

Frank Zane's Personalized Program

Dr. Joe Metzka

Frank's original "91 Day Wonder Body" instructions

Training

Here's the specifics of what Frank had me do when I first met him:

First, he put me on his "91 Day Wonder Body" program. <https://frankzane.com/product/91-day-wonder-body-franks-newest-book/>. Everything I needed is in the book, so I just followed the plan.

Frank encouraged me to really get serious with the squat rack, indicating that I could immediately add an honest inch to my legs (he told me I didn't have to do anything stupid, but said that in my case, working up to 10 full reps with 300 lbs. would be sufficient to stimulate growth). I mentioned my lack of abs, so he had me do 500 reps of abs every session (all variety of exercises, as outlined in his book). Frank just flat out refused to acknowledge my excuses about age, legs, or ab genetics!

I really learned a lot by just submitting to the program and sticking with it. For example, coming from football, I had never done near enough pulling/lat work. My old shoulder problems actually resolved themselves by working the shoulder carriage in a balanced manner, per Frank's plan. In fact, by stretching religiously between sets, my lower back, knee and old Achilles problems resolved themselves as well. I'm really moving around like a teenager again!

His designs of various training splits are really effective and interesting (e.g. – "Growth," "Let's Grow," "Zane Experience"). However, I found his concept of scheduling them to be even more ingenious; instead of thinking in terms of "x days per week," he often thinks in terms of longer cycles. For example, his "5-5-4" schedule repeats itself after 2 weeks and creates an optimal recovery timeline within each 5-day or 4-day cycle. This kept me from burning myself out after a couple weeks, like so often happens to people when they start out. Instead, we optimized sustained progress in a way that I could have never thought of by myself. This particular schedule keeps your brain interested and keeps your body from figuring out what you're doing, since the training days change up. (He has several other training schedules as well.)

What was really a surprise to me (not to Frank!) is that by visualizing each exercise with proper focus, breathing properly, and completing every single attempted rep on every movement, I felt my confidence, poise and general well-being really grow with each workout. I underestimated how powerful the psychological aspects of his system can be!

Supplements

Frank put me on his amino acids <https://frankzane.com/product/super-sports-amino-acid-complex/> and had me add L-Glutamine to accelerate fat loss and maintain a nitrogen balance, while cutting calories <https://frankzane.com/product/l-glutamine/>. I started with 3 aminos and 3 L-Glutamine twice a day (morning and late morning), then another 3 aminos in the evening. By day 91, I had worked up to 15 aminos a day, along with the 6 L-Gultamine. (Frank suggests taking them with some carbs, such as a small piece of fruit, to generate a glucose bump and get the aminos into the bloodstream. I found this really helpful, especially when doing his version of intermittent fasting.)

Diet

Based on my initial photos (5'11", 202 lbs., 18.5% bodyfat), he had me target 200g protein, 100g carbs and 2000 total calories a day. On every 4th day, I'd increase the carbs to 200g. I honestly didn't even track fats - I had never really understood a bodybuilding diet - I just tracked protein, carbs and overall calories, knowing I'd be able to keep track of that and stick with it. (I'm a musician playing out in clubs all the time, so I did still sneak an alcoholic beverage or 2 at music jobs.)

That's what I did for the original 91 days. I stuck with the program and got results!

Frank's New "91 Day Peak Physique" Instructions

Here's a journal of what all Frank did for me throughout his new "91-Day Peak Physique" program. He's more detail-oriented than you could ever imagine, so I've tried to break down all that we did. There's a lot here, but I wanted to be thorough:

Day 1:

Training

I began following Frank's new "91 Day Peak Physique" book, day by day, with a target of a July 15, 2023 show <https://frankzane.com/product/91-day-peak-physique/>. His new book is intended to build on the foundation of the original "91 Day" program. Per his instructions, I did a 4th (drop) set with each exercise, working toward a new peak at day 91.

The program begins with his "Growth" split (pull, legs, push), which integrates modified powerlifting movements, along with various compound and isolation movements. The program begins on his "5-5-4" training schedule, which is a two-week, repeating pattern.

I documented every exercise, set and rep, in order to push my progress in every session.

