

'05 FitExpo's Fittest Couple:
Mike and Holly Semanoff



Pair of Aces

Utah Team Takes Pasadena by Storm to Win the '05 FitExpo's Fittest Couple Competition

by **David Young**

Photography by Michael Neveux

Mike and Holly Semanoff had no plans to enter a contest when they came to Los Angeles to visit some friends during the weekend of the '05 *IRON MAN* FitExpo in nearby Pasadena. Out shopping, they saw a flyer about the expo and decided to go. "We were just walking around, checking out the expo, when we heard there was a competition called the Fittest Couple," recalled Mike. "Someone said, 'You two should enter.'

"So on a whim we did. The next thing we knew, we were shopping for swimsuits so we could compete. Then we made the finals."

Mike and Holly ended up taking the top spot at the contest, and I was assigned to find out more about this wonder couple. (When you see their list of accomplishments, you'll understand why I'm calling them that). These two are on a natural high, so buckle up, kids, because it's quite a ride.

Pair of Aces



DY: Mike and Holly, how old are you, and what are your height and weight?

HS: I'm 21, 5'4" inches tall and weigh 120 pounds.

MS: And I'm 27, 5'11" and weigh 205.

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DY: [Thinks for a second he has a shot] So, Holly, you like older men, huh?

HS: Well, *this* older man.

DY: **Drat! How long have you been training?**

MS: Since I started playing football and running track, about 14 or 15 years.

HS: I didn't get serious until about 2 1/2 years ago.

DY: **Do you both have backgrounds in athletics?**

MS: I was involved in college athletics before and after the Army. Before the Army I played football for a school that is now called BYU Idaho, and after the service I competed in track and field. I did the 100 meters, 200 meters, 4x100-meter relay, shot put and discus. I went to the NJCAA nationals with our relay team in 2002. I also competed in various triathlons with the school's team. I took a silver medal for my age group in the '02 Utah Summer Games.

HS: I have been pretty active my whole life. I played various sports, including softball, soccer, football and track. In high school I was a sprinter, running the 100 meters, 200 meters and 4x100-meter relay and doing the long jump. Unfortunately, in my junior year I tore my hamstring in the 100, and in my senior year I broke my back. Those injuries nagged me for years, prohibiting me from doing a lot of things. It was only when I started doing yoga that the pain and tightness started to go away, and eventually they were gone completely. I became a yoga instructor because of that. I'm currently training for a triathlon and hoping also to do my first figure competition soon.

DY: **Mike, what about when you were in the service: Did you continue your training?**

MS: I served in Saudi Arabia with the 82nd Airborne Division for six

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months. The environment was perfect for training. We had a lot of time, food and motivation. I weighed 215, benched 315 for 18 reps, squatted for three sets of 15 with 405 and still managed to run two miles in under 12 minutes. To this day I don’t know how I did that.

DY: [Jokes] From the sound of it, you two are real under-achievers. How did you get started in fitness and bodybuilding?

MS: My family are all very competitive athletes, so fitness has been a way of life for me from the beginning. I haven’t been involved in bodybuilding until recently, when Holly started competing in figure. I guess as life changes, so does your reason for training.

HS: As I said, I’ve always been active, but I didn’t really get into fitness completely until I met Mike.

He taught me how to train, and I just went from there.

DY: What do you do for a living?

MS: I’m a microbiologist at Electric Aquagenics Unlimited, a company that specializes in electrolyzed oxidative water technologies, and a free-fall photographer for Skydive Utah. I paid my bills through college by videotaping people on their first skydives.

HS: I’m a yoga instructor and love it! I’m currently teaching at Utah Valley State College, Novell, and the It’s Yoga studio in Provo.

MS: Also, we’ve recently been working with GAGA fitness and GotGAGA.com, owned by Tom Wright, a former outfielder for the New York Yankees. He’s going to be hosting his own fitness TV show, “GAGA for Healthy Living.” It will only be avail- (continued on page 168)

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“We stay pretty lean year-round; the seasons seem to dictate what training and diet strategy we’re on.”

(continued from page 165) able in Utah and surrounding states, but it’s still cool. He’s going to have us on as guest trainers once or twice a month. By the way, GAGA stands for Greater Awareness for Greater Achievement.

DY: Do you play any sports? What about hobbies?

MS: Holly and I enjoy rock climbing, and last season we were both climbing “5.12”. If the conditions are right, we paraglide in the evenings after work. We bike 80 to 100 miles per week because we try to bike instead of driving everywhere. We both thoroughly enjoy various forms of marksmanship, whether it is with handguns, rifles or archery.

DY: What motivates you to keep training and eating right?

MS: Training is more like a lifestyle—it’s our recreation. We don’t own a TV, so we are forced to do something more constructive with our time. Our not buying a TV is probably the best thing that has ever happened to us.

HS: As for our diet, eating junk makes us feel sluggish and moody. We generally just eat clean because it makes us feel better and perform better.

DY: What’s your diet strategy—on-season and off?

MS: We stay pretty lean year-round; the seasons dictate what training and diet strategy we’re on. During the winter we’re in the gym a lot more, trying to build muscle, and our diet is geared for muscle development. The rest of the year allows us to be outside more, which puts us into cardio mode, just in time to cut down for the bodybuilding season.

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Pair of Aces

DY: Do you have a cheat day?

HS: Yes, we allow ourselves a cheat meal—not a day—on the weekend. That's what we consider our date night.

DY: Can you list a sample day's meals?

MS: Sure. Here's a precontest meal plan.

