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BUILD BIG SHOULDERS

By Markell Thomas and Rachel Payne

When Markell Thomas went to Masters Nationals the first time, he quickly realized that to reach his goal he would need to build bigger shoulders. Creating the well balance men's physique body with symmetry, size, and conditioning can be achieved with a smart training plan and he was on a mission to do just that! Here are his thoughts on the process that got him there and ultimately helped him earn his Pro card.

Young bodybuilders understand that packing on more muscle makes one physically bigger yet they often overlook the small details that help create the illusion of size. A great set of shoulders can be just the ticket to put the final touch on the body you've worked hard to create.

Face forward and look in the mirror. Focus on the outer edges of your physique. The most prominent body part as it pertains to width should be your shoulders. Your shoulders "finish" your entire upper body from the front and back. They give that beautiful flow to your arms, add polish to your chest, and create balance between your upper and lower body. Follow your lines. Out (shoulders) In (waist) back out again (quad sweep) What I've just described is the Classic- X FRAME. Your shoulders set the table so to speak.

Being a "smaller" bodybuilder I have to focus greatly on width

to create "the illusion of size." I have fairly narrow clavicles so getting wider required me to focus on my shoulder development.

Let's take a very basic look at the anatomy of our shoulders/deltoid muscles :

The anterior deltoid fibers run along the front part of the shoulder muscle and when contracted move the arm anteriorly, think reaching forward or lifting the arm to grab something – or give a high five :). The middle or lateral deltoid fibers run along the side of the shoulder; when contracted create lateral abduction or the arm moving away from the body – think reaching out to the side. The posterior deltoid fibers run along the back of the shoulder and assist the latissimus dorsi to extend the shoulder.

To build a great set of shoulders we must focus on all three muscle heads. Commonly, the **Lateral Deltoids** and the **Posterior Deltoids** are neglected.

Let's start with the **Lateral Deltoid**, the "Let's Get Wide" part of the shoulder because the wider you are, the bigger and more prominent you'll look. I focus on high volume and light to medium weight when training shoulders. Focus is key. Creating the mind-muscle connection is paramount. We want to concentrate on the middle of the muscle without allowing the traps to take over. Heavy weight and bad form recruits our traps.

When training the **Lateral Deltoids**, Side Raises are my main go to. I like to do them from multiple angles. Seated, with a starting position of my arms hanging by my sides. Raise the weight to ear height, slightly pause, and then lower the weight. Watch your form. Never sacrifice form for weight. Another variation is standing utilizing the cable rack. This provides constant resistance throughout the entire range of motion. There are many variations of this basic movement that you can add to your training program.

Next up we have the **Posterior Deltoid**. Symmetry not only occurs from left to right, but also from front to back in our upper body. When we're on stage we want to look great from all angles! Poor Posterior Deltoid development leads to a loss of symmetry and balance in the physique from TWO angles - the back and the side! The importance of training this often neglected body part can not be emphasized enough.

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One of my favorite movements to train **Posterior Deltoids** is the bent over and/or seated dumbbell rear delt raise. Again, our goal is to maintain the mind-muscle connection. Squeeze at the top of the movement and don't forget to add a slight pause at the top. **PRO TIP: Adding pulsing half reps for a few sets adds intensity and really promotes growth! Another great movement is face pulls.** It's very important to retract your shoulder blades while performing this movement to minimize the recruitment of the trapezius muscles. Pull with slow, focused and deliberate movements. Maintain equal tension and good form throughout the rep. Always remember that **concentric contractions** and **eccentric contractions** have the same level of importance during each rep!

The third head of the shoulder is the **Anterior Deltoid**. This area of the deltoids tends to receive the most attention because



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they are secondary movers in all of our pressing motions. They are often the most well developed because even the most basic of programs include pressing movements such as Bench Presses, Push Ups, and Military Presses. However, as with the other parts of our deltoids, deliberate focused movements are the goal.

The final component to getting big shoulders is training frequency. Our shoulders are a relatively small muscle group which allows them to recover more quickly than the larger muscles like legs or back. I often train shoulders every 2-3 days. This allows for adequate training frequency and optimal recovery time.

Building Big Shoulders comes from understanding what it will take to make the changes in your body that will help achieve the desired result. Good form and attention to detail combined with the right amount of intensity and frequency are essential to improving any body part. The results of following a high volume and light to medium weight when training program for shoulders enabled Markell to make BIG changes during his improvement season and the reward came when he was awarded his Pro card.

Sample Shoulder Routine To Build Big Shoulders

(Always warm up prior to starting any exercise routine.)

Primary Muscle Worked	Exercise	Sets and Reps
Lateral Deltoids	Military Presses	3-4 sets 10-15 reps
Lateral Deltoids	Standing Cable Lateral Raises	3 sets 8-15 reps
Anterior Deltoids/ Posterior Deltoids	Seated Front Raises superset with Seated Rear Dumbbell Raises	2 sets 10-12 reps
Posterior Deltoids	Standing Face Pulls	2 sets 10-12 reps
Lateral Deltoids	Seated Lateral Raises	4-5 sets 8-12 reps