



“My brothers used to call me Bob,”

► Michael Strahan tells me from across the table at a small Brooklyn coffee shop around the corner from the gym where he's just wrapped up his *Men's Fitness* photo shoot. It's the kind of cold December day that makes you want to find something nearby. Our coats piled on a neutral chair, Strahan takes a seat at the table. Nursing a green tea in both hands, he begins to open up. “They'd laugh at me, and I didn't get it. I'm 13 years old at the time, and then one day my brother's friend says, ‘You know what Bob stands for? Booty on back. You're fat.’ Like my butt was so big I could reach for my wallet over my shoulder. [Strahan's facial expression suddenly incredulous] And I broke down.” It's an honest, unguarded moment with the man who's lived his entire adult life in front of millions on football fields and television sets across the country. “I started watching workout tapes and literally trying to work my ass off,” he recalls. “My dad saw me doing it every day and said, ‘Hey, I'll work out with you.’ We'd work out five or six days a week, and he would always say, ‘Don't worry, it'll pay off one day.’”

Gene Strahan wasn't speaking to his son in generalities. Back in his day, the former Army major held his own in Armed Services boxing tournaments for a 10-year run that culminated in a 1-1 career record against WBC heavyweight champion Ken Norton, who became only the second man to beat Muhammad Ali as a professional when he famously broke the Greatest's jaw in the 12th round.

It's clear that Strahan looks up to his old man. While stationed in Mannheim, West Germany, where Strahan spent seven years and graduated from high school, the two would stay up past midnight together on Monday nights to watch NFL games on the American Forces Network. Strahan didn't play high school ball until his senior year, but the life lessons that came with quality-time opportunities like “Tuesday morning football” were enough to arm him with most of what he credits today as the keys to his success—like seizing every opportunity, no matter how new or different. “My senior year, my dad says, ‘I'm sending you to Houston—I think you're good enough to get a football scholarship,’” he tells me. “I didn't necessarily understand the game. I didn't understand the technique. I had the work ethic, and I had the desire, but I didn't have anything else. I had to figure it out.” After five months playing high school football in Houston and living with his uncle Art, a for-



XXXX

**“PHYSICALLY,
I FEEL BETTER NOW THAN
WHEN I WAS 25. AND
WHEN I RETIRED I FELT GREAT
PHYSICALLY. THERE WAS
NOTHING PHYSICAL THAT HELD
ME BACK.”**





STRAHAN'S WORKOUT

●●●●● Strahan trains five days a week with a whole-body circuit that incorporates vertical and horizontal push and pull movements, a mix of hip- and knee-dominant exercises, rotational movements, and core work. "My philosophy is making sure our workouts are functional, so that Michael doesn't throw out his back picking up a grocery bag," says Latreal Mitchell, Strahan's trainer. "We train in all planes of motion and keep it challenging." Here's a typical week:

MONDAY

Jump Squat	4x5
Single-leg Squat	4x10
Deadlift	4x10
Bench Press	4x10
DB Row	4x10
Push Press	4x10
One-arm Lat Pulldown	4x10
High to Low Woodchop	4x10
Plank Walkup	45-60 sec.

TUESDAY

Kettlebell Swing	4x5
Drop Lunge	4x10
Back Extension	4x10
DB Incline Press	4x10
Cable Face Pull	4x10
DB One-arm Press	4x10
Wide-grip Pullup	4x10
Low to High Kneeling Woodchop	4x10
Side Bridge and Reach	45-60 sec.

WEDNESDAY

DB Burpee	4x5
Front Squat	4x10
Good Morning	4x10
Reverse-grip Bench Press	4x10
One-arm Cable Row	4x10
DB Split Jerk	4x10
Inner-grip Side to Side Pullup	4x10
BB Torque	4x10
Plank	45-60 sec.

THURSDAY

Box Jump	4x5
Bulgarian Split Squat	4x10
Single-leg Deadlift	4x10
Stability-ball Chest Press	4x10
Single-arm Reverse Flye	4x10
Arnold Press	4x10
Reverse-grip Lat Pulldown	4x10
Straight-bar Cable Rotation	4x10
Plank with Elbow to Knee	45-60 sec.

FRIDAY

TRX Squat Jumps	4x5
TRX Single-leg Squat	4x10
TRX Glute Bridge	4x10
TRX Triceps Pushup	4x10
TRX Row	4x10
DB Scaption Raises	4x10
Wide-grip Pullup	4x10
½ Turkish Getup	4x10
TRX Side Plank	45-60 sec.

STRAHAN

mer NFL player himself, Strahan landed a football scholarship at Texas Southern University.

