



WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



Luke Allison Interviews Dan John

LA: This is Luke Allison with CriticalBench.com and I'm here with Dan John. Dan, how are you?

DJ: I'm doing fantastic today. Thank you.

LA: Give the listeners a little bit of an introduction and a background. They might not be familiar with you. You've been involved with a lot of different types of athletic endeavors over the years.

DJ: Well, let's see. I started weight lifting in 1967, which is a year before my wife was born. So, I've been around a while. I was a solid Olympic lifter. I snatches 314 and I cleaned 402, but I missed a jerk behind me. Power lifted with a 628 dead lift. I was a discus thrower and hammer thrower and shot putter in college. I was the...we always called it the MVP. I scored the most points for the team for Utah State, which is a big deal. I was an All American in junior college in the discus and a pretty good thrower in

high school, played football, wrestled. I do Highland Games. I won the big Pleasanton games two years in a row now. Gosh, I have the American record in the Weight Pentathlon and that's the shot, discus, hammer, javelin and 35 pound weight throw combination.

I coach full time at Juan Diego Catholic High School. I'm the weight coach and the head track and field coach, which is interesting, because my degrees are in theology. I'm also...I teach full time online for Columbia College in Missouri and I teach religious studies. And then, I also write for Testosterone and Men's Health and I just came out with a book...I mean literally, last week called Never Let Go. It's my discussions of life with weight lifting as the prism.

So, I'm married for 21 years and I've got two daughters. They're pretty interesting kids. Kelly was, in a one week periods, Prom Queen and All State in the discus, and Lindsey is a two-time All State athlete in the shot and the discus. She was the Homecoming Queen not too long ago. So, they're a pretty interesting group in my home. My wife is a Federal Agent and I don't see her very often, in the last decade or so, because of certain events. But, here we go. Was that good enough?

LA: Absolutely. There's plenty to get into, I think. You've competed in a wide range of sports, as you just mentioned, how do you understand that? Most people are much more into selecting one sport because they think that's what they should do.

DJ: Well, and it's true. That's absolutely correct. If you want to be the best there is, in fact, I know guys in the Highland Games that only do the sheaf toss and we all make fun of them because that's about as un-Highland Gamish as you can do. But, if you want to be great at something, you have to just do one thing. And of course, the old rule of that is specificity works, but at a price. And the price is, it's hard to stay balanced physically. I've got an enormous right arm. Now, we can insert joke if you like here. But actually, it's from all those years of throwing and being right handed.

But, even though I have tried real hard to balance it off with a lot of different things, my right side is...I've got pictures of me that just look kind of freakish. It's like the angle is funny, like someone Photo Shop'ed it or something.

So, the down side of that is I've also got massive right shoulder issues. I mean, I'm fine. And I've also got left hip issues because the body works in an X. So, the right shoulder, left hip takes all the pressure on throwing.

So, I think that nature rewards the omnivore, the person who can eat anything. Sport rewards the specialist and I think... I try to teach people that extremes at anything are difficult. The human body loves extremes. Like right now, if you went out and sprinted 400 meters and you had lactic acid hitting you and you felt awful, that

would do more for you physiologically than...I don't know...a three mile jog. It would just...the body loves to go over the top.

Now, does that mean every single day or every hour on the hour you run 400 meters as fast as you can? No! Because that's just crazy. So, I think when you look at the way I approach sport is that...but also, too, let's also look... I mean, let's be honest, Highland Game throwing and discus throwing have a lot of similarities. The Olympic lifts and discus throwing have a ton of similarities. So, a lot of this stuff is...it's the same like Pavel says, it's the same, but different. It's the same, but a little different.

I'll tell you one thing, Highland Games are a lot more fun than the other sports. I mean, anytime you can eat and drink between throws is my kind of sport. Whereas in discus throwing, I get sick. I train for nine months for six throws. I mean, it's emotionally exhausting. And of course, the Olympic lifts, you don't have much time at all to make that lift and that bar's coming right back down on you.

So, yes, you're right. Specificity is the best thing you can do. But, then you also pay a very high price with overuse. So, I hope that answers the question.

LA: Certainly. I think it leads into my next question which is, something on specialization versus over-specialization. We seem to have a Western model, maybe Adam Smith versus a Soviet model, their PASM, their Process of Attaining Sports Mastery. This is totally different. Is that something you have any familiarity with?

DJ: Well, yea. And you know, don't forget though, like Pavel says so well in his book Enter the Kettlebell. He says, you know, the Soviets had this thing for mastery, but they had two things. They had the program Maximin which was world domination and they program Minimum. Well, we're not going to lose anything on our borders. We're going to keep where we are. I think and when you read Pavel's book, you got this thing called the Program Minimum. If you only have 12 minutes a day, there's no better way to spend your time than a Program Minimum. It's two days a week you do swings and two days a week you do get-ups. That's the whole program.

