

Triple-Size Tri's

Build Your Triceps to Monster Proportions

by Greg Zulak
Photography by Michael Neveux

If you've got flat, puny triceps, your arms won't look impressive, no matter how well developed your biceps and torso muscles are. To quote my friend Gunnar Sikk: "Thick triceps are to an upper body what wide tires are to a race car. They impart a powerful and serious look when viewed from the front. Almost mean. When viewed from the side, they balance out pec thickness and make the waist appear smaller."

Genetics, as always, plays a role in what kind of triceps you can eventually develop. If you have short—or high—triceps, you're handicapped because you can't develop muscle where there are no muscle cells. Just about every big-armed champion over the past 60 years has had long, full triceps, especially the long head, the head of the triceps that hangs down under the biceps when you hit a front double-biceps pose. Sergio Oliva's are so lengthy that they actually appear to attach a couple of inches below his elbows. Unbelievable!

On the other hand, my own long heads stop several inches above my elbows, which severely restricts how large I can ever get my triceps. It's a sad fact of life—just as it is for bodybuilders who have short, high calves and will never be able to build impressive lower legs.

Don't throw in the pushdown rope just yet. You can build very impressive triceps even if your long heads are a bit short. Albert Beckles has short triceps long heads as well as short biceps, but that didn't stop him from developing an incredible pair of guns, with ice cream cone peaks for biceps and massive horseshoe triceps.

You may also have problems building big arms if you're an ectomorph—tall, long and skinny with a scarcity of muscle cells in your upper arms. Nevertheless, it can be done. Three-time Mr. Olympia Frank Zane, an ectomorph, had arms that probably didn't measure 18 inches, but he had wicked triceps, especially the rear and lateral heads. He beat men who outweighed him by as much as 50 pounds and whose arms measured two or three inches more than his because his arms were beautifully shaped and developed and his physique was so symmetrical and well-balanced.

As Larry Scott, the first Mr. Olympia and owner of one of the greatest pairs of arms ever, says, it's not enough to build big arms. If you want to look impressive, you have to develop beautiful big arms—arms that make the beholder gasp with amazement and turn green with envy.



Indirect Effect and Its Relation to Big Arms

Not many bodybuilders are aware that there's a direct relationship between the size of their legs and the size of their arms. Vince Gironda, the famous Iron Guru, maintained that 15 percent of arm size comes from leg training. To understand why that's so, you have to understand the idea of indirect effect. Simply put, when one muscle group in the body grows, the rest of the body grows too. The bigger the muscle, the bigger the indirect effect, and since the legs contain the biggest muscles in the body, the bigger they get, the more influence they have on the size of your arms. Just as a large rock creates a bigger splash and waves than a tiny pebble when thrown into a pool of water, hard leg training will bring you big waves of upper-arm growth.

Even if all that weren't true, you'd work your legs to develop the most symmetrical and proportional physique you can. Having big arms with skinny legs just doesn't cut it in the impress-the-ladies department anymore. You have to have the whole package.

Triceps Physiology

As its name suggests, the triceps is a three-headed muscle. Its three sections are 1) the long, or scapular, head; 2) the external, or long humeral, head; and 3) the internal, or short humeral, head. Just as bodybuilders refer to upper pecs and lower pecs to describe their chest muscles when, in fact, it's all one muscle, the pectoralis major, they also refer to upper and lower triceps, inner and outer heads, or lateral and rear heads. Although those are anatomically incorrect, the terms are part of the bodybuilding language because some sections of particular heads may grow faster or slower than other sections. They belong to the same head but react as if they were different heads—or even different muscles. For example, your lower triceps (on the long head) may grow slower than your upper triceps (also on the long head), so you can choose exercises that target the upper or lower



The legs contain the biggest muscles in the body, so the bigger they get, the more size influence they have on your arms.

Model: George Farah \ Equipment: Powertec power rack, 1-800-447-0008

parts of the long head.