Figuring it out is something that Strahan, like most guys, has had to do over and over throughout his life. From moving to Germany, to essentially learning the basics of football at the collegiate level, to the rude awakening that is graduating to the NFL, and then starting all over again in front of the camera on the set of *Fox NFL Sunday* and, finally, *Live! with Kelly and Michael*.

"The momentum doesn't continue," Strahan says. "By the time I left college I had won every award you could win—I was Mr. Man! Then I got drafted by the Giants, and you step in that locker room and you feel inferior in every way. You just have to stick around long enough to give yourself the opportunity to build your confidence."

Starting over is especially hard when you're comfortable. When Strahan retired in 2008, he didn't need to leave football. "There was nothing physical that held me back," he says. Coming off a Super Bowl win against the flawless New England Patriots—one of the biggest upsets in NFL history—Strahan could have kept playing. A lot of people still don't understand why he didn't. With an NFL-record 141.5 career sacks and 794 tackles over 200 games in a professional career that spanned 15



SLOW DOWN THE GAME

Strahan was able to tap into his full potential once he learned to embrace his surroundings and focus on the task at hand.

Giants defensive line coach Earl Leggett once told Strahan not to let the game be bigger than him. "I was like, 'What does he mean by that?'" Strahan recalls. "And I figured it out as I became more experienced as a player: Don't be so enamored that you're there, don't get caught up with the stadium and the people. I remember going to San Francisco and I saw Jerry Rice, Steve Young, and Ricky Watters run out for the first time. I wanted to ask for their autographs. The game was too big for me. But as I got older, the game slowed down. I felt like I was on par with them as far as being able to compete on that level. Once the game slows down for you, it's actually a piece of cake. It moves in slow motion and then when you watch yourself play on film you go, I never knew I was that fast, or I can't believe I hit somebody that hard. You almost surprise yourself."



"I walked [to the offense] and said, '17-14, final score—believe it, it will happen. One more touchdown and we'll be world champions.'"



STYLING BY ERIN TURON; GROOMING BY KUMI AT THE WALL GROUP USING LA MER. OPENING SPREAD: CLOTHING: JOHN VARVATOS SHIRT; WIREIMAGE (CHRIS ROCK). THIS PAGE: ASSOCIATED PRESS

years and included two Super Bowl appearances, seven Pro Bowls, and various records and defensive player awards, Strahan was just the man the Giants needed to lead them into the new season as defending champions, and they were willing to pay for it. Alas, Strahan needed something else, and it wasn't another season on the gridiron. "They offered me a lot of money to come back and play that next season," he says. "The hardest part is knowing when to stop."

It's another lesson Strahan learned from his father, one of the few people who understood his decision to retire at the top of his game. "Just because you did one thing well doesn't mean you have to stay there," Strahan tells me. It's something the former athlete feels strongly about, enough that he's co-producing *Athletes Die Twice*, a documentary series about what happens to America's Monday-night gladiators—not all of whom make enough money to retire—when they reach the end of their career, sometimes voluntarily, often not, and are forced to integrate back into the world. Even marquee players like Strahan can't rely on recognition to carry them forward. "If your ego and your identity are tied in to what you did for a living, then, long story short, you're kind of screwed," he says. "There are kids now who are big Giants fans who have no idea that I ever played football—and I've been out for five years. It's kind of like you were never there."

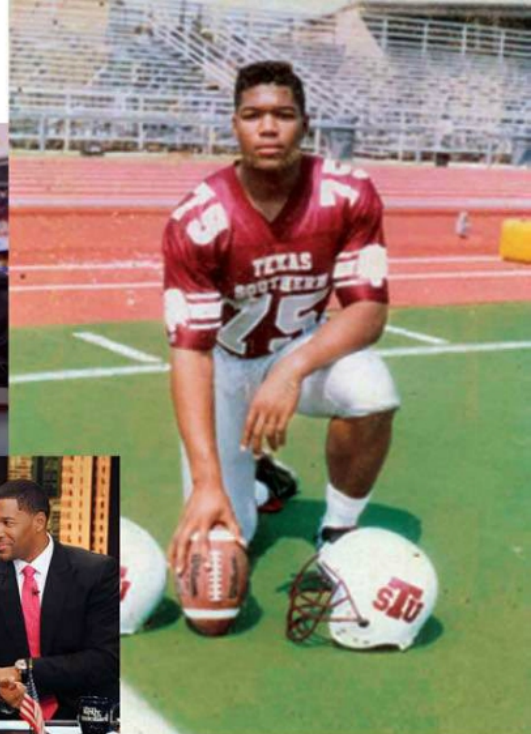
Television was unlike anything Strahan had ever experienced, and once again, it was on him to figure it out. "They don't tell you how to be on TV—they put the camera on you and they turn it on, and you sink or swim," Strahan says, his tone taking a somber turn. "For the first three weeks I swear I was sinking, and I remember thinking, I should've gone back for that one year and played football. I should've played as long as I could, because I don't know about this." It's the first time since his retirement that Strahan has admitted regretting his decision to walk away from football when he did. It's the kind of statement that makes news, one that he wouldn't usually let slip. Then again, this isn't the kind of interview he's used to. He's not being swarmed by sports reporters waving recorders in his face. Right now, we're just two guys having coffee, except one of us happens to be a national celebrity—and he's starting to attract attention. At two points during our interview fans approach Strahan to shake his hand. One woman in her mid-20s recognizes him from TV. An older man comes over to greet him enthusiastically and then calls out to "Big Man Strahan" before disappearing into a restroom. Strahan is happy to give fans what they want, but he stays focused. When approached for a third time, this time by a young man asking to take a photo with the former Giant, Strahan shakes his hand, then points to me to explain that he's actually busy doing an interview, but tells the guy to stick around for a photo afterward. Later, Strahan follows through, as promised, posing for a photo and even offering to take another if the lighting wasn't 100% in the first shot. He's genuine.