So, you're right. I think this. I have to agree with what Tommy Kono said in his book, the genius of the American system is we find the most efficient way to get to the top. It's genius and we have literally...if we have 2,000 discus throwers in the United States. We have 2,000 people tweaking...at least we used to. It's not as much true anymore...tweaking the boundaries. Okay, this guy focused on this, but I'm going to focus on that. And of course, that begins to whirl around and once secrets get exposed, and pretty soon you have something far better.

I think in the hay-day, the true hay-day of bodybuilding, I think when you had guys coming in from four or five radically different philosophies, I think bodybuilding

really flourished. Now, of course I mean it's so much the insult on stuff like that, but back in the day, you had guys who were training on machines. You had guys who came in from a power lifting background, an Olympic lifting background, sport background. So, what happened was kind of that all these philosophies had a chance to play out literally on the platform, on the posing platform.

In power lifting, you know that the west side guys don't like the way Ed Coan used to lift. But, you know what? Ed Coan was fabulous and those guys back in the '70s trained a different way and didn't have all the fancy gear in most meanings of the word gear. But, these guys were pulling enormous weights. With t-shirts, not bench shirts, t-shirts. So, I think I'm a big fan of letting the market just go.

Now, I'm also a head track coach. So, I can't allow that to happen too much. So, what you need to do is you need to have this...oh, I don't know. I'm using my hand to explain it. You've got to have a program that has a lot of wiggle room. So, for example, if you want to do a certain sport, I don't know what the sport is that you want to do. I would suggest you look at three or four radically different schools. Like, you want to improve your dead lift. So, the Ukrainian guys drag logs for two years. These guys never dead lift, that's West Side, they never dead lift supposedly. These guys here dead lift five days a week. So, there's three radically different schools.

Well, can you gleam the truth out of those three schools, and I think that's the answer. So, the answer in the American system is, I would say suggestion try to try everything. Of course, here's the caveat, not all at once. Please, not all at once. Try everything in some kind of intelligent form and then give yourself a little wiggle room. The upside of weight lifting sports is you've got this wonderful thing called the max. And if it's not going up, the program ain't working. I don't care how pretty you are.

I always like what Clarence Bass does for like bodybuilding. Every September he has a photo shoot. If he doesn't look better, what he did was wrong. And if he looks better, what he did was right. So, that's I think the answer.

I think the answer is that both systems have great value. Don't run away from either one, but at the same time, don't get higgly-wiggly after any new fad. Put it into your program. I talk a lot about that in my articles at T-Nation. Do you have a standard program that you can test a new supplement or a new idea? Do you have a... I think everybody should have a basic workout that they do probably up to three, four times a year, up to three or four weeks. It's your program that you do. It's your fall-back program. If you take a new supplement, chromium picolinate, don't do it while you're also trying a new West Side squat program. Do it while you do your standard...the workout you trust the most.

I have one I call the Transformation Program. So, when I take something like chromium, I take it while I'm doing the Transformation Program, my basic, standard, boring workout. If at the end of three weeks I've put on 73 pounds of lean body mass and I look like Mr. Universe and snatch 1,000 pounds, hey, this stuff works. But, if nothing's happened in three weeks, it's an indicator that maybe this supplement or this new idea isn't very good.

That was a long explanation. I'm sorry, but...

LA: No, I think that was very good. One of the things that that sort of brings up is the idea of open-source software development where basically anyone can contribute to this idea of finding a new and better product as a synthesis of what's going on with lots of sort of hands involved. That's what seems to be what you're describing in the throwing community, in the power lifting community. People can work together and listen and learn.

DJ: If you ever go to a football coaches' convention, everything I just said is absolutely the truth. The reason you go to a convention is, you know, there's this offense called the spread offense, and five years ago it scared the hell out of defensive coordinators.

Now, these guys all go to conventions and they sit down and they X and O and they work things out. And right now, the spread offense is probably every school in America uses it. But, it's probably got two more years and it will be replaced by something else because that open source model of defensive coordinators are scared to lose their jobs, has allowed them to work on how to attack that offense. In the throwing parts, you know, what's great about it is I could look at you and say, "He's doing something different." I love the idea of that.

Now, there is a whole other approach. It's called the German approach, and I'm a big fan of it, to be honest with you. It's kind of funny because it goes radically against everything I've just said. But, they have a model that they believe you should follow. You need to be 6'7", you should be 7% body fat. You should be long levered. You should do 10 of these kind of throws a day, 10 of those, 10 of those, 10 those. You should play in a ballgame for 45 minutes and then you should do these six weight lifting exercises. And in 14 years, you should be at this level. If not, you're not good enough, put in the next person.

It's a great model. The problem is this, starting with that 6'7" lean body mass guy. Just don't have that very many of them just falling off the trees right at me. The problem with any kind of what I call the German model is that there's these presuppositions at the beginning that are just...they're not real. I do... I think the open

source software...is it called Linux? It's genius and nobody had to name it. That's what we've been doing in weight lifting at least for the last 110 years, when I can figure.