Generally, you work two triceps heads with any given compound movement, but one head more strongly than the other. So it takes more than one exercise to fully develop your triceps. Many basic triceps movements mostly target the long head, which is a good thing: The long head is the one on the underside of the upper arm that when developed properly hangs down like the belly of a well-fed great white shark. Even so, you must keep a careful eye on your development so you build the three heads evenly.

When triceps lack size or shape, it's usually not because they're underworked. On the contrary, the triceps are used in so many upper-body exercises—bench presses, inclines, declines, dumbbell presses, behind-the-neck presses, dips, cross-bench pullovers and bent-arm barbell pullovers—that we know volume alone isn't the answer to beautiful, shapely and massively muscular triceps. In fact, many champion bodybuilders do so much work for their pecs, delts,

traps and lats, that they train arms directly only once a week. **Ronnie Coleman** does that in the off-season, and his guns aren't exactly hurting for size.

Heavy vs. Light Training

Some people say you must train your triceps with heavy weights if you hope to develop size. *Heavy* and *light* are relative words, however. If you use 300 pounds for 15 repetitions on close-grip bench presses, that can hardly be described as light training. I generally advise bodybuilders to train in a heavy/light style; that is, one or two exercises with heavy weights for sets of six to 12 repetitions combined with some type of high-rep technique—supersets, tri-sets, drop sets, extended sets or single high-rep sets of 12 to 20. That way you work a variety of fiber types and promote good triceps innervation and a great pump to take advantage of the blood principle: The



Keep your elbows back on dips, not flared out.

Model: Andre Nielsen \ Powertec power rack, 1-800-447-0008

elbows that protect his triceps. The triceps is an extremely strong muscle group, but you must be choosy about where you decide to use that strength. You want to do exercises that work your triceps hard without excessively stressing the elbows. You want to place your arms in a position that puts the biomechanical overload on the triceps muscles and not the joints because while a weight may not be too much for the triceps, but it might be too much for the joint. As a rule, always err on the side of caution. Be a little conservative in your poundage increases. Never do fewer than six reps on triceps exercises, and eight to 12 is nearly always better, especially for extension movements, on which your elbows are in a precarious position.

Here are some of the safest triceps exercises:

- Close-grip bench presses
- Reverse-grip Smith-machine bench presses
- Pushdowns (pushing straight down and away from your body, not in a semicircle, or arc)
- Weighted dips
- Bench dips
- Behind-the-back pushdowns
- Lying triceps extensions (pressing straight up, not in an arc)
- Kneeling long-cable extensions using the pedestal bench
- Kickbacks

These are some of the triceps exercises that can cause the most joint pain:

- One-arm dumbbell extensions
- Lying, incline and decline triceps extensions (moving the weight in an arc)
- Pushdowns (moving your arms in an arc)
- Overhead triceps extensions (done with an EZ-curl bar or straight bar)

The best exercises for triceps mass include these:

- Close-grip bench presses
- Reverse-grip Smith-machine bench presses
- Weighted dips
- Bench dips
- Power pushdowns (pushing the bar straight down and away from your body, not in an arc)
- Flat, incline or decline power lying triceps extensions (lowering the bar to your throat and pushing the bar straight up, not in an arc)
- One-arm dumbbell French presses

Heavy bench presses and other forms of pressing will add to your triceps' strength and mass as well. There are also several manufacturers who make good triceps-building machines that target the important long head (the head that gives the most mass).

Incidentally, the cross-bench dumbbell pullover is a fantastic exercise that works pecs, lats and triceps. If you use it as part of your chest workout along with bench presses, incline presses and dips, your triceps get a great workout before you do a single set of triceps work. Many bodybuilders train chest and triceps in the same workout, so for them it isn't necessary to do too many sets for triceps.



Be cautious with overhead extensions.

