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## Death of the Meathead

CrossFitting powerlifter Chris Moore visits a bodybuilding show and ponders the evolution of fitness.

By Chris Moore CrossFit Memphis

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Courtesy of Chris Moore

*"I feel a change comin' on"*

— Bob Dylan

Right around Highway 61 and State Line Road, we realized just how late we were.

Damn. The show was starting in 10 minutes, and we were still 45 minutes outside of town. Maybe it was because we didn't really want to go in the first place. After all, this was no place for our kind. If you only train for performance, then why the hell come here, to a bodybuilding show, for chrissakes?

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It doesn't matter. This crew trains together. And when you train together, you show up, no matter what. It's been said, "Buy the ticket. Take the ride."

### Welcome to Tunica

We pushed the pace to 80 in a 60. I wasn't about to go any faster down a narrow two-lane highway.

"I'm not dying for this," I thought.

A little on the late side, it occurred to us that we weren't even sure where to go.

"It's at Sam's Town Casino, right?"

"Yeah, it should be right up there," Jani said. "Maybe just a few more minutes?"

In the burgeoning mess of tourist traps, all the buildings had the same facade. Who the hell could tell them apart?

"I thought Sam's Town was here ... . No, that's the Horseshoe," I said, confused. "Let me call Mike." The rest of the crew from the gym were right on our heels.

"Mike! Where were we supposed to go again? Sam's Town, right?"

"Hello? Who's this?"

"It's Chris!"

"Mike's not here. You'll have to talk to Mike Beezy. I'm Mike Beezy now!"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Beezy! Anyway ... . The casino's in Tunica. I think it's in Tunica."

I could practically smell the Sailor Jerry through the cell phone. Mike exemplifies the work-hard, train-hard, party-hard mindset. My only thought: "Looks like it's going to be an interesting night."

We arrived at the venue just mere minutes before Nicole was to go on stage. Not a problem. It was just a matter of getting inside, scooping up a pair of tickets and sneaking down to our seats. I was instantly reminded of why I hate these places.

### Welcome to Hell

To step into the lobby is to find yourself lodged in a bizarre world. In the middle, a gigantic fire-engine-red monster truck is on display. Apparently, if luck be your lady tonight, you can drive home in this thing. Circling

around the truck are a sample of the local population. The stereotypical country folk getting 'er done. The confused obese couple looking for the entrance to the all-you-can-eat barbecue buffet. Dehabilitated grandmothers driving around on battery-powered Rascals, pension checks in hand. It's all overwhelming.

We make our way back to the customer-service counter. There are only about five to 10 people in line. What a relief. I approach the counter, "We're hear for the Battle of the Bluff. Two tickets, please."



Courtesy of Chris Moore

*Former WWE and WCW wrestler Sid Eudy (Sid Vicious) going guns in a posedown in Mississippi.*



Courtesy of Chris Moore

**Nicole Conner might have competed in a bodybuilding/fitness show, but she's still training for performance.**

"Oh, sorry." The clerk responds. "You'll have to go upstairs. The escalator is right behind you, there. Just go right on up. It's on your right. Can't miss it."

"Uh, sure. Thanks."

Halfway up, we're bathed with an escalating white noise, the sound of a couple of hundred chattering mouths. Looking over the rail, we find ourselves entering the gluttonous second circle of Dante's hell. There is a massive winding line of humanity for as far as we can see. All are here for the show.

How could we tell? It's way too easy to spot a bodybuilding fan. All along the outer edge of the line, you can see nothing but the elbows of young men who are desperately trying to make themselves look as wide as possible. Each is wearing some variety of bedazzled MMA shirt, complete with either angel wings or dueling goth skulls. All together, they look like shimmering chain-mail scales on a long Jersey Shore serpent.

"We're not going to make it. No way I'm waiting in that line with these guys."

I start preparing my apology to Nicole: "Sorry for missing your competition. Yes, yes. I know I should have bought tickets ahead of time. Look, here's 20 bucks. Go knock yourself out on the slots. I hear they're especially loose tonight."

At that moment, Nicole's husband shows up out of nowhere with the solution.

"What are you guys doing?" Rob Conner says. "She's almost on stage."

"Dude, there's no way we're getting tickets in time. See that line?"