Supplements

Frank's amino acid stack has the optimum ratios of all the essential aminos. Frank says extra L-glutamine is also useful, especially when you're in a calorie deficit.

<https://frankzane.com/product/super-sports-amino-acid-complex/> <https://frankzane.com/product/l-glutamine/>.

With breakfast, I'm taking a multiple vitamin, 5000 units of vitamin D, extra vitamin B complex and desiccated liver tablets. We added magnesium and zinc in the evenings, along with 10mg of melatonin.

I'll sometimes take extra L-Arginine as a pre-workout supplement (to encourage vasodilation and increase the pump), or just drink coffee. I've sometimes been adding L-Leucine powder or taking extra L-Lysine after workouts, to assist recovery and tissue repair.

Frank knows A Lot about aminos acids and supplements! That's why the Original School guys called him "The Chemist."

Diet

Daily diet has been around 225g protein, 100g (or less) carbs and I've worked down to about 70g of healthy fats, at 2000 or less calories a day (Frank recommends about 30% of dietary calories coming from fats). I began cycling carbs down and then increasing to about 200g on each 4th day.

(As a note: I worked up to about 2900 calories a day during the winter, in the effort to put on some size. I got as heavy as 193 at 5'11". I personally found that I started getting fat if I ate much more than that a day).

I do have certain foods that I like, and Frank will tell you it's important to eat in a way that you'll stick with it. For me, breakfast has typically been a porridge of 1/3 or 1/2 cup of gluten free oatmeal and 3 or 4 eggs from a nearby farmer. (My wife thinks it's disgusting to mix eggs into oatmeal, but I really like it!) Some days I'll mix whey protein with the oats instead of the eggs, and then toss some blueberries in it.

I'm a psychology professor; lunch during my teaching schedule is usually tuna or chicken and sometimes a small amount of rice (with liberal use of various zero calorie hot sauces).

For dinner, protein sources include wild caught seafood, chicken and lean beef. I do like lamb sometimes, when we can get it. I like adding fresh garlic and/or onions to the protein sources. I'll sometimes eat low fat cottage cheese or Greek yogurt to mix it up. Carb sources are usually sweet potatoes, white rice and various green vegetables (my wife loves mushrooms, but I don't!).

Frank suggests frozen strawberries as a nighttime "dessert" or snack (they're low carb and really tasty!).

(Note: as with training, I'm documenting daily diet meticulously throughout the 91 days.)

Day 28 Update:

There's a lot of work to be done (!!) but it's sure inspiring to be knocking on the door of age 50, yet be in the best shape of my life, knowing I'm still making more progress every day:



Figure 1 – “Peak Physique” Day 28 (Age 49. 5’11” 184 lbs.)



Figure 2 – “Peak Physique” Day 28 (Age 49)

Training Update

Since I had proven to myself that I could follow Frank’s original “91 Day” program to the letter (and only with Frank’s explicit encouragement), I have now begun to take small personal liberties with the various exercises:

For example, I’ve been using a “trap” (hex) bar for deadlifts, which is easier on my lower back than the Olympic bar. I like doing weighted pullups, so I often do those in place of a pulley pulldown. I’ve been tinkering with weighted curl-ups as a compound biceps exercise; I developed a left elbow problem and for some reason, this doesn’t hurt the way traditional biceps movements do.

I began super-setting these with “spider” curls (face down dumbbell curls on an incline), which was inspired by Frank’s concept of triceps supersets: weighted dips (a compound movement), super-setted with dumbbell kickbacks (an isolation movement). Frank says supersets are useful when you start getting tendon and joint soreness <https://frankzane.com/blog-27-my-super-set-favorites/>

I thought, “why not try the same with biceps?” When I asked Frank about all this he said, “everyone is different, so you do need to experiment. You’re getting results, so keep going and don’t worry so much about why.” I love how his mind works!

My abs lag, so I’m pushing up ab reps; currently at 700 per session this week and working toward the goal of 1000 per session by day 91, which is an idea from Frank’s legendary workout diaries <https://frankzane.com/product/workouts-personal-training-diaries/>.