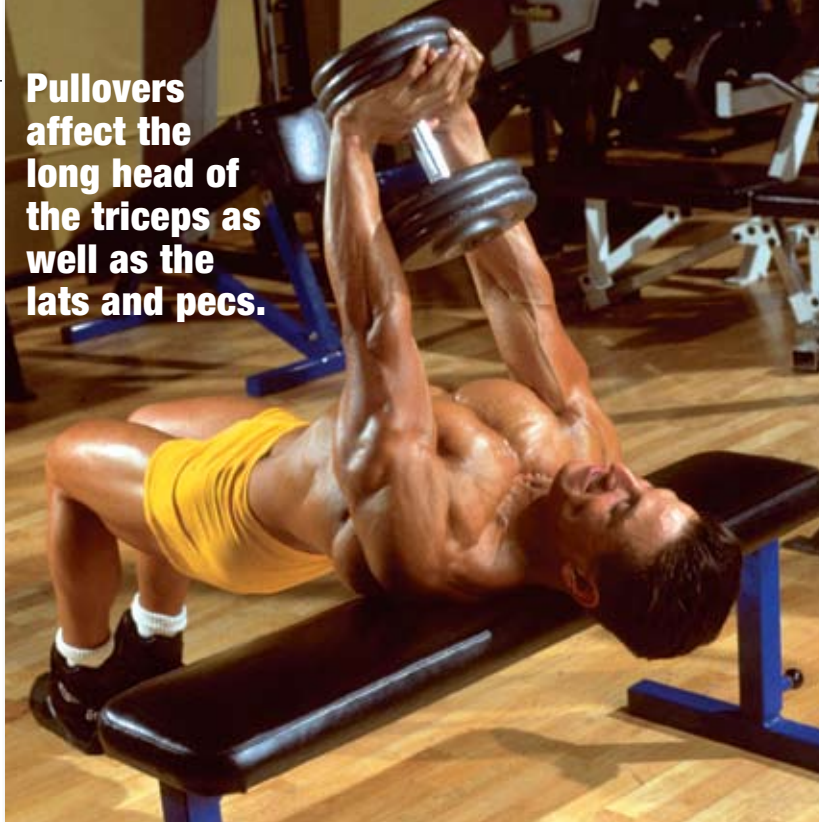
Model: Markus Reinhardt and Humberto Morandell

Too Lock Out or Not?

Many bodybuilders struggle with that question. Some champions swear by locking out, while others say it allows the triceps to rest and reduces muscular tension. Frank Zane, for example, didn't believe in locking out on any triceps exercises, not even on kickbacks, where nearly all the work of the triceps takes place at or near lockout.

Both methods are effective. You can work different sections of the triceps by the way you do each triceps exercise. For example, when doing triceps dips between benches, you can work the high part of the triceps by going to lockout and leaning back to force the triceps to support your body. Or you can do them in partial style, stopping short of lockout. That works the lower section of the triceps harder.

Pullovers affect the long head of the triceps as well as the lats and pecs.



Model: Marvin Montoya

Cable extensions are easier on the elbows and a good alternative to overhead barbell extensions.



Model: Jonathan Lawson

Partial or Full Reps Repts?

Do you like to do shorter, constant-tension/continuous-motion reps or full-range-of-motion reps to lockout? From what I've observed over the years, most champions stop short of lockout except on a few exercises, such as kickbacks. They definitely don't stop the

weight at the bottom or top of the rep. The weight just keeps moving continuously until fatigue forces them to end the set. Champs such as Frank Zane and Sergio Oliva do partial reps and stop short of lockout, but by choosing exercises that together work all the sections of the triceps, they can train the entire muscle fully and more efficiently.

For example, if you do lying triceps extensions, which work the

belly, or middle, of the triceps, and overhead French presses, which work the fully stretched position of the triceps, followed by kickbacks, which work the fully contracted position, then you've worked the entire triceps with only three exercises. That's what Steve Holman calls Positions-of-Flexion training—training a muscle through its full range of motion. [Editor's note: The book *Train, Eat, Grow: The Posi-*

Monster Proportions

tions-of-Flexion Muscle-Training Manual applies POF to all bodyparts. See page 76.]

When I was in Chicago in 1984 to watch Oliva train, I saw him do multiple sets of numerous partial exercises, and when I say partial, I mean really partial. Sometimes the bar only moved about six inches, but he would keep the tension on that one spot until it was burning with fatigue and flooded with blood. It was especially effective on one-arm pushdowns, one-arm reverse pushdowns and numerous angled one-armed extensions.

