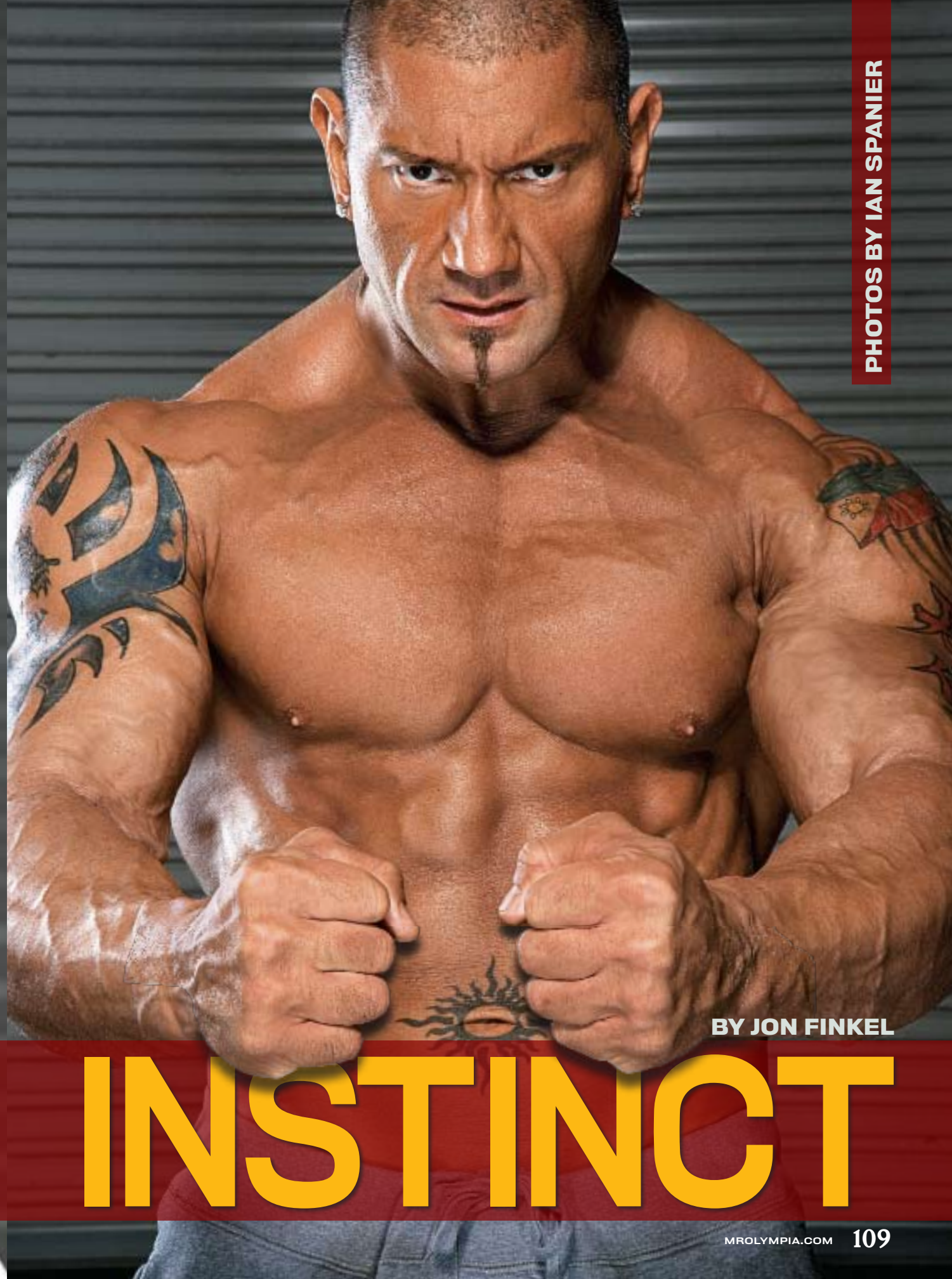


WWE icon Batista steps out of the ring and into the weight room to talk about his workout, the road to becoming The Animal and how he used to weigh as much as a lion



PHOTOS BY IAN SPANIER

BY JON FINKEL

ANIMAL

INSTINCT

“Can you pretend to struggle with the weight?”

our photographer asks Batista as he takes position in front of the World Wrestling Entertainment superstar. The three-time World Heavyweight Champion quickly obliges and contorts his face as if he’s about to bench a Brink’s truck. The reason for the charade is that Batista presses four plates as easily as most people press an elevator button — and nobody on set feels like going to get more weight. 🎯 When we get the photo we want, he leans back and relaxes. His breathing remains steady, as if he has been sitting there watching *Braveheart* (one of his favorite movies) instead of lifting what amounts to an average-size man with each arm almost a dozen times. In fact, he’s downright calm for a guy known to his fans as “The Animal.”



