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## **Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...Who's the Biggest, Buffest, Baddest of Them All?**

Citius...Altius...Fortius...(Faster, Higher, Stronger) Understanding that the human body is designed for movement and that the human spirit loves a challenge, the Olympic motto reflects an ideal. Vitally important to health and well-being, an effective fitness program incorporates a balance of aerobic activities, resistance training, stretching, and self-discipline. Depending on your conditioning, you will improve your agility, flexibility, speed, power, and cardiovascular and muscular endurance. You will strengthen muscles and bones. Your body composition will also be affected, helping to control weight. The benefits of a healthy dedication to exercise extend to mental and emotional dimensions as well. Current research links exercise to increased intellectual functioning of the brain. And perhaps the most motivating aspect of exercise can be found in our earliest experience of it – play. Exercise should be fun and not just because your brain produces endorphins. A healthy commitment to exercise brings a sense of personal achievement, improved physical performance, and enjoyment.

Buy...Buy...Buy...Unfortunately, omnipresent marketing, fueled by a sports-obsessed culture, has shaped the contemporary image of the ideal male body in order to sell products. Teenagers have become a very lucrative demographic. Close ups of slicked, six-pack abs and bulging biceps adorn everything from magazine covers and Abercrombie billboards to muscle drinks and YouTube teasers. Supplements and specialized equipment ads promise bulk and “skin-bursting” results. They usually fail to mention that an increase in muscle mass during adolescence is primarily controlled by hormones. The shift in emphasis from muscle function for movement to muscle gain for visual impact reflects an alarming change in priorities. This constant pressure to get big can have insidious psychological effects.

Big...Bigger...Biggest...A healthy commitment to empowering your body to achieve its full potential can become a compulsion to train or an obsession with bulk. The normal curiosity and concern most humans have as they undergo natural physical transformations can develop into the fear of not growing fast or big enough. Misguided parents, coaches, and peers can unwittingly add to the problem by making invalid comparisons of size and drawing erroneous conclusions about effort. Focusing on what they should look like instead of on what they are capable of doing with what they have, some teens fall into a crisis of “muscular identity.” At the extreme, individuals can develop muscle dysmorphia – a kind of reverse anorexia. Forgetting that success in athletics is influenced not only by size but also by endurance, power, speed, strength, agility, and flexibility, they obsess only about becoming bigger.

Potential signs that your discipline is turning unhealthy:

- Mirror Addiction – you cannot get enough of yourself.

- Scale Dependence – you find yourself on your scale daily.
- Guilt – you feel so awful about missing a conditioning session that you are compelled to exercise before you can sleep.
- Fear - you feel genuine fear about food (you ate a candy bar; you didn't get enough protein for the day; you didn't eat enough), fear about missing exercise (you'll lose all your muscles by morning), or fear about your appearance (too skinny, too fat, too short, too lanky, too scrawny).
- Temptation to take anabolic steroids – you want to bypass the normal process of muscular development and gain muscle mass far beyond your natural individual capacity, forgetting that the lasting dangers outweigh the temporary gains in bulk.
- Neglecting other aspects of your life – conditioning becomes your ultimate priority.

No Pain...No Gain...No Brain...An exaggerated concentration on size is not only counterproductive, it can be dangerous. While weight lifting is an essential component in optimal physical development, those who spend more time lifting than practicing their sport risk ending up with a lot of useless muscle mass. Only movement can give meaning to your muscles. Another danger of an exercise fixation is the tendency to ignore pain. While tolerating discomfort may be an acceptable part of any physical challenge, ignoring pain is not. Overuse, especially while your body is still growing, can cause serious damage to your joints and spine. Permanent injuries are often preventable if you listen to and respect your body. Teens who hide pain in order to keep playing, exercising, or lifting are not acting in their own best interest. It takes guts to stand up for your "self."

Balance...Confidence...Performance... Choose an approach to exercise that empowers rather than enslaves. This is an attainable ideal.

- Set realistic goals which develop *your* body and challenge *your* spirit.
- Decide who is in charge of your "self" – Madison Avenue? The program? You?
- Wink at the mirror. It doesn't tell you what you are made of.
- Seek advice from expert coaches who care about you. There are plenty of them at BB&N!
- Include rest and recovery as an integral part of your training.
- Compete with yourself instead of comparing your scores with others.
- Focus on what you can control.
- Ask yourself, before buying supplements, products, and contraptions, "To whom does it profit the most?"
- Listen to your body.
- Express your concerns to someone you trust if you feel like things are getting out of control.

- Laugh at the “shirt-ripping vascular look” ads.
- Be patient. Your body is undergoing an amazing transformation.

And remember with every heartbeat to be grateful for all that your body does for you.