But above all, I’m closely following the schedule and program he has outlined in the new book and just documenting each day.

Posing

Frank has really encouraged me to explore posing, especially as a means of bringing out muscle definition. I’ve never really done it and I can tell you, it’s quite a workout if your mind is into it! I’ve actually found it to be similar to doing Yoga. At this age (49), it’s also a nice warm up before training, because you really get your blood moving and joints warmed up.

To really learn the nuances of physique presentation, I’m exploring his “31 Day Wonder Posing” book <https://frankzane.com/product/31-day-wonder-posing/>. For example, I can see now in the frontal photo with the guitar from the original 91 days, my foot positioning doesn’t present optimal lines and v-taper. There’s always more to learn!

Mental Skills

My mom and dad have both recently been diagnosed with cancer. It’s a bummer – and obviously difficult – but a part of life. Without being too personal, Frank has written several helpful books about the power of the human mind (<https://frankzane.com/product/mind-body-connection/>). His genuine nature and depth of spirit have been something I’m grateful for, as I continue to train under these circumstances. And to be certain, training hard really is a form of therapy!

We’ve also talked a lot about avoiding what he calls “negative body metaphors.” It’s counterproductive to use negative word choices about yourself, and I had been doing that more than I realized. Old football cliches like “pain in the ass,” “busting my balls,” “pissing me off” and so forth, can manifest themselves unproductively. I’ve stopped saying stuff like that. My attitude and physical health keep improving. A chronic auto-immune problem (that kept me from training for years) even cleared up. I don’t believe this is a coincidence.

Day 45 “Peak Physique” Update (June 2023):

Posing

My teaching schedule ended this week, so I’ve been able to practice posing in the mornings, really studying the “31 Day Wonder Posing” book <https://frankzane.com/product/31-day-wonder-posing/>.

Frank was right, overall definition has improved. Foot positioning et al is improving, though there’s still a lot of work to be done; posing is more nuanced and challenging than one might think. It’s as detailed as ballet, and Frank himself has certainly made this very challenging art look deceptively effortless! I’m learning just how much there is to it, while exploring some of his ideas.



Figure 3 - “Peak Physique” Day 45 (Age 49)

There's always new things to learn! For example, I can see now that I don't pose my left side waist, serratus and intercostals as well as the right side (figure 12, 13). Frank's "Symmetry" book has helpful insights about this concept and how to address it <https://frankzane.com/product/symmetry/>



Figure 4 & 5) "Peak Physique" Day 45 (Age 49)

Frank advocates for taking lots of photos as you progress. By doing so, I can see how posing work is going, but also, that I'm getting visibly leaner since day 28, which is encouraging.

I'm now down to the bodyfat level (11%) from the original "91 Day" program and holding about 5 pounds of additional muscle in about a year's time (182 lbs. vs. 177). And I've been able to do that at age 49, by simply following Frank's program!

However, I can see that my abs still need work, so in addition to the posing work, I'm going to experiment with cutting carbs slightly more and check in again in a few weeks.

“Peak Physique” Day 58 Update (2023):

Training

I’ve learned to really embrace Frank’s “Let’s Grow” training split (back of body, legs, front of body), which is the 2nd phase of the program (weeks 5-12). It’s a good program for delt specialization, and something I would have never thought of on my own. I’ve broken a lot of best personal marks on numerous exercises at this phase, by going to this split on this schedule and timing.

Frank looked at my updated photos and suggested I really ramp up pullovers, since my serratus, intercostals and abs still need work. He had me emphasize supersets of dumbbell pullovers with pulley stiff-arm pulldowns. I started doing this on both the torso and arm days, in order to give extra attention to this weakness.

Check out the book for how he organizes these and other complimentary exercises:

<https://frankzane.com/product/91-day-peak-physique/>

Diet

In talking with Frank on the phone, he encouraged me to experiment a bit with diet, because everyone is different. Frank truly thinks for himself - he’s one of a kind! - and he encourages others to do the same.

I began to cut carbs more strictly, dropping as low as 50g of carbs on the last low carb day and getting into ketosis before reloading. Total calories on that day have gone as low as 1400. I’ve experimented with going 4 and even 5 days of low carb before a reload as well.