Whether he’s lifting weights or his opponents, The Animal is always animated

>> “My wrestling style is to basically give a brutal beatdown to my opponent,” Batista says. “It’s very animalistic, which is where the name comes from. From there, it took on a life of its own.”

And that life, the life of the 6’6”, 290-pound Animal, must seem surreal to those who knew Batista as a kid growing up in southeast Washington,

D.C., because back then, The Animal was just Dave. And Dave was skinny. Dave had asthma. Dave even tried out for the swim team.

“I was tall when I was in high school, and I kind of had a swimmer’s physique,” he explains. “The coach begged me to come out, but I went to one practice at 5 a.m. and that was it. Too early for me.”

Then the football coach came calling. “I played tight end and defensive end, but my father wasn’t a big sports fan so I didn’t really know the game. I was a horrible football player.”

As he says this, he’s peeling plates off the Hammer Strength machine like he’s picking up quarters off the ground, and the idea that a man of his size and speed would’ve been a bad football

player seems almost impossible. This is what it must be like when Michael Jordan tells you in person that he got cut from his sophomore hoops team.

“It’s true,” Batista explains. “But remember, I was only about 180–200 pounds back then.”

That’s about 100 pounds lighter than he is now — and almost 200 pounds lighter than the days when he tried to be a professional bodybuilder. “I used to look up to guys like Lee Haney, Dorian Yates and Shawn Ray,” he says. “I got myself close to 370 at my peak.”

>> Looking at the 290-pound version of Batista and trying to imagine another 80 pounds on his massive frame is like trying to picture *Jaws* with more teeth. Is it even possible?

“I trained hard and ate about 11 times a day at that point,” he says. “Plus, since I had the tall-man problem of skinny legs, I gave my quads their own workout. I used to blast them with six sets each of leg presses and squats.”

During that time, he spent his days in the gym and his nights as a bouncer at various clubs throughout D.C., which means that if you were denied entry into a bar on M Street sometime in the mid-1990s, there’s a chance that a 370-pound Batista kept you out. It was only when he decided to give wrestling a try that he began to shed pounds to pick up agility.

“I didn’t drop the weight all at once,” he says. “I’d lose 10 pounds here, 10 pounds there. I was 340 at my first wrestling tryout, and one year later I was down to 325. The key for me was to keep eating right. I stuck with a high-protein, medium-carb and low-fat diet, but I allowed myself to cheat sometimes.” And he didn’t cheat with just a single meal. Nope. When Batista decides to go on a doughnut, pizza and burger binge, he needs an entire day to get it out of his system.

“The key is to really gross myself out so that I remember how sick I feel when I eat all that junk. After one of those days, I don’t even think about that stuff for a month,” he says, recalling his last feeding frenzy (which must



Training Split

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|----------------|------|
| Mon/Thu | Chest, arms, Muay Thai | Wed/Sat | Legs |
| Tue/Fri | Shoulders, back, Muay Thai | Sun | Off |

This is a best-case scenario. Batista travels and performs frequently, so he sticks to this schedule as closely as he can.



Administering the Batista Bomb requires the strength of a powerlifter and the agility of a tight end. Here, WWE superstar Curt Hawkins experiences the Bomb firsthand

have been a doozy, because he makes a face like he just found a fingernail in his energy bar).

But eating right and keeping up with your training aren't the easiest things to do when you're on the road more than 250 days a year.

"I'm used to the traveling now," he explains, getting himself situated at the Smith machine. "Every city we go to, I know where the gym is. Most of the time, I get off the plane and go right to the weight room. I think getting a good workout in and a good sweat going helps get rid of jet lag." In fact, since Batista will be flying out in a few hours, he decides to take advantage of his time in the gym and turn our photo shoot into an impromptu light workout.

"Is there a heavy bag?" he asks, surveying the weight room. I happen to know for a fact that there isn't one, but since I'm not the strongest man in the world, I don't feel like giving bad news to the guy who recently tossed the WWE's "World's Strongest Man" Mark Henry into a staircase.

When someone else on set breaks the news, Batista takes it in stride. And when he asks why Batista wants a heavy bag, I realize he must be one

of the only people in the room who hasn't seen the famous YouTube clip of Batista working out with mixed martial arts fighter Marrese Crump. In the video, the duo goes through a series of training routines that include hand movements done so quickly that it's astonishing someone of Batista's size is able to perform them.