Sergio's philosophy was, Why not just move the bar over a very short range of motion and keep the tension exactly where he wanted it? He did that with five or six different exercises that together worked the entire triceps muscle, all three heads, well.

Obviously, you have to try both full-range and partial exercises to find out which work better for your triceps. You may find that some movements feel better when you do them over a full range to complete lockout, while others feel better when you do them in constant-tension style—no lockout.

It comes down to innervating the muscle group and pumping the hell out of it. When you're doing heavy sets of bench presses, bent-over rows, squats, deadlifts and so on, it may be necessary to rest three minutes between sets to recover properly. With arms, however, you shouldn't rest that long because you risk losing your pump. I recommend a style of training that Larry



Bench dips are great for working the high part of the triceps.

Model: Jonathan Lawson \ Equipment: PowerBlock-selectorized dumbbell

Scott calls racing the pump; that is, resting 45 seconds to one minute between sets, supersets, tri-sets or whatever. Larry says to try to get the greatest pump with the fewest sets. It's intense!

Exercise Info

There are countless variations of pushdowns, pushups, dips and extension exercises for the triceps. Consult Bill Pearl's *Keys to the Inner Universe* for illustrations of a lot of them. It's a great reference for bodybuilders.

I don't have the room to go into that kind of detail, but here are some tips that should get you on the right track for triceps growth:

Pushdowns. When doing pushdowns, grip the bar so it rests in the meat of your palms, not in your fingers. Many people wrap their fingers around the bar, and that makes pushing down more difficult and the exercise less effective.

Push the bar down and away from your body until you hit lockout—or just short of lockout. If you're doing full-lockout pushdowns, hold the lockout for a second or two and slowly return the bar to the top position. If you're doing pushdowns in constant-tension/continuous-motion style, reverse direction as soon as you get near lockout, and head back to the starting position for another rep.

Behind-the-back triceps pushdowns are a great triceps-mass builder, but you need a training partner to pull the bar down for you until you can grip it and to take the bar from you at the end of the set. Behind-the-back pushdowns are similar to dips between benches, except you can get a longer range of motion and a better lockout at the completion of each rep with the cable. You can actually use more weight with the bar behind you than you can when it's in front. The Blond Bomber, Dave Draper, favored this type of pushdown for building his 20-inch guns.

Dips. Bench dips and parallel-bar dips are great for working the high part of the triceps as well as the rear head. On both movements the triceps lock out harder when you lean back at the top. To contract your triceps to the absolute max, come up as high as you can and then lean back and brace your body with triceps strength alone. Hold for a count of two, and return to the starting position. If you're doing constant-tension/continuous-motion reps, just pump up and down like a piston until fatigue forces you to stop.

When dipping for triceps, it's not



Kickbacks give the tri's a hard peak contraction.

Model: Tamer Eishahat

necessary to go all the way down to full stretch, as it is if you're dipping for pecs. Lower yourself until the biceps make contact with the forearms, and then, if your goal is to work the high, or top, part of the triceps, come all the way up till lockout, with your arms straight. As with the bench dips, it's vital to lean back and brace your body-weight with your triceps. As you descend, use John Parrillo's method of pulling the body down with the strength of your biceps, as that places the triceps under greater tension as you begin the next rep.

Another tip about dipping for triceps: Your elbows should stay tight to your sides and point backward, not out.

Extensions. When performing lying extensions with an EZ-curl bar, you'll get a superior triceps contraction if you push the bar up and back, away from your head, rather than just up. Pushing backward places the elbows in a precarious position, however, so it's wise to use less weight when doing extensions in that style. Keep in mind that muscle stimulation and exhaustion are more important than sheer weight. You should feel a cramping contraction at the completion of each rep, which helps carve out those much-sought-after horseshoes.

