



# FOCUSED ON GIVING BACK

## Michelle Prater

NPC women's physique competitor

## Chase Gates

NPC bodybuilding competitor, nationally qualified four years a row, ROAR fitness ambassador

## Channing Gates

Dancer and member Best Buddies program

The Chase Gates Foundation began because somebody helped a kid with mosaic Down Syndrome. It made an impression and it was a life-changing moment for Chase resulting with the creation of the Focus Award. Nine years later it's continuing to make a difference in people's lives. It started with one bodybuilding show and has spread to more shows, the local community, in schools with the development of the Best Buddies Program, and being supportive of a business that will provide employment for the disabled. The Chase Gates Foundation is helping to educate and bring awareness that disabled people can achieve success when they FOCUS.

“ The word focus became our acronym, Follow One Course Until Success. Basically, that's what you have to do to bodybuild, just stay on course. ”

## WHO WE ARE

When Chase was little, I watched him get skipped over in T-ball and he wasn't invited to birthday parties. He didn't have any friends. I did what I could to make up for it. But disability or not, people crave social interaction. Chase is diagnosed with mosaic Down syndrome. Down syndrome is a genetic disorder that results in 100% of chromosome 21 cells have an extra copy. People with mosaic Down syndrome have a mixture of cells and in Chase's case, 20% of his chromosome 21 cells have 3 copies.

Working out in a gym has always been part of my life, so when Chase turned 12 and was able to lift weights we got him a personal trainer, Don "Coach" Grubbs. Coach was a teacher and a trainer. After seven years of training, Chase had added some muscle and was doing really well so at the age of 19 we allowed him to compete at the NPC Alabama State Championships, Teenage Bodybuilding division. The promoters of the show, Morris and Kelly Pruett created an award they called a "Crowd Participation Award." At the time, no one knew that Chase had any sort of disability. In that instant, when they called his name as the winner of that award, it completely changed his life. That was Chase's touchdown, it was his home run, and his invitation to the birthday party. All of the things that he had missed out on as a kid culminated in that one moment. It was his defining moment because he actually felt like he was in a place where he belongs.



In the gym and amongst our bodybuilding family, no one is ever told “no”. No one is ever told “you’re not good enough”. You are welcome there no matter what. Chase’s level of commitment is incredible. When he started his fitness journey he had no end goal in mind, he just trained because he loved the process. Finally, there was a place and a sport where he was accepted as part of the family. He was accepted just for who he was, no questions asked. He made friends. People looked forward to seeing him. He looked forward to seeing his friends at the gym, adults, teenagers, everybody.

When your gym becomes your second home, you walk in the door and everyone says “hello”. You’re there at the same time, every day. He has continued to compete every year since; almost 10 years. He’s won his class, he’s been nationally qualified and he’s graduated from Bantam to a solid Welterweight. Prep is his life. I printed out pictures of Arnold doing the mandatory poses and explained to him that you have to do these poses in your routine. So every routine you’ve ever seen of him, he’s put it together himself. Chase likes to dance and he loves being in front of the crowd. He appears quiet and reserved, but when he’s on stage, during his routine, he is a different person.



“ In the gym and amongst our bodybuilding family, no one is ever told ‘no’. No one is ever told ‘you’re not good enough’. ”

### WHAT WE ARE

Chase works out and works at Empire Fitness in Madison, Alabama. He’s not a personal trainer but he enjoys helping people sometimes. It was in that spirit that the Focus Award was created. Chase’s coach always said to him, “Come on Chase, you got to focus, you got to focus.” The word focus became our acronym, Follow One Course Until Success. Basically, that’s what you have to do to bodybuild, just stay on course. Because of the impact that working out and competing has had on Chase’s life, we wanted to recognize other people that have overcome a disability or any sort of obstacle or challenge and continued to focus on their goal of stepping on stage. And that’s how the Focus Award was born. My role in all this is to guide both of my kids to be grateful, supportive, encouraging and inspiring to others and create a legacy for them that make a real difference in the lives of them and others.

### So when did that start?

The first FOCUS Award was in 2014 at the NPC Rocket City Championship where Chase guest posed with IFBB Pros Timmy and Judy Gaillard.

### How do you determine who gets the award?

We get people to fill out a short form at check-ins to tell us their story. A lot of people use their prep, to overcome addictions to drugs and alcohol, to prove other people wrong when they’ve been told they can’t, to honor other loved ones who can’t and much more. Once they fill out the form and turn it in, we read each of the stories and pick a winner. Chase is very involved in the final decision.



## WHERE WE ARE

### How many shows do you present the FOCUS award at every year?

It's really grown; this year, we're doing seven. Like anything else, it started off slow. This will be our biggest year to date. We've even had promoters ask us to be at their show and continue to ask us to come back. We gladly do it because it spreads a positive message of hope and proof that with hard work, determination and commitment, you can achieve success.