"I've always liked martial arts," he says, slowly going through a few arm motions. "I was a huge Bruce Lee fan as a kid. I didn't know how much weight training he did until I read about it in *MUSCLE & FITNESS* [March 2008]. He was such an innovator. And *Enter the Dragon* is a classic."

Does this mean an *Enter The Animal* movie might be in our future?

"I'd definitely like to get into acting," Batista says. "Mainly action movies. I'm used to doing that kind of stuff, and I know I'm good at it."

He knows this because he recently guest-starred on the TV show *Smallville*, playing a bone-eating alien named Aldar who rips out human spines to feed on the marrow. Obviously, this isn't too much of a stretch for The Animal, but before he leaves the canvas for the silver screen, he has some unfinished

business to take care of in the ring — namely, regaining the heavyweight championship. This means his opponents are about to be fed a steady diet of his signature move: the Batista Bomb.

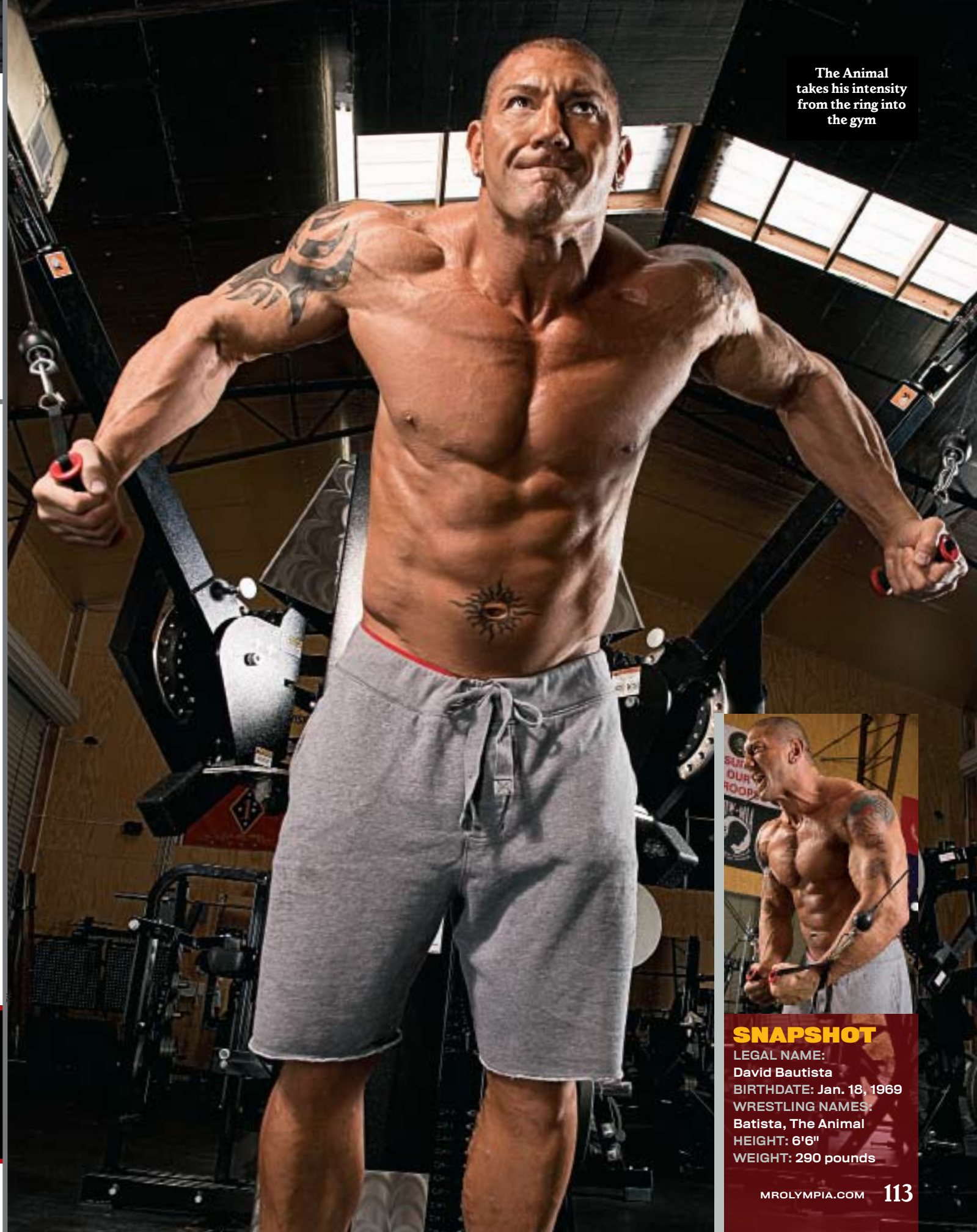
>> Complimenting Batista for his Bomb is like complimenting Dr. Guillotine for his guillotine. It just feels wrong to pat a guy on the back for successfully inventing something with the dual purpose of inflicting maximum damage to a human and pleasing the crowd. And while Batista's victims get to keep their heads, even the most medieval audience would appreciate the spectacle of one massive man picking up another massive man, holding him upside down, then whipping him in the air and slamming his back to the ground.

