

Michael Pickett, left, holds the award he received for ...

Michael Pickett, left, holds the award he received for placing second at the Silver & Black Muscle Classic in Oakland. At right is personal trainer Mark Davisson of Napa, who coached Pickett. during the senior project. Submitted photo Michael Pickett enjoyed carving on a snowboard until a major spill put him on a course to carving something else - body fat.

For his senior project at Vintage High School, Pickett became a bodybuilder, continuing the weight lifting he'd started as a junior and then adding muscle definition this spring through 14 weeks of strict dieting.

The results were life-altering for the 17-year-old.

"A lot of people can say they lift weights a bunch, but not that many people can say they're a bodybuilder, where you're getting down to five-percent body fat," he said. "Just seeing the changes in myself motivated me to keep going."

He competed in the Silver & Black Muscle Classic, sponsored by the Oakland Raiders on May 2 at Fremont High in Oakland, and came home with a second-place finish against three competitors in the 18-19 age division. The International Natural Bodybuilding Association-sanctioned event was for "natural" entrants, meaning they could be disqualified if they tested positive for steroid use.

Pickett probably would have taken first place had he competed in the 15-17 age group, but he was the only 17-year-old there and his birthday was three weeks away, so organizers moved him up.

We had a pose-down, where you try to beat the other guy with your best poses, and I heard someone in the crowd yell to him 'Get him with the legs! You'll kill him with the legs!' I guess that was the main reason he beat me. My legs are my weakness because I didn't work them out the first six months after my injury."

That injury was heartbreaking, happening during Pickett's very first run on the first day of a three-day family trip at Heavenly Resort in South Lake Tahoe in January 2008.

"I sat in the room for three days while everyone else went off on the trails," he said.

Two months later, with a cast on his leg, he started lifting weights - as he had done the summer before to get ready for his junior season of football for the Crushers.

"I started lifting when I was in the eighth grade because I always wanted to be one of those big guys everyone looks up to, but I wasn't really motivated at the time," he said. "I didn't really enjoy it during football either, but all of a sudden last year I got into it."

In October, one of his mother's friends introduced him to Napa's Mark Davisson, a certified personal trainer and former bodybuilder who took him under his wing. Pickett went online to find the closest bodybuilding contest happening in the spring. It happened to be the same date as his senior prom, but he wasn't going to let that stop him.

This past January, the 5-foot-8 Pickett weighed 195 pounds, having put on 35 pounds of muscle. Davisson then helped Pickett through 31 2 months of a diet consisting of five protein shakes a day, vegetables, chicken and mixed fats.

"I used to eat fast food every day of the week, and that had to stop, and cutting out carbs was really hard, too," Pickett said. "The way Mark had me do it was, instead of all of a sudden switch diets, to ease into it at first, and that made it a lot easier. The shakes weren't that bad because he recommended a kind that's like water, basically."

"We texted or called each other every day and he did an awesome job sticking to it," Davisson said.

Everything was going according to plan until the week before the competition, when Pickett came down with walking pneumonia.

"I was really scared that I wasn't going to do good," he said. "I went to the doctor and she noticed that I'd lost 25 pounds since the last time I'd been in. She acted like she thought I was not eating right, but my diet was still around 3,000 calories a day, which sounds like a lot but it was the right kind of food and I was still working out a lot."

But he was determined to do it, not only for himself but for Davisson.

"Mark helped me tremendously," he said. "If it wasn't for him I wouldn't have known how to change my diet or how to master the mandatory poses for the competition. He's really cool. He was (backstage) the whole day with me. It was fun, like hanging out with one of my friends."

Davisson said he knew early in the day his pupil would fare well. Pickett didn't drink any water in the 24 hours leading up the 6 p.m. judging, to maximize his muscle definition, and he weighed in at just 163 pounds.

"The judges like the overall symmetry, and the guy that took first had won the teen division the year before," Davisson said. "He was a litter taller and meatier, but I thought Michael was more defined."

After the judging, Pickett got to do a 90-second posing routine to music for the crowd, which included his family.

On the way home, they rewarded him with a bacon chicken burger from Elephant Bar. The next night, he ordered a double cheeseburger from In-N-Out.

"I missed all that food," he said. "Three and a half months is a long time. But participating in this contest proved to myself that if I put my mind to it, I can do it."

Pickett will now put his mind to pursuing a degree in Health and Human Performance at Brigham Young University starting in the fall.

He said he might try to enter another bodybuilding competition when he's 19, but not before then.

"A lot of people have asked if I'll do another one soon, but I don't think I will because it takes time to bulk up again and build more muscle and cut down again," he said. "You have to say on a diet and stay lean, and that's really hard to do. But I've adopted a more healthy, bulking diet. It's changed my life."

Davisson said Pickett showed a lot of discipline for someone his age.

"I commend for him sticking to something not a lot of people can do," he said. "I have three teenage boys who are great kids, but just getting them to pick up their socks is hard."

"I laid out the road map for Michael, he asked intelligent questions and did all the work. I'm very proud of him."

I've known Michael and his loving family for a very long time, congrats for getting 2nd in your division. You must be proud to represent your family and the city of Napa. I wish you all the best to you in your high school graduation from Vintage and your college days @ BYU in Provo, keep up the good work and keep it up. Best of luck and friends for life, Timmy "

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