

Body-Builder

Superheavyweight champ **Jerome Ferguson** bulks up at the original Gold's Gym in Venice

BY CHRIS MARTINS

» **"I came up** in the Bible Belt—I'm from Memphis—and my mom would read me stories about Samson. He's a big muscle guy, and I always loved it."

» **Ferguson has won** Mr. San Diego and Mr. L.A. (the city's biggest competition), among other events, and performs his most popular routine to "Who Let the Dogs Out?"

» **"When I was a teenager,** my parents bought me a weight set. I never smoked or drank. I just ate good food and started pumping iron."

» **When he's not prepping** for an event, Ferguson, 39, logs two hours a day at the gym and consumes about 4,000 calories. When in training, he intensifies the program, working out for at least four hours a day and eating 5,000 calories, or seven meals—mostly oatmeal, egg whites, chicken, and salad—to maintain his competition weight of about 255 pounds. A sponsorship finances his supplements (he takes about 30 tablets and six servings of protein powder daily), but he still spends \$250 a week on groceries.

» **"Seeing pictures** of those guys on Muscle Beach, I was always trying to figure out, "How can I get out there?" In 1993, Ferguson moved to Southern California. "I would say, 'I'm going to the mecca.' Everybody in Tennessee thought I was crazy." When he first arrived, he worked as a FedEx deliveryman in Huntington Beach and rented a tiny apartment in Venice a year later.

» **Ferguson's body parts** are featured in Sega's video game *The Incredible Hulk*.

» **When Joe Gold** founded Gold's Gym on Venice Boulevard in 1965, it became a second home for Muscle Beach regulars and bodybuilders from across the country. "Joe acted like Mr. Tough

Guy—if you dropped the weights or complained, he'd throw you out of the gym—but he was really a loving man." Today there are 46 Gold's locations in California. "Joe was a mentor. Through him I met Arnold Schwarzenegger and the whole crew: Eddie Giuliani, Irvin Koszewski, Lou Ferrigno. They welcomed me with open arms. Still, I was intimidated—everybody was bigger than me."

» **Between his businesses**—Power Nutrition Depot (a supplement store) and Fit 4 Life Training Systems (a personal fitness company)—and acting and modeling jobs, Ferguson earns \$80,000 to \$100,000 a year. "I've got a house seven blocks from Gold's Gym, an H1 Hummer, and I'm still competing. I've made my dream come true."

» **"I'm all natural.** I don't condone steroid use—you don't have to force your body to be something it's not. But to each his own." According to Ferguson, there's less steroid use in the sport now than there used to be because the science behind "natural" supplements has advanced to the point where illegal drugs are unnecessary.

» **"If a bodybuilder** needs a favor, another is there to do it. It's like a big family. Before Arnold became governor, he'd show me how to pose. He'd say, 'Suck it up! Come on!'" ■