"Wow. Yeah, that ain't gonna work. Tell you what: just come with me."

We work our way down through the back of the casino, through the hotel, to the entrance of the event hall. As we get closer and closer to the show, I can't help but notice this persistent smell getting stronger and stronger and stronger. It's Preparation H. Bodybuilders apparently use it to dehydrate the skin, giving the illusion of a leaner physique. It gives me the impression that bodybuilders are even bigger assholes than I had first imagined.

"Now, Jani, I'm going to give you my spare ticket. We'll walk into the show together. Then when you leave to go to the bathroom, take both tickets with you and bring Chris in."

"The ol' switcharoo? Is that going to work?" I ask.

"Sure. The guy at the door doesn't look that sharp. He's not even paying attention."

Rob is right. It works like a charm. We both get in, right on time to see Nicole walk, and we didn't have to drop \$70 on tickets. Was it the wrong thing to do? Sure. But fitting. There's already so much wrong with this sport to begin with.

### The Belly of the Beast

At ground zero, the heavily lit stage is surrounded by a thousand-odd physique-o-philes. The outer perimeter features vendors of all types peddling their wares. It's the usual crap. Extreme nutrition programs, super hardcore workout apparel. One shirt I notice says, "Only the Strong Survive." Just what you must wear to achieve hugeness.

On the stage, the novice heavyweight men are completing their posedowns. They're all veins and bloat. With the strain of flexion, their faces fill with bright red blood. In between poses, they gasp for breath—the very picture of health and fitness. The announcer calls out, "All right, gentlemen, please face the rear of the stage. Hands over abdominals. Excellent. Double biceps ... into rear lat spread."

From the audience, a man stands up and shouts at the top of his voice, "Spread it, Tommy. Spread it! Fuck, yeah, man!"

"Jesus," I think, "is this a competition or an exhibition prison search?"

All throughout the procedure, contemporary pop metal permeates the venue. It's all too much for a sane mind to tolerate. But we are here for a reason. Remember that. Just then, Mike Beezy and the rest of the crew arrive. They seem a little bit dazed to me. Perhaps it's the heavy perfume of Ed Hardy cologne in that ticket line or sticker shock from discovering the ticket price. I act sympathetic.

"Man, I know right? Bummer."

"Well, at least there are some hot chicks here," Mike says.



Courtesy of Chris Moore

**Functional training isn't about aesthetics, but some fitness competitors find great success with CrossFit.**

"Only if you like them extra crispy and full of hard edges. I think they've all been tanning a little too much. It's disturbing."

"Yeah, disturbingly awesome."

As the men exit the stage, I take a moment to look around the crowd. One thing is clear: these are folks who really want to be someone else. They want to be bigger, leaner ... more than what they are. Then a thought crosses my mind. Here I am, a 300-lb. tattooed man at a bodybuilding show. Somewhere in this audience, there's a guy eyeing me down right now and thinking to himself, "Look at this guy. What a poser." Fair enough.

The announcer calls out for the next group: "And now, our next competitors are the girls in bikinis."





Courtesy of Chris Moore

**Using nothing but CrossFit Nicole placed fifth in her first show.**

Cue the hooting and hollering from the sex-crazed, hormone-fed attendees.

"Sensuality. Sexuality. Soft and smooth—just like me."

Everyone shares an uneasy laugh.

Girl No. 15 is the first to walk across the stage, then No. 29 ... No. 33. They all carefully hit their marks, assuming the same catwalk action pose at the end of the runway.

A guy beside us decides to make small talk.

"Man, eight bucks for a Bud Light! Can you believe that?"

"You guys got a girl up there?"

"Yeah, one of the girls from our gym is competing."

"Oh yeah? Right on. What gym you guys from?"

"We all train at CrossFit Memphis," Mike replies.

"CrossFit?"

"Yeah. We don't really care too much for aesthetics. We mostly train for performance. Our friend wanted to come down and compete, so we're hear to support her."

"I can dig that. I mean, I may look a'puss, but I can do some shit. I lift up at 24 Hour Fitness."

"Cool. You know, you should come by our place sometime. Saturdays are free, so—"

He interrupts. "Damn! D'you see that dude? Man, I'd give \$100,000 to look like that guy."