Most people do lying triceps extensions in a way that moves the bar in an arc while their upper arms remain motionless and their elbows point to the ceiling. If you use too much weight or cheat too much, it can be an elbow wrecker rather than a triceps builder. Parrillo advocates doing lying triceps extensions so that the bar moves in a straight line rather than an arc. Scott also does his extensions that way. Try it for yourself. Use an EZ-curl bar but lower the bar to your throat and push the weight straight up, very much like a close-grip bench press except you can allow your elbows to flare out to the sides. You can use heavier weights when doing extensions with this technique, and it's better for pure triceps mass.

Close-grip bench presses.

Whether you use a barbell, a Smith



When performing lying extensions, you'll get a superior triceps contraction if you push the bar up and slightly back, away from your head.



machine or an EZ-curl bar, your triceps contract harder when you push the bar up and slightly toward your feet. Use a narrow grip—thumbs about six to 12 inches apart—lower the bar to a low point on your pecs, and then push it up and forward, toward your feet, an inch or two. It helps to grip the bar with your thumbs on the same side as your fingers. You also want to try to keep your elbows flared out to the sides. The little tilt toward your feet places more stress on the outside head of the triceps, as well as the meaty long head. You can accentuate that by putting a two-by-four or a couple of barbell plates under the end of the bench so you're on a 10 degree decline.

Overhead extensions. Regarding one-arm extensions, I used to be more adamant about keeping the working arm tight against the side of my head and my elbow pointing straight up (at 12 o'clock) to guard against cheating. I've found that you can move more weight and innervate the triceps a little better on some sets if you allow your arm to move a few inches away from your head, with the elbow pointing somewhere between 10 and 11 o'clock for the right arm and 1 to 2 o'clock for the left. Another tip is to reach across your face and grab your working triceps with your free hand, which enables you to better feel the triceps working.

Model: John Hansen

Rope pushdowns can provide more outer-triceps-head development.



Model: David Yeung



Model: Marvin Montoya

Push the bar up and slightly toward your feet on close-grip bench presses.

Something else to try is to use a curl grip on one-arm extensions. Vince Gironda advocated that for developing the inner head of the triceps as well as the lower part of the long head.

You can also try using a curl grip on lying dumbbell extensions, a favorite bulk builder of the Iron Guru. Start with dumbbells over your chest and touching, hands facing each other. Keeping your elbows high and still, lower the dumbbells behind your head, rotating your arms inward so your knuckles are pointing away from your head at the bottom, with your arms holding the dumbbells as if you were doing curls. Raise the 'bells in the reverse movement, with your arms rotating outward into a hammer curl position, with the thumbs up, until the 'bells meet over your chest. Make sure the weights touch at the top of each rep.

Obviously, you can also use the

curl grip on pushdowns and one-arm pushdowns to work more of the lower- and inner-triceps areas.

A good rear-head exercise is front pulley extensions, a.k.a. forward-lunge cable extensions. Use a rope extension or an angled triceps bar. Face away from the lat machine, and grip the rope or bar. Lean forward from your waist and then, using triceps strength alone, extend your arms forcibly out over your head. Get a good contraction on each rep—unless you discover you can feel constant-tension/continuous-motion reps better.

These are similar to a Larry Scott favorite, kneeling long-cable extensions performed on a twin-pedestal bench. Try supersetting them with kickbacks to work your rear heads hard.

Dumbbell kickbacks. Although you can do this exercise

It helps to grip the bar with your thumbs on the same side as your fingers.

With two dumbbells simultaneously, it's more concentrated when you work one arm at a time. It's a good one for carving the triceps so they look full and impressive even when your arms are hanging straight down.

Experiment with different grips. While most people do kickbacks with a hammer grip—thumb on the bottom—you can work the muscle a little differently if you use a curl grip, with your knuckles facing forward and your palms facing back.

If you're looking for more constant tension, you can do kickbacks on the low pulley of a cable crossover machine or a seated rowing station.

Triceps Training

The triceps respond very well to supersets, tri-sets, drop sets, down-the-racks and extended sets of any kind. Keep that in mind as you check out a few of my favorite routines.