The realization that moments like these eventually stop happening is a tough one to come to



PLAY BY PLAY

Counterclockwise starting from top right: Strahan at Texas Southern University; on the set of Fox NFL Sunday with Jimmy Johnson; Strahan in his latest TV gig with Kelly Ripa, co-hosting *Live!* with Kelly and Michael.



terms with for any retired celebrity, especially after a career as long and successful as Strahan's. At the same time, it's a realization that Strahan tells me motivated him to find success off the field and gave him the energy he needed to box out a cavalry of A-list candidates for the industry-coveted co-host spot on *Live!* Ending his career on his own terms gave Strahan the mental advantage of being able to think of his next move as one of choice rather than necessity. "We're our own worst enemy," he says. "You doubt yourself more than anybody else ever will. If you can get past that, you can be successful." It's reassuring to hear a man who's accomplished as much as Strahan talk about how doubt is only natural when we're faced with life-changing decisions. We will always wonder what would have happened had we gone a certain way, he tells me. "I'm always curious, and sometimes, I'm not going to say regret, but definitely think maybe I should have [played another season]. Maybe I should have." The key to moving on, for Strahan, was realizing that there was more to him than a Giants uniform.

He may have left football, but, judging from Strahan's appearance, you'd never know it. At one point, while changing T-shirts on set during his *Men's Fitness* cover shoot, at least one female visibly gawked at the former athlete's chiseled torso that is currently carrying in the neighborhood of 8% body fat. Working out may have come into Strahan's life as a means to earn a new nickname—or at least shake an undesirable one—but it never left, and it continues to be a core part of who he is, regardless of what he does for a living.

Five years removed from professional football, Strahan still approaches workouts with the same energy as when he was gunning for his first Super Bowl. He works out five days a week with friend and former bodybuilder Latreal Mitchell, who also serves as Strahan's nutritionist. In the gym, their workouts are fast and explosive, incorporating everything from kettlebells to the TRX, to make the exercises as varied and functional as possible. Strahan's not conditioning his body for



WHAT IT'S LIKE...

TO LOSE A SUPER BOWL

● "Losing the Super Bowl, you're almost like, why did I even make it? Why did I even go if I'm not going to win? And then the confetti falls and they sweep you off the field with the confetti. It's like, 'Get off, you don't matter anymore, it's the team that's on the podium, your season's over, we don't care who you are.' It's a very dismissive feeling."

TO WIN A SUPER BOWL

● "It's the most amazing feeling ever. I had resigned myself after 14 years to say maybe I'm just one of those guys who retires. I'd had a great career, and you go, 'Hey, I went to one and we lost. That's good though, it's not in my cards to win a Super Bowl.' But after we won, I said, 'How could you ever think like that?'"

ON THE FIELD

● "The fans get a different perspective. Even if think you can see everything there's nothing like standing there. You can see the guys sweating and breathing hard. They're like modern-day gladiators."



hits anymore; now it's about staying healthy in the long run. He pays more attention to recovery than ever, utilizing stretching and foam rolling to bounce back faster from intense workouts. Injury isn't a major concern anymore now that he's not throwing his body around a football field a couple of times a week, but the lack of football training and games has made it necessary for Strahan to consciously (and consistently) get his cardio in. To burn fat and keep his cardiovascular health in check, Strahan covers a fixed distance on a Concept2 rower and tries to beat his previous time with each workout. He also does intervals on the stationary bike, riding hard for 20 seconds and then backing off for 40 for a total of 10 rounds, making sure to stay above 100 rpm for the duration of each 20-second round.