Carb sources are yams, sweet potatoes, rice and oatmeal. Vegetables included asparagus, green beans, onions, cauliflower, along with frozen blueberries and strawberries (taken with the aminos and for dessert).

As I experimented with carbs, I pushed protein intake up to compensate. (Frank even pointed me to some medical research, regarding protein metabolism and aging.) I’ve found that I can personally digest as much as 1.5 grams per pound of bodyweight (roughly 270 at a bodyweight of 180), while I’m training this hard, given the reduced carbs and fat. I experimented and I don’t digest more than that amount very well.

Frank said to me both, “I always had better results when eating less” and “trust what you see in the photos, not necessarily how you feel,” and I’m going by that as I experiment with diet.

Cardio

I've increased cardio by running more on the track (6 laps like Frank did, along with various striders & sprints, since I have a track & field background). I'll also do walking lunges for 20-30' at the end of leg day; this limits impact and is easier on my hips and knees, which took a beating from years of football.

I personally find steady state cardio on a machine to be too monotonous, so I came up with other things to do; I've added some MMA style cardio workouts, since I have a martial arts background from childhood. I can push-mow the lawn in about 55' (closer to 40' if I jog with the mower). I'm also going for long walks with my wife, pushing our baby in a stroller.

Posing

Frank has been generous enough to give me pointers on my posing routine for the event.

Posing is really challenging, but I'm sticking with the program consistently. As Frank predicted, doing so brings out more and more definition. (My own observation is that posing has done more for definition than cardio.)

Mental Skills

I'm in "blue sky" – this is the best shape I've ever been in, and there are still 5 weeks to go (figure 6 & 7). This is where Frank's emphasis on visualization and mental work comes in:

<https://frankzane.com/product/mind-body-connection/>



Figure 6) "Peak Physique" Day 58 (Age 49)



Figure 7) "Peak Physique" Day 58 (Age 49)

“Peak Physique” Day 73 Update:

Training

The final 5 weeks of the program is Frank’s “Zane Experience” split (torso, legs, arms). Intensity increases by way of eliminating a rest day within each cycle.

I’m just staying consistent with the training during the final phase. I’ve experienced small strength losses in the big compound lifts from dieting, but I actually keep making gains in rep ranges.

Cardio & Posing

Cardio has been consistent the last few weeks. I work on the compulsory poses every day, holding the “relaxed” poses for longer periods each day, along with working on the posing routine Frank has helped me with. We changed out a couple poses, and I continue to work at them.

Diet

I simplified diet during this phase. Fish & chicken were the primary protein sources, though I continue to eat some steak & eggs, like Frank and the guys of the Golden Era did. It’s primarily yams for the carb source (though I did eat gluten free oatmeal and rice on the reload days). Vegetables included green beans, asparagus, broccoli and cauliflower, as well as the frozen strawberries.

Since day 58, I had been cycling carbs 4 days at a time, to try to get bodyfat down through a sticking point. From here out, I’ll be back to carb cycling 3 days in a row, then reloading carbs on day 4.

I’ve never been under 10% bodyfat before (figure 8 & 9). It’s an inspiring new journey, especially at this age (49)!



Figure 8) "Peak Physique" Day 73 (Age 49, 9% bodyfat)



Figure 9 - "Peak Physique" Day 73 (Age 49, 9% bodyfat)

“Peak Physique” Final Week Day 91 Update:

Training & Diet

Training stayed consistent up until the end of the program. Per Frank’s program, I backed off training the final 2 days and just practiced posing, in order to recover for the event. I did experience a “controlled-overtrained” state that timed up almost exactly with those last two recovery days. (More specifically, we stopped squats and leg presses one week out and then stopped leg curls and extensions three days out.)

For the final weeks, I carb cycled 3 days in a row, reducing carbs down from about 80-90g on each successive day, then reloading to 160-180g of carbs on day 4. Calories were targeted at 1800 or less on successive days, and then up to no more than 2000 on the reload days (bodyweight at the event was 171).