You try this. I try that. We get together. I like your idea, you like my idea. I think your idea is stupid and then I steal it. You know. I do think that's a good model.

The other things is, you have to be honest, too. You have to have that backup. As I talk to a lot of college weight and strength coaches and stuff, I'll tell them, hey, we don't do this because of the injuries. They'll look at me and go, oh my God, you're right. This exercise causes injuries. Yea.

Now, at the college level, you can get away with... If you lose Johnny, Paul's pretty good. But, the high school level, you lose Johnny, ain't no way in hell you're going to win with Paul. If that makes any sense.

So, the open source, there has to be that outset level of honesty. If a program is hurting people, if an exercise, a movement, an idea, you have to be honest and say, hey, that was a mistake, man. That was a huge mistake. And very few... I'm willing to do it. Here, help me pat myself on the back. But, a lot of people don't. A lot of people, I read on these forums about these injuries, people blowing out hernias and all these different things, blowing their knees out doing box jumps and stuff and I thought, why do you have a 45 year old guy jumping on boxes? I mean, it's fine. It's a good thing, but why?

So, sometimes you also have to be honest on the other side of the open source of the downside if things are falling apart. I think that's a pretty solid response to your question.

LA: Absolutely. Pulling back a little bit, you've talked about a lot already, but what are the sort of things that interest you in the various sports that you described, and would those same things sort of interest you if you found another sport or someone found a different way to combine throwing events, something like that?

DJ: Oh, okay. You know, the thing that has always intrigued me about the discus throw is that...and the hammer throw actually...is that there's a dance between you and the implement. And that you come in with a bigger engine and you're taller than I am and you're stronger than I am, I can beat you like by...like throwing the discus is like playing the violin. If I'm smoother and more subtle and have a more beautiful flight, I throw farther than you.

And that's always something I've enjoyed about the throwing arts. There's this bizarre relationship between you and the implement. So, I can go out the first day after training for six months and my bench has gone through the roof and I've got the huge

plane and not throw nearly as far as I did when I was far weaker, but much more delightful in my movements, graceful in my movements. So, that's something I like.

If you go to a top end track and field meet, you just look at the body types and then you look at the efficiency of the athletes. There's no other word than beautiful. Sadly, with the way we show track and field on television in the United States is just one step from horrific. But, when you go to a track meet and you watch any event, it is amazing how just simply lovely the movements are. That doesn't come across on television very well. It's like, there's certain sports that don't carry well. I think hockey's bad on television. I discovered the other day that lacrosse isn't as good as you think on television. It's kind of hard to follow. And track and field doesn't come off. But, in a real meet, it's amazing to watch.

So, I think that would be it. The reason I like the throwing sports is the beauty and of course that relationship with the implement. You probably don't hear that very often, but that's the truth.

LA: I think the reason I hear most often for wanting to get involved with Highland Games is people want to flip the caber. That's just interesting and sort of beyond what you would find in most other situations. So, I can see the attraction to that.

I've been reading you on T-Nation, Testosterone Nation for several years and one of the things that came across to me is you have a very straightforward writing style when most people just don't come off like that. Talk a bit about that and how people have responded to your style.

DJ: Well, it's interesting because most people really like my articles. I get a lot of positive feedback. You know, I tend to cut to the chase a lot. Like this last article I wrote for them. There's this thing called general training. You can call it whatever you want, general physical preparation, whatever. The problem with that is they read these ancient texts, I mean, I'm 52 and I'm old enough to have been alive when people tried this training program. But, if you were born after '64, no one does it anymore. That's now...it's archaic. It's not been used.

But, people fall in love with these Soviet terms and these German terms and the funny this is they never translate well because they're using translators to translate the documents, not athletes and coaches.

But, GPP is supposed to train qualities. Well, there's only two qualities that most people want, at least at T-Nation, fat loss and hypertrophy. Well, fat loss is done much easier with a strict diet, generally something that's low carbish and fairly strict, you've got to count it. It does help to take some kind of fat burner and it really helps to be a

400 meter runner. I tell you that. Go to a high school track meet and look at the 400 meter runners. None of them are fat.

And then hypertrophy, just seems to be...well, one, God blessed you and gave you the genetics to get it. Some people's genetics are so bad they'll never get good. But, and then of course it's that...like in the kettle bell community, there's these guys doing these long...like they'll do a double kettle bell clean, a double kettle bell press, a double kettle bell front squat, and they just keep doing that for up to two minutes which is just really hard to do. And the idea is that the more time your body is loaded, the more hypertrophy you get.

Well, I just finished it for most people. You need to eat more protein. You need to eat less carbs. You need to eat less calories and then when you get in the weight room, you've got to do something that kind of makes you sick to your stomach. Well, no one wants to hear that. You want to stay on the treadmill and you want to do all this malarkey and all these timed curls and you know. The thing is, if you can't strict curl 155, why are you doing any curl variation? You're simply not strong enough to get anything out of a concentration curl.