Yet administering the Bomb — and being the victim of other wrestlers' specialty moves — takes its toll, as evidenced by the torn triceps Batista suffered during a 2006 match with Henry. The injury kept him out of wrestling for six months and forced him to give up his World Heavyweight title.

"I hated being at the mercy of my injury," he says, eyeing the torn triceps



If you were denied entry into a bar on M Street in the mid-1990s, there's a chance that a 370-pound Batista kept you out



The Animal takes his intensity from the ring into the gym



SNAPSHOT

LEGAL NAME: David Bautista
 BIRTHDATE: Jan. 18, 1969
 WRESTLING NAMES: Batista, The Animal
 HEIGHT: 6'6"
 WEIGHT: 290 pounds

that robbed him of his belt. "The thing was, it really didn't hurt that bad. I was able to finish the match when it happened." What he wasn't able to do, however, was come back quickly.

"I had to go to a rehab clinic in Tuscaloosa, Alabama," he explains, stretching his arm out. "I was hoping to get back in four months, but it ended up taking six."

Six months in the WWE is a lifetime, so while Batista toiled in rehab, he had tapes sent to him so he could keep up with the sport.

Finally, on the July 7, 2006, edition of *SmackDown!* Batista returned, vowing to regain his title. In November of that year he made good on his promise, getting the championship belt back by defeating King Booker at *Survivor Series*. Five months later, he lost the belt to The Undertaker. After it passed through the hands of several other wrestlers, Batista won the World Heavyweight Championship back from The Great Khali, only to lose it again to Edge in December of last year. Such is life at the top of the WWE, where a champ's reign can be shorter than a Britney Spears rehab stint.

The trick, Batista says, is to remain on top. "In our business, when you're sidelined, someone else is right there to take your spot." Watching him perform a military press using a bar loaded with enough weight to sink a small boat, it's hard to believe anybody can take anything from him. Which is why, come *SummerSlam*, the only thing he'll be taking is a few steps toward title reign No. 4. **M&F**

SummerSlam airs live on pay-per-view Sunday, Aug. 17, from Conseco Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. Contact your local cable or satellite provider for ordering information. This is the 21st rendition of *SummerSlam* and will feature stars from Raw, SmackDown! and ECW.



Batista warms up his shoulders for a workout that enables him to lift 300-pound men over his head and throw them like rag dolls



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For bonus information about *The Animal* and a behind-the-scenes look at our photo shoot with the former World Heavyweight Champ, visit muscleandfitness.com



As a longtime reader of *MUSCLE & FITNESS*, Batista knows the benefits of getting a complete workout. Here, he cranks out a final set of dumbbell curls

Batista Breakdown

SHOULDERS

| Exercise | Sets/Reps | Tip |
|-----------------------|-----------|---|
| Dumbbell Shrug | 3-4/15-10 | "I'm very careful with form on these. I bring my shoulders as low as I can and then raise them as high as I can." |
| Lateral Raise | 3-4/15-10 | "[At the bottom] I don't bring the dumbbells in front of my body; I keep them at my sides. [At the top] I raise my arms until they're even with my ears." |
| Reverse Pec-Deck Flye | 2-3/15-10 | "I do these slowly, and I'm careful to use good form." |
| Shoulder Press | 3-4/15-10 | "I don't train too heavy with these anymore, but I still like to do them last. This way, I've warmed up all the muscle groups involved and can really work my shoulders." |

ARMS

| Exercise | Sets/Reps |
|--|---|
| Biceps | |
| Preacher Curl | 3-4/15-10' |
| Dumbbell Curl | 3-4/15-10' |
| Grip training | 1/"I pick up the heaviest dumbbells I can find and hold them at my sides as long as I can." |
| Triceps | |
| One-Arm Pressdown (regular and reverse grip) | 1/20 |
| Overhead Dumbbell Extension | 3-4/12-15 |