

The State of the Bodybuilding Nation – Brian Robitaille on Physique Sports in Canada



Normally, I reserve this space each month to broadcast my own thoughts on bodybuilding and other things. But to kick off 2013, I thought it best to let Physique Canada’s president, Brian Robitaille, have a turn through an interview, since he had quite a few experiences in 2012, resulting in many things he wanted to share with Canada’s physique enthusiasts. Physique Canada is the nation’s newest physique organization, and based on what happened in 2012, likely to be the most successful and fastest-growing. And Brian Robitaille, despite being the president in a new organization, is hardly a novice when it comes to bodybuilding – he won national-level titles with the CBBF in 2000 and 2002, and he represented Canada at the IFBB’s world championships in 2000. After he retired from competing, he focused on a successful judging and contest-promotion career. So when he has something to say, it’s worth listening to.

I talked with Brian in late December, a short time after he returned from the 2012 WBPF World Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Championships, which were held in Thailand at the beginning of December. Here is what he had to say:

Doug Schneider: *Were you happy with Physique Canada’s first year?*

Brian Robitaille: More than happy. We started out with high expectations, and we have more than met them. In some areas we exceeded expectations. For example, we achieved 20 percent doping-control rates, of which 20 percent was out-of-contest testing – unparalleled in our industry and, from the information I’ve received, likely ten times as much as our IFBB rival in Canada.

DS: *What's your vision for Physique Canada, as well as for men's and women's physique events in Canada?*

BR: Simply stated, Physique Canada strives to be "Best-in-Class." We have the infrastructure, the experienced leadership, and the commitment to carry this out. Our vision is to judiciously expand to offer competitors from across the country a place to compete on a level playing field for a chance to compete on the world stage. Physique sports have to embrace a drug-free attitude in order to be relevant to the average Joe and Jane. For example, women's bodybuilding has already become marginalized due to rampant drug abuse and is effectively a dead category in Canadian bodybuilding.

DS: *To the best of my knowledge, Physique Canada is the only organization in Canada aggressively taking on the issue of drug use by using stringent testing means and WADA-like procedures. But there were no doping failures in 2012. Does that mean the drug users are staying away, or are some athletes simply "beating the tests"?*

BR: Isn't that the perennial question? Certainly there are ways to beat drug tests, as Lance Armstrong proved recently. But to reliably and repeatedly beat the WADA doping controls, you need a large budget and world-class medical experts on your team. Frankly, that eliminates 90 percent of the Canadian physique athletes. WADA testing is the gold standard, so we are confident that if we stick with that protocol we will have a decent dragnet.



Physique Canada champions (left to right): Kim Chartrand, Rob DeLuca, and Michele Steeves

I believe that because we have a very strong anti-drug stance, one that we loudly and repeatedly publicize, the druggies have stayed away. And let's be honest, most folks in our sport are sophisticated enough to recognize obvious steroid use, and we have not seen anyone get on our stage in 2012 who caused our "spider senses" to flare up. As we become more successful and our organization grows, no doubt cheaters will start to make ill-advised attempts to participate in our competitions (our prize money might be one of the enticements for cheaters) – that's when I

believe we will start to see doping-control failures crop up. But, looking at the bodies that competed with us in 2012, I believe that all of those that we tested are authentically clean and drug-free.

DS: *You just attended the World Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Organization's (WBPF) world championships and congress in Bangkok, Thailand. The WBPF is Physique Canada's international affiliate; likewise, Physique Canada is the only organization in Canada recognized by them. What's your perception of that organization? Are their goals and ideals in line with yours?*

BR: It was quite the experience. I learned a great deal about bodybuilding in the rest of the world. I realized that we in North America are completely self-absorbed and are completely unaware of what is really happening internationally. The WBPF is basically a re-formed IFBB – version 2.0, if you will. Most of its leaders were with the IFBB until a few years ago. It has a legitimate constitution and is legally registered in the United Kingdom. More important, it has the moral high ground in that it is a democratic non-profit sports organization with 70-plus member countries, and growing. That last bit is important – from what I can see, the IFBB is dwindling internationally, as countries opt out wholesale and re-affiliate with the WBPF. One just has to look at the roster of countries with the WBPF to see that. We're proud to be involved.

I was fortunate to attend several meetings while I was in Thailand. I even had a one-hour private meeting with the secretary general, Paul Chua. A harder-working man you'll never meet. He tirelessly promotes bodybuilding and has dedicated his life to the sport. He and I are on the same page. He completely understands our position on drugs: that they will be the demise of our sport. I will work with Dr. Delbeke, who is also with the WBPF, to improve doping control in both Canada and North America, and across the globe.

DS: *Right now men's and women's physique competitions aren't regarded by the public as "sports." Part of that has to do with the rampant drug abuse that goes on, but other factors contribute too, including the way the organizations are run. Do you think Physique Canada can change that perception?*

BR: Bodybuilding, as a sport, was kicked out of the World Games organization a few years ago. Under the leadership of the IFBB at the time, bodybuilders represented most of the positive drug tests (close to 70 percent is a figure that comes to mind), and so the second-largest amateur sports body in the world declared bodybuilding not worthy of being a legitimate sport (in that it is obviously just a drug-fest for narcissists). Ouch, that hurt, as truth often does.



Brian Robitaille (far left) at the WBPF's annual meeting

In Asia and the Middle East, bodybuilding is still considered a legitimate sport and is well integrated into their national sports bodies and Olympic councils. More often than not, these countries' anti-doping agencies are compelled to test bodybuilding competitions. This entrenchment of bodybuilding as a sport is historic and the Asian Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Federation (ABBF), as part of the bigger WBPF, is largely credited for this advocacy of bodybuilding as sport over the past 50 years or so. With regards to bodybuilding as a "sport," the future lies in cleaning up the drugs and having a governing body that has integrity at its core. Physique Canada has signed on, in a big way, with the most legitimate governing body for bodybuilding in the world: the WBPF. We have a seat on their Executive Council, in fact. That alone holds us to the highest standards.

DS: *Is it possible that an organization like Physique Canada could be recognized by something like Sport Canada?*

BR: It hasn't been accomplished by any other organization in Canada so far. As I mentioned already, many Asian national affiliates of WBPF have official recognition from their respective countries, so we are motivated to start a dialogue in that direction.

DS: *The year 2012 was a great one, so what can you do in 2013 to make it better?*

BR: More of the same! Just like a physique competitor improving his/her physique, we will grow our organization in both quality and quantity. We will add at least one more contest to the schedule, keep advancing our doping-control program, improve existing judges and recruit new ones, bring more people into leadership roles, and continue to focus on providing a stage for athletes to fulfill their physique dreams.

DS: *The 2013 WBPF World Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Championships will be held in November in Budaörs, Hungary. Will Canada be sending a team?*

BR: You bet! The extent to how much financially we can support a team will depend on the revenues we generate from the local contests. Certainly our cash prizes alone can be an excellent support, should the Tier 1 Elite winner of the Canadian Championships in October 2013 elect to represent Canada. After witnessing firsthand the caliber of the World Championships that just happened in Thailand, I encourage all the winners to make the effort to go in 2013 – the best of the best in the world will be there, and it would be a once in a lifetime experience for most, something that (s)he will never forget.

DS: *Thanks for the update, Brian. We should make this a regular thing.*

BR: Great idea, Doug!

To learn more about Physique Canada, visit www.PhysiqueCanada.ca.