Meal 1

1 banana
8-ounce protein shake

Meal 2

1 cup Eggbeaters
1/2 ounce cheese
2/3 cup dry oatmeal

Meal 3

1 1/2 cups string beans
10 ounces sweet potato
3 ounces chicken

Meal 4

1 cup string beans
8 ounces sweet potato
3 ounces chicken

Meal 5

1 1/2 cups string beans
8 ounces sweet potato
3 ounces chicken

Meal 6

1/3 cup dry oats
4-ounce protein shake

DY: What are your favorite supplements?

HS: Tahitian Noni Juice. It's amazing how much it helps with our recovery time.

Holly is a yoga instructor, so it's easy for her to get bent out of shape.

MS: Holly and I have been working with a company called Aquagen. They specialize in liquid, stabilized oxygen supplements. I'm taking a product called Oxytime®, which is something that you take when you're preparing for hard cardio—it's great for endurance and recovery. A lot of marathon runners really love the stuff. I like Muscle Milk for protein.

DY: How do you overcome training plateaus?

MS: I take a full week off of training and totally change my strategy when I start up again. If I've been doing high reps, I'll come back after a week and hit it real heavy for a while, or vice versa. I can usually put on an easy five pounds after I bust my plateau.

HS: I mix it up. If I'm beginning to feel drained in the gym, I allow myself time away. Instead of hitting the weights, I'll go biking or rock climbing. When I feel I'm ready for the gym again I usually overcome the plateaus on the first few days back.

DY: How do you stay on track?

HS: It's almost a game with us. We don't let each other fail. If someone wants to cheat, the other calls them out.

MS: You can't be called weak by your better half.

DY: How do you organize your training week?

MS: We're in the gym six days a week, three days of heavy training

and three days of light work:

Heavy work, 3-4 x 6-8

Monday: Legs
Tuesday: Push
Wednesday: Pull
Light: 3-4 x 10-12
Thursday: Legs
Friday: Push
Saturday: Pull

DY: Can you list a typical week's program, bodypart by bodypart?

MS: These are just in general. We modify whatever we want depending on the mood. On any given day some things just feel better than others.

Push: Chest, triceps, front delts

- Flat-bench dumbbell presses
- Incline dumbbell bench presses
- Dumbbell shoulder presses
- Cable flies (high)
- Cable flies (middle)
- Cable flies (low)
- Dips

Pull: Back, biceps, rear delts

- Pullups
- Wide-grip pulldowns
- Narrow-grip pulldowns
- Seated rows (narrow and wide in the same set)
- Cable pullovers with a rope
- Cable pullovers with a bar
- Cable lateral raises
- Cable upright rows
- Cable curls (bent bar, narrow and wide grip)



Legs: Quads, hamstrings, calves

Squats

Stiff-legged deadlifts

Lunges

Leg presses

Leg extensions (light)

Leg curls (light)

Inner/outer thigh machines

Barefoot calf raises (toes in, toes out, toes forward)

We do a lot of indescribable things for our abs. Most require a lot of core strength; we get very creative.

DY: And what about cadence (speed of movement)?

MS: On push exercises we come down slowly and under control, and then I push explosively as we exhale. On pull exercises we pull steadily and hold for a second at full contraction, really get a good squeeze.

DY: What about rest periods?

HS: Two to three minutes.

DY: What do you do for cardio?

HS: As we said, we do a lot of cycling or running, but if we can't be outside, we hit the stair stepper or treadmill. Precontest we do one to two hours of cardio. When we're outside cycling, it's easy to knock out two hours. Cardio takes real dedication when you're stuck inside

looking at a TV screen. If I do cardio in the morning, I'm charged up all day. I love it.

DY: Do you have any role models?

MS: Justin Dees. He won the Utah Spring Classic a couple of years in a row and has helped us both with our diets, posing, backstage, as well as helping us mentally prepare for shows. Not only is he a great bodybuilder, but he's also a great father to his children, which we admire.

DY: What are your future goals in bodybuilding and fitness?

HS: We really want to promote couples fitness. Training is so much easier when you have the full support of your spouse. Fitness to us is a fundamental part of our life together, our success as a couple depends on each other's support in and out of the gym. We hope to compete together and win together and motivate others in the process.

[Update: In June Holly took best of show in figure and Mike took first in the heavyweight division at the North West Natural Bodybuilding Championships.]

DY: What's your life philosophy?

HS: Do what you love to do! Take time to enjoy life, and live it to the fullest.

DY: What's your training philosophy?

MS: We listen to our bodies. We like to train hard in the gym, but because of our other activities, we have to be careful about burning ourselves out mentally as well as physically. We sometimes run into the problem with leg workouts. For example: We do a hardcore leg workout in the gym, but then for the next couple of days we might bike hard or run more than usual. Then before you know it, leg day comes around, and we can hardly walk. So we just take the day off, swim laps and hit it hard the next day.

DY: What's the toughest thing about bodybuilding?

HS: Sometimes we can't stand even looking at the gym, especially when it's nice outside, and you have a room full of toys that need some attention.

DY: What's the best thing about being a bodybuilder?

MS: The respect you earn as you better yourself as well as the people around you.

Editor's note: Mike Semanoff's Web site is www.naturalhighphoto.com. Visit the Aquagen Web site, too, at www.aquagen.com and the Tahitian Noni Juice Web site at www.noniusers.com/floyd. **IM**

**“Do what you love to do!
Take time to enjoy life,
and live it to the fullest.”**

