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## Muscle & marriage: Bodybuilding champs redefine strong relationship

By Billy Watkins  
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Vickie D. King/The Clarion-Ledger

**Billy Sanders spots his wife LeQuida as she performs shoulder presses with 20-pound dumbbells. The Sanders compete in bodybuilding and both took home overall titles from a recent show in Bossier City, La.**

When Billy and LeQuida Sanders go to the grocery store, their first stops are the bakery and the candy aisle.

Just to look.

"We'll stare at all the stuff. I'll say, 'Ooh, I'd buy that' - meaning probably a pound cake. I crave pound cake," says LeQuida, 34. "And Billy loves candy.

"But then we'll go and get what we came for - water and grapefruit."

The Sanders are one of the few husband-wife bodybuilding couples in the Southeast. They will compete in Saturday's Mississippi Bodybuilding and Figure Championships at Thalia Mara Hall in Jackson. About 60 competitors are expected.

"Bodybuilding takes a great commitment," says Billy, 41, a Jackson police officer. "And it's not just the workouts. Anybody can go to the gym. It's the dieting that keeps a lot of people from

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## LIFESTYLE

"Grumpy" diet

Oatmeal, egg whites, turkey breast, unseasoned fish, asparagus, broccoli and grapefruit. Drink up to three gallons of water daily.

Supplements

Include B-12, B-6, Glutamine and an occasional fat burner.

Exercise

Work out twice a day Monday through Saturday - cardio for 45 minutes in the morning followed by a two-hour workout in the evening. Sunday's session consists of cardio only.

doing this. And having my wife go through it with me makes it a lot easier."

"The diet makes you grumpy," LeQuida says, laughing. "But at the end of the day, we realize it's the diet making us that way and it's not anything personal. We never go to bed without saying 'I love you' and we pray every morning before he goes out that door. Being a police officer, we know he might not come back home in one piece. So we make sure we keep things in perspective."

The "grumpy" diet consists of oatmeal, egg whites, turkey breast, fish (with no seasoning), asparagus, broccoli, grapefruit and up to three gallons of water daily. Supplements include B-12, B-6, Glutamine and an occasional fat burner.

They work out at the Courthouse Racquet & Fitness Center on Lakeland Drive twice a day Monday through Saturday - cardiovascular for 45 minutes in the morning followed by a two-hour workout in the evening. Sunday's session consists of cardio only.

Apparently, they have found the right formula. Billy and LeQuida won the overall titles at the NPC Southern Cup in Bossier City, La., in May.

Both had always worked out. "I'd get a (muscle) burn, but that would be about it," LeQuida says.

But in 2001, Billy attended the Mississippi Bodybuilding and Figure Championships.

He happened to take along his video camera. "We were watching the tape one night, and I just couldn't believe these people. I loved it right way," LeQuida says. "I told him right then, 'I'm going to do that.' I think he thought I was joking."

LeQuida sought the help of one of the women she had seen competing in figure, Kim Jones.

"I could hear her passion for it over the phone," says Jones, a personal trainer and owner of Miss Kim's Gymnastics and Cheerleading workout center in Raymond. "As a trainer, when you find someone who wants to soak up information like a sponge, it's awesome.

"But I put her through some tests," Jones laughs. "If we trained sort of easy one day, I'd be so hard on her the next day I thought she was going to quit. She would get upset, not answer her phone. But she would always show up the next day to work out."

After watching LeQuida in her first competition, in Tunica in 2002, Billy decided to start bodybuilding, too.

"I think I impressed him," LeQuida says with a smile.


Her first three years, LeQuida competed in the figure division, which focuses on lean and toned muscles rather than mass. "But I wanted more action," she says. Two years ago, she switched to bodybuilding.

She gets some stares.

"I have a lot of women turn their noses up at me," she says. "I've even been told 'That's not very lady like.' But I just smile. I tell them this is the lifestyle I've chosen, and as long as I put the Lord first, I know I'll be able to live it."

## DETAILS

- What: Mississippi Bodybuilding and Figure Championships.
- When: 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. Saturday.
- Where: Thalia Mara Hall, 255 E. Pascagoula St., Jackson.
- Tickets: \$10 for the morning show, \$20 for evening show, on sale at Courthouse Racquet and Fitness Centers and on show day at Thalia Mara Hall.
- Phone: (601) 932-4800 or (601) 898-2521.



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She and Billy also get the inevitable question about whether they used steroids. Competitors at this weekend's competition won't be tested for steroids, but LeQuida says, "I've never done steroids. It took me five years of hard work to look the way I do. You don't have to do steroids if you eat right and work out correctly."

Billy adds: "People bring it up all the time to me. What they don't realize is that we're in the gym seven days a week - rain, shine, sleet or snow. The way we look is not about steroids."

But LeQuida says she understands why people ask because her appearance changes - even her facial features - every year. "The more muscle I add, the more different I look," she says. "But that's OK with me."

Since she's been competing, LeQuida's biceps have grown from 9 inches to 20, her waist dipped from 25 to 18 and her body fat decreased from 16 to 9. She stands 5 feet 3 1/2 inches and weighs 143 pounds.

"I love it," says Billy, who is 5 feet 6 inches tall and weighs 185 pounds. "I want her to get bigger and bigger."

Their four children, ages 13 to 20, love it, too.

"They take pictures of us to school - and we always have to make career day," says LeQuida, who owns Lady Of America fitness gym in Flowood. "We'll have kids mashing and poking on us ... but all of that is part of the fun.

"Like I said, this is not for everybody. But it's perfect for Billy and me."

To comment on this story, call Billy Watkins at (601)961-7282.

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