Amused, I reply, "Yeah, that's probably what it would cost you."

"Winstrol, baby! *Winstrol*. I'll get there. I'll be looking just like Sid Vicious! You'll see."

It's Nicole's turn to walk.

"And from Cordova, Tennessee, give it up for girl No. 31 ... Nicole!"

This took some courage, going out there in nothing but a little bikini. She'd had no previous experience or coaching. The only training she had done for this show was CrossFit. She looked incredible.

"Rob, she looks great. I'm surprised. Well, not surprised ... It's just that, she—"

"You know that spray tan shit costs \$100? \$100!"

"Yeah, well, she does look pretty dark. I guess you have to have it under those bright stage lights."

"The bikini's over \$100, too. It all adds up. But as long as she's having fun, I guess. I'm proud of her."

As all 10 ladies line up for judging, the announcer hands them each a red rose. You see, It's very important to make a lady feel like a lady, especially after you make her feel like a piece of meat up for auction. After a brief pause, the bottom five girls are asked to leave the stage. Oh, the rejection. At least the bottom girl is spared the humiliation of being asked to leave first. The judges pause again. Then out of the silence, No. 31 is called.



Courtesy of Chris Moore

*The CrossFit Memphis crew. The author is at the the far right.*

Nicole took fifth place. Now she can always say she placed at a figure show, her very first, no less. Fourth and third follow, with a dramatic unveiling of the first-place winner. As she is crowned, the announcer cues the Nickelback victory song: "She didn't make it this far by just shaking hands." Wow, very classy. This must be every little girl's dream.

We all meet up with Nicole backstage after the show to congratulate her on how great she did and how great she looked.

"You're so tiny!" Jani says. "How'd you do it?"

"Simple. Don't eat!"

"See, that's your problem. You can't prepare for something like this by eating just a bowl of cornflakes in the morning," Rob says.

"No! The judges told me I wasn't sexy enough! They said it's sex that sells, and that I should try and be more seductive. Forget it. I'm a mother! I'm not shaking my butt on some stage!"

We all pause, nodding in agreement. Paying no attention to Rob, Mike Beezy leans in close to Nicole, "I like your earrings. They're dangly. What are you doing later?"

### **It's Evolution, Baby**

At that show, I saw a dying, antiquated culture. The era of the meathead is quickly coming to an end, and not because the lives of these people revolve around their "fitness" goals. I'm very much aware that we all share that focus. No, it all comes down to the root motive. Why do you do what you do?

That culture is familiar to anyone who has ever been inside a modern Globo Gym and anyone who has ever picked up a health and fitness magazine in hopes of finding some knowledge. In this scene, everything is done for someone else. You're not lean enough—unless you're as lean as that girl on the magazine cover. You're not big enough—unless you're as big as that one huge guy in your gym. This is not a path to long-term success and fulfillment. It's an unsustainable path to failure.

Picture in your head the stereotypical, brutish Neanderthal. They dominated most of Europe and Asia for at least 300,000 years. That body plan and way of life worked for a very long time. They had reason, language, complex social structures, beliefs, hopes. But they were only good enough until something better showed up. Something sexy, long and lean, more keen. Something whose time had come. That same kind of shift is manifesting in gyms like ours all over the world.

What is *our* motive? We do it for us. We train to become capable, more like what we were meant to be. We take what is useful and throw away what is not. Within our crew, we build community. We take the time to get to know the people we train with, to learn more about ourselves. We turn the volume to 11 and let the chalk fly.

To all the brutes out there, I only have one thing to say: You should come by our place sometime. Saturdays are always free.



### About the Author

*Chris Moore is writer and powerlifting Coach at [CrossFit Memphis](#). Prior to his lifting career, Chris played Division 1 football at the University of Memphis. During this time, he began his study of human performance, eventually obtaining a master's degree in exercise and sport science. In 2007, Chris joined Mike Bledsoe, Doug Larson and Rob Conner to found Memphis' first CrossFit gym.*

*Today, CrossFit Memphis has grown to include powerlifters, weightlifters and mixed martial artists, all training and competing under the banner of Faction Strength & Conditioning. As a drug-free lifter, Chris' best competitive lifts include a 975-lb. squat, a 675-lb. bench press and 675-lb. deadlift.*

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