

## Greg Rando, IFBB Pro

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I started in the early 90's, 31 years ago to be exact. I grew up playing sports. I loved sports and I wanted to play sports in high school. Although I played well, at the end of my freshman football season my doctors and parents had decided it would be the last year I could play contact sports due to my diminishing eyesight. When I was seven, I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa. As the years went on, my eyesight continued to diminish. Once I hit high school, it became pretty challenging for me not only to play sports, but to even walk down the crowded hallways.

It was tough being in high school and having all my friends play on the team. So I would hangout after school with everybody, a little bit in denial. As they would go out and practice, I started lifting weights. I quickly realized just how empowering it was, especially not being able to see. I could really sense and feel how to control and move my muscles, feel the blood rush and that pump! It was also pretty exhilarating not having to rely on anyone to help me. I worked out every night after dinner and when I went to college, I continued training.

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### College

I was a senior in college at the University of Massachusetts when I met a friend who asked me if I had ever thought about competing in Bodybuilding. I had, but I had no idea how to get started. He helped me prepare for my first show, the Massachusetts Bodybuilding Championships on June 23, 1992. In those early years, the only division available was bodybuilding and I only did one or two shows a year. I really wanted to show improvement every time I stepped on the stage. I finally felt comfortable and confident enough to compete in the NPC Universe, placing 5th in '95 and 2nd in 2000 in the Middleweight division. In 2001, I again competed at the NPC Universe, winning the Light Heavyweight division and Overall to earn IFBB Pro status. It was one of the best highlights and experiences I've had as a bodybuilder, winning the overall and being there with good and close friends of mine. Another incredible experience occurred at the World Championships in Malaysia, where I received a Sportsmanship Award presented to me by Ben Weider, then I took a couple years off.



Photo by NPC News Online

### Career

I've been so grateful because as I was finishing high school, I was thinking about what I would do. I was thinking, I'm not going to be a pilot. I'm probably not going to work on a computer, but I do know health and fitness; and I'm engaged in it, I feel emotionally and psychologically strong. I consider going to college and graduating with honors at the top of my class in health and fitness to be one of my biggest accomplishments. I owned a gym with my best friend from college for 10 years. We started from scratch, owned it and sold it and I moved to Florida. Now I'm semi-retired and manage a small community fitness center in Naples. Along with another trainer, we do all the personal training. It's seasonal, part-time and just what I was looking for because my vision is very poor at this time, so I only wanted to work a few hours and the small conducive environment is perfect for me.

Making my way around the gym is harder now; my vision has regressed over the last 40 years. I rely heavily on contrast, which is very foggy and muted so contrast of any kind is difficult, especially in the gym. I'm very familiar with my gym and I can go slow enough and know where I am at all times based on what I'm touching. I have an awesome training partner and assistant in helping me get around the gym and we usually have a lot of fun.

After taking a couple years off, I wanted to do the prestigious IFBB Pro Night of Championships in New York. That

year was the biggest pro show in Men's Bodybuilding in history with 46 competitors on the stage. I came in 23rd and I was ecstatic to come in the top half of the class. I was allowed to pose in front of the whole auditorium. I got a standing ovation from thousands of people and that was a night I'll never forget. I continued to compete. While I felt I was getting better as a bodybuilder, I knew I wasn't competitive. I just wanted to compete as long as I was improving as a competitor. Then the NPC came out with the 202 class, which I did once, coming in 7th with the help of Hany Rambod as my coach. I learned a lot and then again, I took some time off.

At this point in my competitive career, I needed to figure out a more sustainable eating program that would help me maintain fullness in my muscles and keep the energy levels up. When I moved to Florida and reached out to an old college friend to learn about primarily plant based nutrition, I realized it changed everything in terms of my health, well-being and energy levels. Incorporating a primarily plant based nutrition into my program also increased the fuel to my muscles so I had better workouts in the gym. Prior to this new plan, I lost weight by restricting my diet; this new philosophy allowed me to fuel my muscles for a specific purpose, losing weight or building strength. Combined with the new Classic Physique division in the IFBB professional League, spurred me to get back into competition. As I got older, I realized restrictive diets just drained me of all energy whereas the largely plant based but not exclusively plant based foods allowed me to be my fullest and strongest and still melt the fat off my body. I still eat small portions of animal products 3-4oz of meat per meal, but I combine it with plant based products that provide adequate fiber and complex carbohydrates for fuel and to level my blood sugar.

In 2018, I hit the stage in Classic Physique, placing 3rd at Tim Gardner's Tampa Pro show and was encouraged



and felt good about competing in my age group in the Masters Pro division. This past year, 2021, with posing help from Cynthia James of CJ's Elite, I won the Classic Physique Masters Pro 45+ at the Daytona Pro. It was my first win at an IFBB Pro show and I was super excited about that! I placed 2nd at the Legions Sports Fest. It was a good year and I'm looking forward to this upcoming season. I am looking at probably doing 5-6 shows in the 40+ age group starting in July at the new Masters World Championships in Pittsburgh, the Tampa Pro, San Antonio Pro, Hurricane Pro and finishing the year again at the Legions Sports Fest. These days with my new diet and lifestyle, I stay close to competition weight and feel it's so much more effective for me than putting myself through the rigors of gaining a ton of weight just to have to lose 25-30lbs to dial it in for a show.

I learned that I was going into shows too lean at 2.9% body fat. Bringing my body fat up to 7-8% going into the Daytona Pro helped to put me in first place. The Masters division is pretty competitive. There are a lot of masters competitors out there that want to compete; its amazing what 50+ year old dedicated fitness people can look like!

## Blind

Pretty much my whole life my m.o. has been to live my life as a normal person. When I was young, I never wanted to be put in a box. I never wanted people to think of me as disabled, challenged, or handicapped. This way of thinking served me well growing up, but when my vision diminished and being an adult, I had to learn how to get what I needed for survival; but then you surround yourself with good people and that was no longer a challenge. Today, I don't use a cane or a stick. When I'm in familiar places like home or work, I can get around fine. Otherwise, I'm with somebody. I've always been an overachiever, whether it's in school or athletics and as a result, I've had some pretty incredible rewards and experiences. Right or wrong, I'm not sure that it would have been the case if I had not tried my best to get around and meet the challenges I had. Not letting retinitis pigmentosa hold me back, not letting that stop me from achieving what I want to achieve is my goal. I've been able to compete all over the world. I've won numerous championships both amateur and pro. Over the past 30 years, I've trained a lot of people and made a great living at it. Health and fitness have been intertwined in all aspects of my life — hobby, work, school. And it's just been a blessing and truly been amazing to have the experiences and be successful in life doing what you love. Let's face it, there are limitations and then again there are advantages. For me to learn how to work out in a gym with diminished eyesight, it's all about how each movement feels. Being able to do that well and convey it and educate others by explaining what your body is doing, the posture, the stabilization and the technique of engaging the muscles is what made me successful as a trainer.