If you can't bench, as an adult...I'm to the point where... I've got to be careful because for years I thought if you couldn't bench 300 there was something physiologically wrong with you. Now, I realize that okay, god gave me a lot of fast twitch and I think you can almost hear it in my voice. I'm grr-rrr. I'm that guy. You know? So, I've kind of really backed off that. Now, I'm down to you should be able to do a body weight bench press. That's a huge drop from what I used to believe.

But, if you're not strong enough to do this basic stuff, there's no need to do anything advanced, anything! That even includes multi grip pull-ups. No! You don't need any of that. You need to just get stronger. That's where I get criticized probably the most. I get emails from somebody that says they're an advanced trainer, been training six months. I didn't think I was advanced until I lifted 8, 9, 10, 12 years. Of course, the upside was, I'd go to a weight lifting meet... One time a guy named Bruce Wilhelm snatched 407 pounds. I followed him as the first lifter in the clean and jerk, and I opened at 319 pounds and I remember Dick Notmeyer kind of patting me on the head and telling me, actually you're pretty good Danny. It's like, yea, right. Come on. I know I'm okay, but I'm not... He was right in my face, you know. I knew right there. I knew there was...for me to be good as a weight lifter, there was a chasm to cross.

One of the things I tell people in some of my articles is get out of your local gym with all your buddies. Go to a metropolitan area, go to a serious bodybuilding gym, not one of those bizarre meat markets. In Southern California, you'd be the worst

bodybuilder at some of the gyms in Southern California, yet you'd be the best in your state.

Back when I was young I had a chance to go to the original Gold's in the world. World, when it first opened up, when it was upstairs and there was...gosh Robby Robinson, Arnold Schwarzenegger came by to drop by. He just threw some poop at people and then Lou Ferrigno, Danny Padilla, all these guys were training and it gave me a vision of what a real bodybuilder should look like. It wasn't anything like the guys that I had in...when I was in college working out in the PE building, doing three sets of 15 in the curl with 55 pounds.

They didn't look like they were from the same species. Maybe the same genes, I think. But, yea, so the straightforward stuff is important. I try to be as honest as I can because I train between 400 and 1,000 athletes a year, if you throw in all the camps and stuff like that that I do and all the daily work I do. So, I get a real vision of what hard work is and what genetic superstar is. I've worked with some kids at discus, I mean they show up as sophomores in high school, 6'5", 240 and haven't lifted weight yet and they're faster and stronger than kids who do. It's like, okay, this kids' just better than you and me.

I worked with John Godina when he was just getting out of high school at the Olympic Training Center. I didn't work with him, we were at the same clinic together. He was flat out just better than us adults in many of the...if you had to do something for the first time. He was better than us. He was a high school senior.

So, I try to be as honest as I can. And let's be honest, especially in the field of bodybuilding. If you're born a certain...well, maybe that's not true anymore. But, there's a certain kind of person that just grows better. I had a friend in high school named Barry who had huge guns. God gave him biceps, triceps and he had it going on. So, I hate to throw the genetic thing in.

Let me back up a little bit. When I start talking genetics, everyone blames mom and dad. Now, it is true. It is their fault, I hope. But, at the same time, you can't blame it so much that you never find out what your potential is. I graduated from high school at 162 pounds. I was the youngest kid in the class and four months later I weighed 202, working with Dick Notmeyer and squatting five days a week.

Well, no one would want to recruit me because they all thought I was too small. And then, a couple of years later I'm just spanking their athletes because I'm... You know. So, you have to be careful about genetics. We always say in coaching...can I swear on this?

LA: Absolutely.

DJ: Potential is a French word for can't do shit. Because, whenever someone starts talking about potential, you know you're not working with anybody. I've never heard the word potential used in a positive way, in my life. Whenever a coach says to me, "That kid's got potential." I just look at him like, how many years you been coaching? Four. I know, I've been coaching 30. Once you use the word potential more than a few times in your career, it just gags your throat. You just...chokes you down a little bit.

So, yea, I think people like Mark... I'll tell you one other thing people like. I have a lot of stories in my articles. I tend to...sometimes funny and sometimes whatever. But, I do try to let people know kind of the setting of where my little rant is about to come from.

LA: Absolutely. One of the things I think that sort of goes towards establishing is some people think they're working hard when they're not really working hard. And then the people that have been working hard for a while are maybe the ones that most need to focus on sort of mental training or sort of developing other psychological aspects. Does that make sense at all?

DJ: Oh, if I had my druthers, I would take a team of former high school wrestlers to do anything. Because, they've been there. And maybe not... You know, the first year a kid wrestles, they're just trying to survive and practice. The second year they suddenly realize about half way through, it's not as bad as I remember. And the third year, they kind of giggle because they know that they're going to survive the day and they'll be fine.