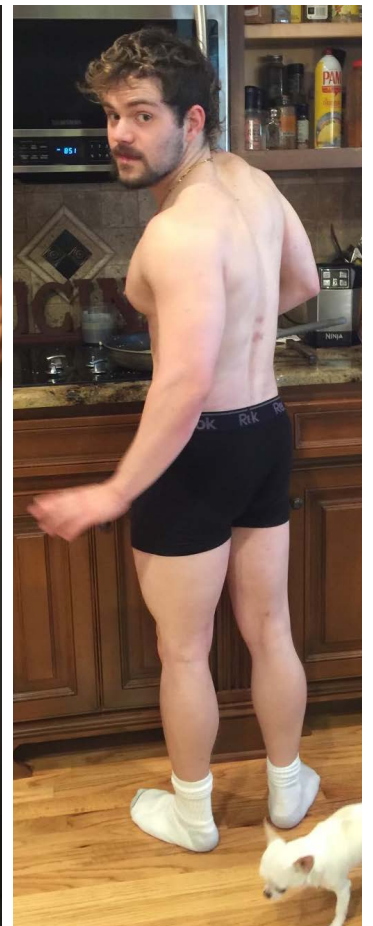
For now, the Focus award is funded out of pocket. My pocket. We do it because we want to bring a positive light to this sport, and reward and recognize people that really put in the hard work and focus to be their best on stage. They understand that if you focus and just try to get better, that's a win. Doing it with your bodybuilding family makes it fun.

“ People being recognized for what they've overcome is bigger than I thought and the impact that we make on people is becoming bigger and bigger. ”

## WHY WE ARE

### How would you like to see the FOCUS Award evolve?

Right now, it's just me and Chase doing this. We would love to grow to a point we could help other people with special needs connect with personal trainers and maybe even help pay for it. That is what brought excitement to Chase's life. A lot of parents with special needs kids don't ask for help, but I'd like to think that one day we could offer the kind of support and encouragement that bodybuilding has shown to Chase. He has been able to grow and learn from practical experience in the gym. He understands what food is healthy and what is junk, he knows how to do the exercises, what weights to use, and the benefits of the exercises. And he understands the process and the sacrifice. For example, when Chase is in prep he understands we can't have his favorite ice cream right now. But we tell each other it's going to taste the same in 20 weeks as it does right now. So we just have to wait just a little bit longer.





“...I’d like to think that one day we could offer the kind of support and encouragement that bodybuilding has shown to Chase.”

**What is your future vision?**

I would just like to see the Focus award eventually pay for itself and become a staple at other shows. I can’t tell you what it meant when a past winner shared that of all his achievements in bodybuilding shows and others events, “The award that meant the most to me, was the Focus Award and that’s the only one I have on display.” That came from a police officer/physique competitor that was mauled in the line of duty and left with many broken bones. People being recognized for what they’ve overcome is bigger than I thought and the impact that we make on people is becoming bigger and bigger.

Chase’s ultimate goal is to become an IFBB Pro with a disability with no adaptations. I started my first competition when I was 50 after a very big, unexpected, life changing event. And my motivation was to prove to my daughter, Channing, that no matter what anyone says or does, we can take control of our own self and be successful. My daughter helped me pick the color of my bikini. Chase helped me backstage. I had been to all these shows, but never as a competitor. He helped me, he coached me through that. Like Chase, I would also like to earn pro status. My daughter loves handing out the award, she loves being a part of it. She herself has joined a club at school called Best Buddies. It pairs an abled person with a disabled person. She’s not aware that we got that group funded and started it at the school but I am so proud that she joined it on her own. So disabilities and Down syndrome are a big part of our lives and helping others. My daughter is very active in dance and she also knows the benefits of a healthy diet and exercise as well as what’s good for you and what’s not.

**Has the FOCUS award ventured outside of bodybuilding and into the community?**

Absolutely! We recently did a fundraiser for the Best Buddies group that my daughter joined. Chase and I went to a Best Buddies meeting and we spoke about him having a disability and being a competitive bodybuilder. He signed some autographs of his picture. We also donated to a local organization that help people with disabilities see that they are capable of doing more than they think possible. More recently, we donated and fundraised for a Coffee Shop business that is committed to providing jobs for people with disabilities.

*People need to be recognized even if it’s just a pat on the back. Now you are spreading the word and making people feel good. I’m excited because the future holds so much opportunity for you all, and we will be cheering for you all the way! If you wish to support or contribute to the Chase Gates Foundation, please email [chasegates1994@gmail.com](mailto:chasegates1994@gmail.com).*