I simplified diet even more in the final 2 weeks. Mostly tuna and seafood as the protein source. I did eat eggs & sirloin steak all the way through the program, like Frank and the guys of the Golden Era did, keeping the fat calories at or under 30%. (I tried the even leaner cuts of steak like flank and round, but I don’t digest them very well.)

It was primarily yams for the carb source, with small amounts of cauliflower and asparagus, as well as the frozen strawberries. We did bring carbs down a bit more the last 2 weeks, the lowest on Wednesday, then put them back in the last day and a half, for the exhibition on Saturday.

The night before the event, we put in 100g of carbs (yams). The day of the event, I ate poached eggs for breakfast, and then ate 25g pieces of yam along with Frank’s amino acids, every 90’ or so, up to the compulsory posing, and again before the final callouts.

Mental Skills

Frank reminded me that I’ve done the work thoroughly, so to just perform for each judge and to carry myself as though I was the winner. He gave me two of his own competition mantras, which I meditated on backstage, and especially while holding compulsory poses:

“Muscles tensed, face relaxed, crowd pleasing confidence.”

“I have already won.”

The first mantra was very helpful, while holding the compulsory poses. It became obvious that other competitors weren’t prepared to hold the poses for long periods of time, as cramping and fidgeting became visible among them. By contrast, the judges and even photographers commented to me after the event that I made the posing look “statuesque” and “effortless.” None of them believed this was my first ever bodybuilding contest. Thanks, Frank!

Results

We entered the “Classic Physique” division. We won the master’s (over 40) category and won the open category “tall” class, though I ended up 2nd place overall, down to the final callout of the day. I had wanted to sweep everything, just to pay tribute to him for what he’s done for me, but Frank was quick to tell me that this was a quality showing for a 49 year old guy in his first ever bodybuilding competition.

With Frank’s permission, I hit many of his classic poses in my presentation. Nobody will ever do them like Frank did, but the crowd sure approved, especially the women in the audience! (Frank himself, was always the favorite among female fans in the Golden Era.) (Figure 10-14)



Figure 10) “Peak Physique” Day 91 (Age 49 years, 195 days)



Figure 11) "Peak Physique" Day 91 (Age 49 years, 195 days)



Figure 12) "Peak Physique" Day 91 (Age 49 years, 195 days)



Figure 13) "Peak Physique" Day 91 (Age 49 years, 195 days)



Figure 14) "Peak Physique" Day 91 (Age 49 years, 195 days)

It was a challenging, rewarding, deeply fulfilling experience throughout! I'm already inspired, with new fitness and modeling goals going forward (figure 15-18). And I have profound gratitude to Frank Zane for what he's done for me.



Figure 15) "91 Day Peak Physique" Day 92 (Age 49 years, 196 days)



Figure 16) "91 Day Peak Physique" Day 92 (Age 49 years, 196 days)



Figure 17) "91 Day Peak Physique" Day 92 (Age 49 years, 196 days)



Figure 18) "91 Day Peak Physique" Day 92 (Age 49 years, 196 days)

I've tried to journal and document everything we did. That said, it's obvious to me that Frank has a library of information in his head and - even though there's a lot written here - all of this was him actually keeping things focused for my specific situation.

Give the man a call and see what he can do for you.

Thanks again, Frank!

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Post-Script (T levels):

Guys my age (49) talk a lot about testosterone levels; I have never personally tried any anabolic agents or testosterone/hormone replacement, and I chose not to do so throughout this program.

For me, the amino acid stacking made an immediate difference in T levels. Keeping fat content up to around 30% with steak and eggs also did (I noticed energy, mood & skin changes when fat was below 30% of daily calories). Vitamin D, magnesium and zinc supplements bumped T levels as well. And desiccated liver tablets made a difference when we added them.

I tried some natural/trendy testosterone boosters (methyl folate, ashwagandha, saw palmetto, astaxanthin, etc.), but none of these really made any difference for me, personally.

Photography by Ces White, for IDex Media <https://www.idexmediapro.com/> and HeroFit Photography <http://www.goherofit.com/about>

Onstage photos by Doug Howell, for Howell Portraits <https://www.howellportraits.com/bodybuilders>