It's like football double sessions. You always think as an athlete the coach is getting easier on you every year. They're not. You're just getting mentally tougher. So, what you need to do in a sense is you need to find something in your life that pushes you to the top. I'll tell you one thing that really made a difference in my life. This was a long time ago now, but we had a newborn at the time so...that can tell you how long ago that was. Lindsey got this pretty serious lung disease where we had to put her under this mask for every two hours, I think, for 15 minutes for two weeks.

At the same time, my other daughter, Kelly, developed this terrible cough that...just this hacking cough. So, Tiff and I did not sleep for two weeks. Okay? It all turned out fine, but the point is, we didn't sleep for two weeks. I never missed a minute of work. I coached every day, I did all my other jobs. The kids got three meals a day. We looked like hell. But, at the end of those two weeks, things all of a sudden...both girls, little kids, they're fine. Yea, let's play. They go to bed that night, we pass out, sleep eight hours and the next day I wake up and realize what a pansy I'd been most of my life. What a pansy!

In college if I didn't get eight hours, oh my God! I need to take a nap this afternoon, I only got seven and a half hours of sleep. I mean, I looked at my life like you big pansy. Now, this is after being a division one athlete.

I think what has to happen in life sometimes is you have to push yourself, get pushed either by life or a drill sergeant or something like that and really discover inside you how much more you can do than you think you can do. I've taken on a lot of challenges in my life sometimes just to simply see, can I do it? Can I do this thing?

I've failed on a lot of them, famously I was trying to squat 300 pounds for 61 reps one time and I failed miserably on that bet. Miserably! I came close, but not nearly as close as I should have.

But, I've tried a lot of other things and yea, some of the stuff I've done, but you have to try to do something that really stretches you out. That's why you've got to get out of your little friendly gym. You know, if you tell me, I'm a bodybuilder, yea, I get this all the time online. Yea, I'm a bodybuilder. Well, what did you compete in? Well, I don't compete. Well, then you're not a bodybuilder. You're not a bodybuilder. You are a guy who likes to go to the gym just like the girl on the cover of Vogue, and you might as well put makeup on. I don't have a problem with it. If you're trying to look better, I'm cool with that. I understand why. But, you are not a bodybuilder until you walk on the stage in that damn singlet and stand there. I respect that. That it tough.

But, please, when guys tell me they're body... If you tell me, I just want to look good naked, my backup thought is, well, have you ever talked to a girl or why do you want to be looked at naked? See now you got me on a rant. See how you did that to me?

So, we'll stop there. You're right. You've got to find a way to get hard work. I'll stop. There you go.

LA: I remember at one point I had read an article of yours that really resonated with me and it talked about sort of the importance of willpower as a finite sort of resource. You can use it however you want, but you need to think about it before you use it all up and don't have any more. Talk about that.

DJ: Oh, absolutely. I am shocked. I'm at a school right now, so I've got the day off. So, I got up, I ate three chicken breasts for breakfast because I grilled a whole bunch of extra chicken last night. Now, I could have had some food that wasn't good for me, but the chicken breasts were sitting there and they looked good. They were barbecued and they were great. So, I started my day with three chicken breasts. By the way, that was like six hours ago, I'm still not hungry.

That is a perfect example of a freewill day. How much decision making process did I do to pop open that little baggie and eat those three chicken breasts? None! So, by simply taking the time last night to bag up some chicken breasts, I started my day with a fairly good meal from the strength world, right?

Well, now as I go through the day, I've also got other barbequed foods and they're waiting for me and I'm very excited about it. And so, when I finally get to my workout I'm doing some stuff... I'm organizing the articles I've written in the last few years so I can have them all in one place, because they're just all over the place.

So, when I decide to work out today, I have not yet...the biggest decision I've made all day was deciding to have this interview with you. That's the only ten second thought I've had all day. So, here I am, I'm throwing some stuff in the garbage, but I'm not making bad food decisions because I have those darn chicken breasts. And I'm going to keep making good food decisions all day long because I cooked extra food last night.

So, I believe that you only have so much freewill. Now, if the first thing that greets me in the morning is my daughter saying the car is broken, I can't get going. "Will you drive me to volleyball practice?" Let's switch this day around. So, she freaks me out at 6:30 in the morning. Okay, I get in the car, I drive her there, I haven't brushed my teeth. By the time I get home I'm starving and there's that box of chocolate doughnuts that we have. It's 7:00 o'clock and now I've got to go fix this car. I've got to get it ready. I've got to... And then I zip over. My other daughter complains, "Where have you been? I need you to..." Okay. And then I go over, pick that car...and I drive the car. I get a friend to... And then... Am I eating those doughnuts? Oh, yea. I'm eating doughnuts.

All those little things have etched away any willpower I have. People don't agree with me on this. But, I can tell you the people who don't live with their moms. No offense. But, if you live in the basement of your mom's house and she wakes you up in the morning, she makes your breakfast, your lunch and your dinner, pats you on the head and gives you a little snack before you go to the gym, you have a different life than I have.