Heavy/Light Big-Pump Routine

EZ-curl-bar decline extensions	4 x 8-12
Close-grip bench presses (last set is a drop set)	4 x 6-15
Tri-set	
Kneeling rope extensions or one-dumbbell extensions	4 x 10
Pushdowns	4 x 8-10
Bench dips	4 x max

Take no rest between exercises in the tri-set and a maximum of one minute's rest between tri-sets. Also take just one minute's rest between the decline extensions and the close-grip bench presses.

Preexhaust Triceps Routine

Superset

Pushdowns 3 x 8-10
Dips 3 x 8-10

Superset

EZ-curl-bar decline extensions 3 x 8-12
Close-grip bench presses 3 x 8-12

Superset (for rear head)

Two-dumbbell kickbacks 3 x 8-12
Reverse-grip bench presses 3 x 8-12

The Pure Mass Routine

Superset

Power EZ-curl bar lying extensions (move bar in straight line) 4 x 10
Close-grip bench presses 4 x 8-12

Superset

Seated one-dumbbell French presses 4 x 10
Power pushdowns (push straight down and away from body, elbows flaring) 4 x 8-10

Superset

Weighted dips 4 x 8-10

Take no rest between movements and only one minute's rest between supersets. If the volume is too great for proper recovery, reduce the supersets to three instead of four.

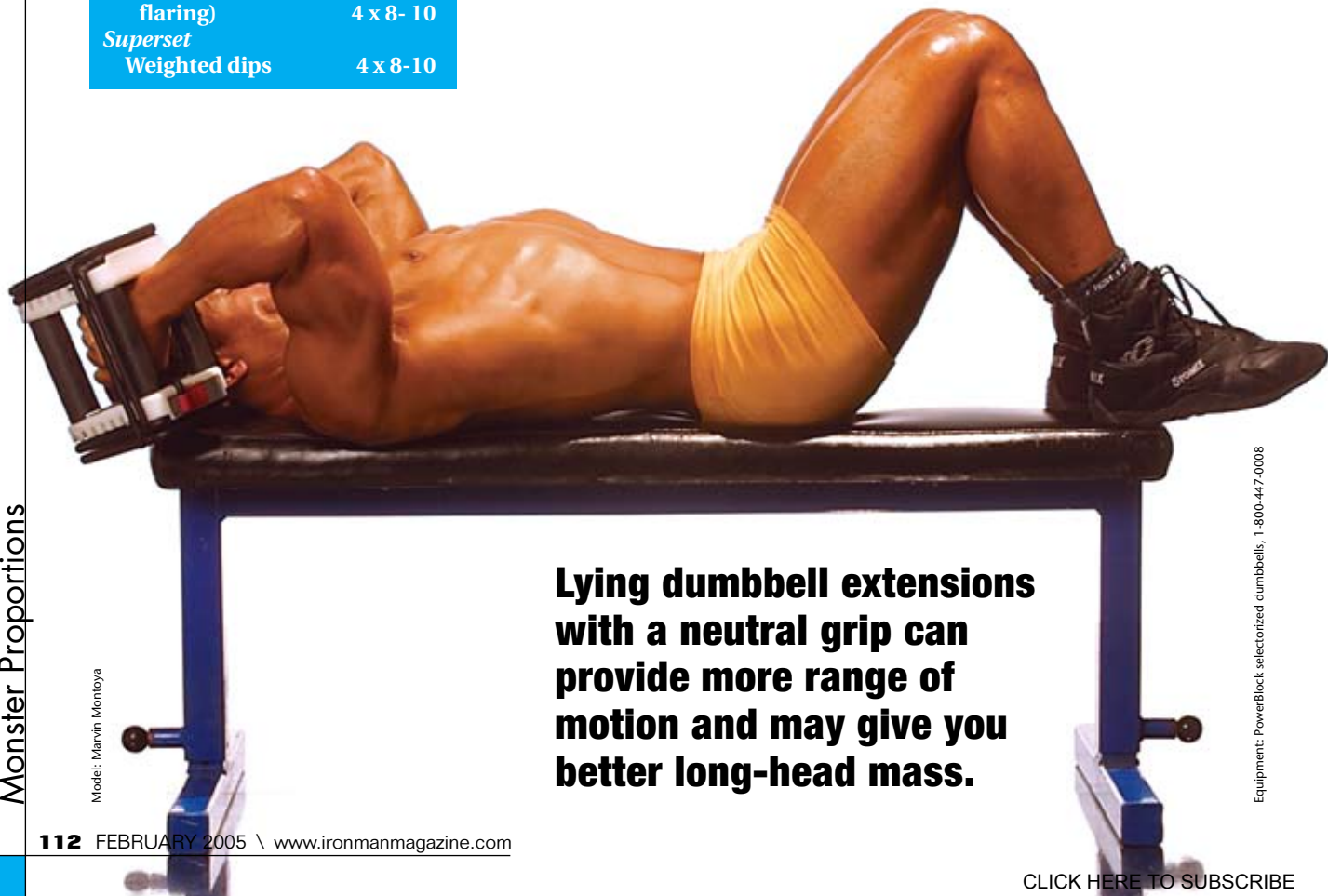
The triceps is one of the most impressive bodyparts and is the key to having massive—and beautiful—arms. I've gone way overboard on details here, but I'm confident that if you apply this stuff in the gym, you'll improve your triceps by monster proportions in the next few months.