Mitchell is tasked with making sure that Strahan's diet is substantial enough to fuel his taxing workouts but also lean enough for him to see the results that he's working toward (in 2013 Strahan is aiming for 5% body fat). "After years of bodybuilding I know what works," Mitchell says. The magic formula she's fine-tuned for Strahan is a high-protein, high-fat diet with 35% of calories coming from protein; 40% from healthy fats like avocado, almond butter, and coconut oil; and 25% from complex carbohydrates. He eats five to six times a day, avoiding processed ingredients and sugar whenever possible, and as long as his meals fit into the above blueprint, Mitchell is cool with it. "I don't count calories, because if you are eating the right foods I believe you don't have to," she says. Clearly, it's working, and judging from the way that Strahan breezed through the workout portion of his *MF* photo shoot, he truly is either in—or very close to—the best shape of his life. Even now, wrapped in a black hoodie, sitting at the table, and leaning forward on crossed forearms—he towers. "I think as we get older, you become more conscious of health," he says. "I just want to be around, man. I've got a lot of stuff to do. I don't want to go too early."

At 41, Strahan isn't what you would consider old. Sure, maybe for pro football. But in his new world where appearances are more important than numbers, he's right in the middle of his prime. Still, that hasn't offset the shift in priorities that naturally comes with age, experience, and, of course, fatherhood. He finds he's more ready to speak out. In June 2011, he filmed a commercial supporting legalizing same-sex marriage in New York, and he previously helped PETA produce a public service announcement in favor of animal rights. "I don't want to feel like I'm part of the reason why people aren't happy," Strahan tells me. Ultimately, he's setting an example for his children, trying to give them the same inspirational father figure that he had growing up. "My



MIND THE GAP

Don't hide what makes you unique. Flaunt it.

• Strahan has been many things over the years, but one thing he's always been is a guy with a pretty sizable gap between his two front teeth. However, what started out as a flaw has become his most recognizable feature. "I thought about getting [it] fixed, but then I realized that this is who I am, and if I changed it, I don't think it would be me," he says. "The curse has become a gift, and I embrace it. I embrace the gap, I admire the gap, I am the gap." Although, it's not an approach he recommends for everyone—like New Orleans Hornets center Anthony Davis. "The unibrow!" Strahan exclaims. "That unibrow ain't nothing; you've got to get that hooked up, man. You have to fix that. I'm sorry, you can tweeze that. That's not surgery."

kids are great because [they] are truly their own people," he says. "My daughter's into fashion. My son, he's into science. And then my twins are 8, and they're into everything." It's important for Strahan that his kids find their own path. His job is to make sure they never doubt themselves—something he was taught years ago by his father.

"My dad was somebody who never doubted me," Strahan says. "He said you're going to get a scholarship—I did that. Then, when I was in college he said 'when' you're in the pros—yeah, that happened. And so on. 'When' you're an All Pro, 'when' you make the Pro Bowl, 'when' you do this, 'when' you do that...and now the show, *Live!* It was 'when' you get the show. I have to make sure I do the same with my kids."

Ultimately, the most important lesson that Strahan wants to pass on to his children is that while hard work will bring you success, it's never an excuse for complacency, and sometimes moving on to something else is the best way to truly experience life. "My last memories of playing are of how great I felt [at the Super Bowl]—how great it felt running out of that tunnel, how we weren't supposed to win—that was the most fun I've ever had as a player," he says. "It was the crowning moment of anything I've ever done in terms of the biggest payoff. Every sacrifice, every surgery, every time I was out there shivering in Green Bay in -23° weather—it made it all worth it." It all paid off. **MF**

XXXX

"STOMPED YOU OUT"

To earn his spot co-hosting *Live!* Strahan beat out no fewer than 58 celebrities. "Chris Rock sent me a message saying, 'You are a lucky motherf—ker... You the luckiest motherf—ker in the world!'" Strahan recalls. Here are some of the notables who were in the running:

- **Nick Lachey**
He'll have to go ahead with that 98 Degrees reunion after all.
- **Andy Cohen**
"Wait, you mean we don't drink first? I'm out."
- **Ryan Seacrest**
Hey, leave some for the rest of us, OK, Ryan?
- **Neil Patrick Harris**
Barney Stinson won't be suiting up on this network.
- **Seth Meyers**
Don't expect a Weekday Update anytime soon.
- **Josh Groban**
This would have looked like bring your son to work day, every day.
- **Jerry O'Connell**
Live! with Kelly and Jerry? Come on.
- **Joel McHale**
Looks like his role on *Almost Live!* was more foreshadowing than he thought.
- **Rob Lowe**
This—literally—would have been the best show ever. Literally.
- **Bryant Gumbel**
Terrifying.



XXXX

**"IN FOOTBALL YOU HAD
A BEGINNING AND
AN END. I SEE TV AS A
BEGINNING, BUT I DON'T
NECESSARILY SEE
WHAT THE END IS."**