I have to be... I've got to be proactive. I've got to preplan things. I have to think ahead on things. And when I do it, I compete at a high level, I keep my body fat down and good things happen.

So, yea, I stand by that freewill article. I think it's the single most important article I've ever written. It's the first chapter in my new book. It's funny because the inside came from when I used to do prison ministry. People would say are these guys all buff? And I'd say no...prison population's a huge sweep. But, the guys that do train look

pretty good and I figured out why. Some of those guys do nothing but burpees for up to two hours a day.

Well, next time you have nothing to do, do burpees for two hours. I guarantee you this, your life will be different after two hours of burpees, because I don't know... But, that's what they do, because they have nothing else to do.

So, that's the sense of that article. That's the sense of this belief and that's why one of the things...in fact I'm leaving in...I think it's 12 days now, discus camp. I go to discus camp two weeks every year. Somebody cooks my food. My biggest hassle of the week is doing my underwear and socks laundry, because everything else is done for me.

At the end of the those two weeks, I come out healthier, tanner, fitter, I throw the discus farther. I'm happier, I have a big smile on my face. I have great stories because I haven't done anything. I don't vacuum. I don't dust. I don't make my bed. I just roll myself up in a chute every night. It's hilarious. But, I hope that gives you some insight.

And one of the things you need to do is probably... Well, I can't remember the guy. David Allen wrote a book and it's about organization, but if you're a normal guy and you struggle...a normal girl, and you struggle with this kind of stuff, if you can organize and be a little bit more proactive, you can really turn things around in your life.

I like...I'm a big fan of Anthony Robbins, too, and he really pushes some other ideas. But, I know this. There is nothing more important than being proactive. Always grill extra. Always cook extra.

I've got a friend, Josh Hillis, who recommends that on Sunday and Wednesday your workout is cooking, cutting vegetables and making baggies for the next two days. His belief is that that time is better spent...that hour or two is far, long term, more important for your health and the way you're going to look than going to the gym one more time. So, you make good food selections for the next two or three days.

Was that too long winded?

LA: Not at all. Transitioning from the idea of discus camp, what is your sort of interest or motivation for working with younger athletes?

DJ: Oh, I don't know. Honest to God. Well, it's deeper than you probably want to hear, but honestly. Okay, when I was young I had kind of a speech impediment. You'll hear it sometimes when I talk. I have a hu-normous tongue. There's some other issues. I stuttered and you know, I had to go to these little stupid things in this trailer and I hated it. I had to talk to this lady and I hated it. I didn't talk much.

And then, when I was in the 9th grade, I'm a Catholic, so I got confirmed. And there's this thing...you get a gift. And I honestly think I got the gift of teaching, with all my heart and soul. Many of my family members cannot believe I make a living talking and doing the things I do. I cannot help myself. It comes up from the very roots of my being. I can't help myself but coach you. Even if I'm your competitor, I will help you.

You know, you'll be with me at a track meet, you'll have me by four inches and I'll tell you to move your right foot faster because you'll throw farther. It comes right out of me. I can't help myself.

So, I just think it's just part of who I am. I mean, I don't recommend it. I mean, ask my wife. I hate coaching. I mean, my friend Jim Marcosian unpacked my whole problem the other day. He says, "No matter what happens, you always expect perfection." He says, "That's not a good way to go through life." And I thought, well, yea, I know. But, it's a good way to keep constant and never ending improvement. You know?

I worry about my athletes. My athletes don't realize something that I realize, is that when they graduate from high school, 59 out of 60 of them will never compete again. One of them will go off to college and compete a few years, but most of them are done. The next thing you know, next time I see them, "Hey, what are you doing with yourself?" "Well, I'm in the rec league flat football team." It's like, are you kidding me? You went from All State in football to rec league wide receiver? "Yea, well, I couldn't make it at this college," or that college. It was like, oh, man. Geez, man.

So, it's just in my nature. It's like why does the shark eat the seal? Because that's what a shark does. And why does Dan John coach? Well, that's what Dan John does.

I don't necessarily like coaching. I'd much rather be the actor instead of the director, so to speak. But, that's just...that's just who I am. You know? I think anybody who's successful in teaching or in coaching literally can't help themselves. I guess you can in football, going to it for the money, but even if you made the millions like Ervin Meyer does, I don't know if it's worth it. I hope that answers it. That's the only way I can answer it.

LA: For sure, I think that will probably resonate with people. I guess maybe getting into some more of the nuts and bolts. What is an average day look like as you're working with athletes and what does the process of sort of building athletic foundation and then moving athletes through their four years, what does that look like?

DJ: Sure. Be sure you remind me of that second part before I go on.

LS: Sure.

DJ: I teach three one and a half hour weight classes every day, and then after school I keep the weight room open and then during track season, of course, I go right out and we've got stuff to do. But, that's...I mean, I try to spend quality time on the...looking up articles and doing stuff on the internet, reading books.