IM



One-arm work can provide better focus and contraction.

Model: Todd Smith



Lying dumbbell extensions with a neutral grip can provide more range of motion and may give you better long-head mass.

Model: Marvin Montoya

Equipment: PowerBlock selectorized dumbbells, 1-800-447-0008

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When I was a teenager, I had dreams of being so big and muscular that jaws would drop when I walked on a beach. I also had dreams of competing in the sport of bodybuilding, but I refused to resort to bodybuilding drugs. They were out of the question for me because the rewards simply weren't worth the risks. I was determined to rely solely on training and nutrition.

The real size I was seeking didn't materialize, however, no matter what I tried. I began to think that the drug users at the gym were right, that it was impossible to build exceptional size and strength without anabolic steroids. Even so, I refused to risk my health and convictions, and my training gradually slacked off, falling by the wayside. By the time I was 21, my 5'11" physique had leveled off at a soft 190 pounds.

As chance would have it, I got a job in the product division of *IRONMAN* magazine and met Steve Holman, the editor in chief. He told me he had developed programs that could add pounds of muscle to just about anyone's frame in a few months. Talking to Steve motivated me to start training hard again, and here's the real kicker: I convinced him to train with me. When he agreed, I felt a wave of motivation unlike any I'd ever experienced before. Steve had developed the Positions-of-Flexion muscle-building system and written a number of books, so I had a good feeling that he could help me take my muscle size and strength over the top.

I trained hard, ate well and consistently and concentrated on doing my best at every workout. To say I was shocked by the results is putting it mildly. My muscle size took a radical leap: I added almost 20 pounds in only 10 weeks. My bodypart measurements and strength increases also amazed me: arms, up 1 1/4 inches;



es; thighs, up 1 1/2 inches; waist, down one inch; bench, up from 200x10 to 290x6; squat, up from 205x8 to 335x7. Unbelievable—and I did all that in 10 weeks with no steroids, just hard, sensible training, a regimented eating schedule and a few choice supplements. Considering my sputtering progress in the past, those gains were miraculous.

Adding new muscle that quickly felt incredible. Thanks to the *IRONMAN* Training & Research Center, Steve Holman and POF, I'm very close to my dream physique and I appear in the magazine regularly. I even made the cover. I'm positive that once you try POF and channel your motivation, you'll make some of the best gains of your training career. POF blows the doors off anything you've ever tried in the gym. We've even had bodybuilders who start using POF say they thought their skin might split because the influx of blood is so fast and furious. That growth effect is from the max muscle fiber recruitment and full-range work POF provides for each target muscle—and it only takes a few sets so you have much more recovery energy to grow.

If you want to learn how to use POF, I suggest you check out the Critical Mass video series, which includes "Critical Arms," "Critical Chest & Delt" and "Critical Legs & Back." Each half-



Today, thanks to POF training, I'm an *IRONMAN* cover model and I appear in the magazine almost every month.

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IRONMAN Research Team Member

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