sprint. It's not something that you just wake up one day, throw on a tan and a suit, and go stand on stage. You have to really prepare for it. You have to really drill every single day. You're working out. You're eating right. You're getting enough sleep. I liked that about it. So for me it was just a challenge of can I stick with this for six months? Can I get myself on stage? Then I, personally, love public speaking and love being on stage. I don't know if you can tell. For me it was a way to get back on stage and a way to kind of perform and show off all the hard work and the fact that I was a trainer, and I knew what I was doing, and people could see me and say, "Oh. I want to go see her. Look at her." Then there's the other side of that, which is I know some people who are just the quietest, most reserved people you've ever met, and they compete, because it is so uncomfortable for them and because it is such a challenge to just get up there in front of people, let alone the fact that you're 90% naked, because your suit's the size of a postage stamp, but they want to get out there and show off what they've done and how hard they've worked. I think that's kind of the root of everyone's journey when it comes to bodybuilding is it's a chance to really show what you've done and really step up and be something that people can admire. It might sound like people are kind of being shallow by looking at or judging bodies, but it's really all about the hard work that goes in prior to that moment on stage, the months and months of training and work. You can really see that on stage. You can see who did their work and who didn't.

Nick: Maybe even who kind of enjoys that part of it.

Heather: And who loves it. Yeah.

Nick: You sound excited talking about it, but other people ...

Heather: I am excited talking about it.

Nick: I've talked to people who look back on it with kind of a dread in their voice like, "Oh, god. I did it one time. I'll never do it again." Yeah. If you're trying to talk yourself into from the get go, then maybe it's not for you. It sounds like it kind of has to make sense.

Heather: There's definitely... I talk about it and I smile, because it's a dirty, kind of weird, gritty world. When you're a bodybuilder, you get to a point where you don't care. You're eating chicken with your fingers, because you just have to get that next meal in before ... You only have four minutes to eat before you have to go do your next thing. By the time you're on stage, you're exhausted. You're dehydrated. You're covered in this goopy tan that just gets on everything you touch. It sounds like the most miserable sport in the world, but it's also the best you've ever looked or felt, and you've worked so hard. I have run marathons, and that twenty-sixth mile versus stepping on stage, stepping on stage is a much, much higher endorphin rush. Your knees are shaking, but you're having to hold a pose, and you're smiling, and your muscles are pumped up, but you just want to go and eat a donut back stage. You're just trying to kind of focus on everything. Running, yeah, not to take away from that. That's amazing, too, but it feels like you can just kind of push yourself through that, but with bodybuilding everything has to come together in this perfect moment, or it's all for nothing.

Nick: Wow. It sounds pretty intense. How different did you find the training was though, and how different should the training be for somebody who's preparing for a show? If somebody's, yeah, they've been training hard for a long time, they maybe have done bodybuilder-style splits before, they've accumulated a fair amount of volume, is the training that goes into prep, if it's done right, still

really different from the workouts we see on a site like ours?

Heather: Absolutely. I mean, I know guys that work out like a bodybuilder year round, but they're not bodybuilders. I would say the most... the biggest difference is it's an all-in sport. What I mean by that is you might like going and working out at the gym five or six days a week and just kind of doing whatever, but with bodybuilding it's no longer a choice. It's a "you have to go to the gym" five or six days a week. You have to get that workout in. You have to hit every muscle group. You have to push hard. You have to try to put more weight on that bar, go for that extra rep, go for that extra set. You have to push yourself to run that extra mile. You have to eat right. You don't get to just go to a barbecue and pig out on whatever. You have to follow every single thing as closely as possible, because when you get on that stage you want to be able to tell yourself you did everything that you could to get ready. If you get up there and you know that, "I had cheat meals every single week. I skipped several workouts," you're going to kick yourself, because you didn't do everything that you could.

Nick: Yeah. You had a great article recently. It was one of your first ones for the site called "[Three Questions You Should Ask Yourself Before You Decide to Compete](#)." What you were just talking about was definitely one of them, can you go all in? Yeah. It sounds like it's kind of about how you feel at the end. Do you feel a little bit of regret, or do you feel like you threw yourself entirely into the journey? Yeah.

Heather: Yeah. I think one of the reasons I stopped competing is I did go so all in, to the point where it started taking away from my life. Some people love to live that life, 100% of the time. I'm not one of them. I've got 500 other things I'm interested in doing, and so that was just one thing, but as you can see, I'm still very passionate about it. I love the sport. I put that question there, because I think that people need to realize this is not just something that's for, like I said, the guy that likes to work out. He can definitely try it, but it's definitely you need to go all in. You can't half ass it if you want to be a bodybuilder. You have to give it 100% effort or don't do it.

Nick: Right. But even if you do give it 100%, the third question is are you prepared to lose? Because you may have given absolutely everything you can and still just not even get close to the victory. Right?

Heather: Right. Well, it's interesting. I think that bodybuilding is a unique sport in that everyone gets into it thinking they're going to win, and they go at it thinking, "I'm going to win. I'm going to win," and that's what keeps them at the gym late at night, and that's what keeps them eating the broccoli, and the sweet potatoes, and the chicken. And you've got to realize that there's only one winner that day, and it's probably only 2 to 3% of people who do bodybuilding shows do well at them.

Nick: As opposed to marathoners, you don't expect to win.

Heather: Right.

Nick: The winner is somebody entirely different. The bodybuilder kind of does think they're going to win.

Heather: I think the novice enters in thinking they're going to win, and then they're incredibly disappointed. I always point out, "What did you think was going to happen? This is your first time doing this." Like you said ...

Nick: I'm one of the all-time greats, man. What are you talking about?

Heather: You don't go out and run a marathon expecting to win. You just go out expecting to finish the race, if you're lucky. Bodybuilding's the exact same. You're just trying to get on stage. Come hell or high water, you just want to get on stage and look your best, and that's it.

Nick: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Do you need to go through a lot of soul searching for this sort of thing, or ... because it's just a casual competition or it can be, right? Even if you do all of the preparation, does it have to be an incredibly meaningful, heavy thing in your life?

Heather: Not at all. I've been toying with the idea of getting back on stage, and I think that now where I'm at in my life, I'm in my 30's now, and to me it would be something to do for fun. I wouldn't put so much ... because when you're young and you're still figuring out who you are, you just want to be the best, and now I think I'd want to be the best version of me, but I really wouldn't necessarily care.

Nick: You say that now. When you set foot on stage and you lose to some 23-year-old, it's going to eat you up.

Heather: Right? No. I know what I can look like, and I know looking back what I could have done better. I think that's the only reason I would get on stage again, is to see if I could beat my previous self, not everyone else, but I would want to compete against myself again and see if I could do better from what I did seven years ago.

Nick: Well, we won't push you to do that, but if you do decide to do that, we will force you to document every step of the way. How about that?

Heather: Oh. Good.

Nick Collias: Well, Heather Eastman, thank you so much for coming by. We look forward to grilling you on future episodes here, or rather I just say I look forward to grilling you on future episodes here, as well. Everyone, if you want to read her stuff, come to Bodybuilding.com and we'll link to her [author page](#) and the article we mentioned, below. See you all next time.

Heather Eastman: Bye, everybody.



3 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU DECIDE TO COMPETE

Think you have what it takes to compete in bodybuilding? A former NPC competitor and bodybuilding judge shares her insight on what you should ask yourself before preparing to step onstage.