One of the things that always amazes me when I work with the young...somebody who wants to be a strength coach is how unread they are. It just shocks me. I'll say, "Have you read this? Have you read that?" "No, I want to be a strength coach." "So, what did you do?" "Well, I hung around the weight room." Well, at best, if you hung around the weight room, you'll get one, maybe two opinions. I think as a strength coach, you really need to read a lot.

In the last three weeks I've probably written reviews or forwards to three new DVDs and three new books. So, that's not untypical for me to read a new book and a new DVD at least once a week. I mean... I'm not saying you need to do that, or the listeners, but that's what I think those of us in the field need to do.

Pavel's new Return of the Kettle Bell book and DVD, I mean, they're fabulous. It's just, oh my God. Where was this 10 years ago? There's a new Gallop DVD called Kalos Sthenos from Brett and Mark Chang and Gray Cook. It's like, oh, okay. I thought it was a doofy exercise. Now I think, oh, everybody in the world needs to do Turkish get-ups. It's the answer to all question.

Kenneth Jay has that new book on Vo2 Max. It's like, so you find me three days a week in my back yard doing 15 seconds match then rest 15, 15 seconds match with the other hand, rest 15. I just...I love this stuff and I read and I eat this stuff up.

So, and then I also spend some quality time on the forums because a lot of it's... Well, I also think it's funny. I mean, some of the trash talking just cracks me up, especially when you meet some of these people. My friend Dan said not long ago... I was giving a talk at a...I won't tell you which one because otherwise people would feel bad. I was giving a talk at one of these large gatherings and he said, "Never have so many people been in a room to talk about weight lifting with so few of them looking like they've ever touched a weight." I thought that was one of the funniest lines I ever heard in my life.

But, I really think you need to spend time on the forums. It's also give you insight. I wear the Vibram five finger shoes and I got that from a forum, and it's done marvels for my heels... pardon, my heel and my hip, just taking care of business. So, you pick up little gems like that. Then, of course, like my brother Gary turned me onto that Al Car stuff and that stuff. So, you really got to keep your ears open.

You asked a really good second question there. How do you develop a kid? It's my sense that especially the young athlete, is that you have to have this kind of broad, general strength. We do a lot of things. Of course, we do thick bars, chains, pull-ups. We do hurdle walk-overs. We do tumbling every day. We do cleans. We do snatches. We do bench press. We do front squats, overhead squats. All kinds of kettle bell movements. We do all kinds of things. That's all important, the exposure to all those different means.

But, at the same time, as a measurement, I like measurements that are somewhat like this. We have a thing in school called the Big Blue Club. You have to... If I screw up the numbers, just forgive me, okay? So, in the Big Blue Club you have the power clean 205, front squat 205, back squat 255, again, that's not very much, clean and jerk 165, do a strict standing press with 115, do five one arm presses right, one arm presses left, I think with the 32. I think I'm right on that. Dead lift 315. I'm probably missing another one. But, there's like seven lifts.

What was interesting was this year, with a small school in our division, in 3A, but we won the state championships and went 14-0. That was interesting because we have a ton of kids on this year's football team on the Big Blue Club. The secret to success in the team sports is two things. The first one is called shrink the gap. What you need in a football team is you don't need a kid...and we do...we have a kid who power cleans 300 for a double. Now, next time you think you're strong, there's a high school kid who cleans 300 for two. That's pretty impressive.

So, you've got that kid. He's on one... We have a sophomore this year bench 385. That's pretty impressive stuff, okay? We've got a bunch of kids pulling 5. Those kids are here. But then, what you've got to do is okay, what is your top 10, top 20% of your team strength levels? Then you've got to look at the bottom end. What your goal is, to shrink...of your 22, 25 starters, you can't have... Like for example, you can't have a starter who benches 135 and a starter who benches 385. That gap is too big. So, the job of the strength coach in a team sport is to shrink the gap, shrink the gap.

What you need is you need something like a Big Blue Club, Big Silver Club, whatever you want to do. We'll come up with a couple more next year for the younger kids. You need to have... You want as many kids as you can to be strongish over those seven different movements. You might say, well, a 255 squat is not much. A 315 dead lift isn't much. Yea, but that's okay. Those are fine. They're fine.

But, 165 clean and jerk, yea, that's a little more difficult, maybe. But, these are all okay, solid, fine lifts. The athlete needs to do all seven of those in one day. So, what happens is, whatever their weak movement is, is the one they have to work on. So, you automatically build-up their weaknesses by having a club like that.

On the individual athlete, there's no question in my mind and I think this is the thing a strength coach should tattoo on their forehead, attention to detail. I tell you one thing, I know I'm not popular with the kids, a lot of the kids. I think you should wear a uniform shirt, uniform shorts into the training facility. Why? I don't know. Because that's a detail, and attention to detail is what makes you great.

I work with a person who's missed the Olympics twice now because they foul in training and when it comes to all the pressure of the Olympic trials, they hold back a little bit not to foul and it just missed making the finals twice. Oh, my God! Don't foul in training. It's a detail.

When I work with you...if I'm working with you as an individual athlete or whatever your goals are, when I tell you to do a plank and you have your butt in the air, that detail is what I focus on. Why? Because, it's a detail. When you're doing a swing with the kettle bell and you're not locking your thighs out at the top and turning yourself into a plank, if you don't do that, why are you still planking? You're not doing them right. And then what happens is, if you focus enough on the details, pretty soon the whole system really expands and what you have is you have that elite athlete.

At the elite level, there's no wiggle room. You've got to be good at... I mean, you have to be at the top end of everything. You can't suddenly make it up with these dysfunctions that you've been ignoring for five years. That's one thing I realize about like a guy like Brett Jones, is that he says you don't want to build strength on dysfunction. Well, that's a pretty good thing to think about. If you've got an athlete who's weak here and you're making him stronger and stronger and stronger, that weak link in the chain is going to be their downfall.

So, that's...I just gave you... By the way, I think all your listeners should sent me \$1,500. That was pretty good. That general thing was a pretty good idea. That's exactly how you make a program. It is hard. It is hard to explain at first.

Why are we spending so much time with the small freshman boy and teaching him how to do shoulder rolls when he should be getting his body weight up? Well, because the shoulder roll is going to prevent him from getting an injury one day, or maybe somebody not injured. That is that little detail that I don't want to lose this scholarship kid to a bad fall when we can spend 20 minutes fixing that issue. So, that's my approach. I hope I answered it with some clarity.

LA: Very much so. That was generous and definitely insightful. Just to wrap up, I think we're about running out of time. If people are interested in getting the book, how do they find the book. If they're interested in sort of keeping track of what you're writing or what you're doing, where can they find you?

DJ: Two things, the best place to go now...at least until I kind of catch back up on everything, is DaveDraper.com. Dave Draper was a famous, famous bodybuilder back in the '60s and he hosts a question and answer area for me on his website. Then, you can buy the book directly from there, Never Let Go, directly off the website.

Everyone...a lot of people will go on Amazon and Barnes & Noble, but they don't have the book. They're not going to have it for a long time. I'm not trying to drive business away from them, but if you want the book you go to DaveDraper.com, and you just look around. It will be really easy to find.

And then, of course, my home site is DanJohn.org. I've got a free book on Olympic lifting there. A free book on discus throwing, a book on how to grow up as an adult and then I've got this newsletter called Get Up, which if you print off all the Get-Ups, you will go through two reams of paper, at least. There is more information about more stuff than you'll ever think of in your life. It's overwhelmingly too much information. And then, there's some archives of some stuff I have from there and there.

About a year ago at this time my site crashed when this...well, it's a long story. But, I lost a lot of good stuff. But, for straight up questions and answers, just go to Dave Draper's forum. But, if you want a whole bunch of background...it's all free. Everything's free. I don't charge anything for my website or...ask me all you want. I'm here to help you, make a difference. But, go ahead, download the weight lifting book, see what you think. It's kind of for beginners, but there's some really detailed insights about the Olympic lifts.

I'm real proud of the concept called Bow and Arrow. I mean, I really think it really helps. If someone's taking it serious, it helps them a lot. The way I teach the Romanian dead lift, literally, I think is the best way to teach it. So, there's just some stuff in there I think you'll like. But, the weight lifting books, I think 97 pages. I don't know. Help yourself everybody.

LA: Well, I think that about does it. Dan, thank you for the time.

DJ: Oh, thank you. And just if you can let me know where to find this interview, I'd like to plug it up on my website, too, so people can find it there, too. All right?

LA: Absolutely. Appreciate the time and take care.

DJ: You bet. All right, talk to you soon.

About Dan John

Dan John is the Strength Coach and Head Track and Field Coach at Juan Diego Catholic High School in Draper, Utah and a full-time on-line religious studies instructor for Columbia College of Missouri and contributing writer to *Men's Health*. Originally from South San Francisco, Dan came to Utah to throw the discus for Utah State University and never left.

Dan has Masters degrees in history and in religious education, as well as intensive work at the American University in Cairo, University of Haifa, and Cornell. Dan has written articles for *Catechetical Update* and *Utah Historical Quarterly*, as well as being a columnist for the *Intermountain Catholic*.

In addition, Dan writes articles for a variety of strength magazines and publishes a little newsletter called *Get Up*, which registers up to a quarter of a million hits a month. Dan has been teaching for over thirty years.

At home, he is humbled by his lovely wife, Tiffini, whose middle name is not "long suffering" no matter how often it is repeated, and his two daughters, Kelly and Lindsay.

In addition, Dan has won the Master Pleasanton Highland Games twice, American Masters Discus Championships several times, the National Masters Weightlifting Championship once and holds the American Record in the Weight Pentathlon.

Dan's Web site: <http://danjohn.net/>