



<http://www.criticalbench.com/muscle-building-experts.htm>

## WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



### **Luke Allison Interview Interviews Burkey of Station 515**

LA: This is Luke Allison with [CriticalBench.com](http://CriticalBench.com). I'm here with Burkey from Station 515. Burkey, how are you?

B: I'm doing all right.

LA: I wanted to talk to you, I originally found your page through, I think it was Mark Twight's Twitter feed. And he sort of mentioned you and I had no idea who you were or where you were or sort of what Station 515 was. I wanted to start right there and give you a chance to sort of explain what you're doing and what you have going on.

B: Well, the whole thing started with just working out in my garage. And what ended up happening is I got pulled into working out actually through Mark. At a wilderness school, someone pointed me to some of his writings and the idea of working out more than just picking this up and putting it down.

You're spending that kind of time changing yourself physically and that is has a mental and emotional component. The idea of Station 515 kind of came from really putting that into the forefront, that these psychological lessons are just as important, if not more important, than physical changes that happen when you train at that kind of level.

LA: You actually have a facility now. You work with other people. You've sort of made a commitment to this, haven't you?

B: Yeah. Well, people starting coming and started asking questions and enough people got together that we moved out of the garage and into a little warehouse space and got certified as an instructor and started as a personal trainer and started taking on clients, working with new people.

LA: Now, you mentioned sort of just that you came to this idea of working out, being more than just sort of picking up and putting things down. But, did you have an athletic background, did you want to work with athletes, did you want to be a trainer or strength and conditioning coach? What as that sort of process like?

B: It was actually very interesting. The first time I really stepping into a gym to train was in 2007. Never, never was an athletic kid. Working out was that jocks did, for me. It was never really that interesting until it got framed in a way that made sense to me, that your conditioning determines your reality. That simple idea was that your idea of possible and impossible, the way you look at the world, is through the lens of your physical abilities and your emotional responses to that.

And so, that started making a lot more sense than just trying to get bigger or get stronger, get faster, the idea of actually changing how you see the world through physical training. That's what got me interested. And as a result, you know, I have definitely changed my physical abilities, but more so I think I've changed the way that I see and work with problems. So, that's been the real important part.

LA: I think at one point you mentioned ending up in Salt Lake City to work with Gym Jones and Mark Twight. What was the experience like?

B: It was great. I feel really, really lucky that I was able to find them so early in my training. I didn't end up wasting much time at all. I was actually at a seminar back in 2007. I will admit, I was completely terrified when I first showed up there, because I'd

been working out for six months. And these are some world class athletes. But, definitely, they were just really, really helpful and really responsive to just...if you were honest and willing to work hard, they were willing to meet you half way. Mark had said something about how they don't care about ability as much as integrity.

LA: Something similar to 'empty your cup' and whatnot, and 'be ready to learn clearly' is what it sounds like.

One of the, I guess basically the captions on your website under Station 515, is "philosophy with consequences". Talk a little bit about what that means and maybe where it came from.



B: A lot of it came from trying to explain the difference. It was after I came back from that two-day seminar in 2007. I was trying to put all the things I learned into action. All the little sayings and things that came out of that, you know, Mark's outlook on how to train. I was trying to make it into...well, trying to understand it and make it into something that mattered to me.

Very used to people talking a lot. When I was in high school, just everyone always has their opinion and how they want to deal with things. It's a hit or miss whether or not they actually embody it.

The gym was one of those situations where you can say all you want, you can talk as big as you want, but that kettlebell weighs 70 pounds. Pick it up or don't.

There's really no gray area. Regardless of the excuses you make, you didn't achieve the goal on that day.

And so, the idea is "philosophy with consequences", the philosophy of, this is how we look at the world. This is how we work. But, that it's measurable. It's not like on this day I will behave this certain way. It's you say what you want and there's a measurable amount of it right there. There's a joke about someone making an off-handed remark about how they could run a marathon. The idea of a trainer is like, really? Okay. We're going to run a marathon next week. Be careful what you say because it's a kind of place where there are no idle words.

We kind of have a group of people who are tied to making that the way we normally behave. We only say things we're willing to back-up.

LA: I think that's something, if people are familiar with Mark Twight at all, that you can pick-up in his sort of mountaineering and alpine background where you really are sort of responsible in that realm for yourself. And if you do something stupid, it really could kill you.

B: Yeah.

LA: I don't know that that resonates with a lot of people, but it does seem very real. It does seem appropriate. It seems like you picked that up to a certain degree.

B: Yeah, and I mean, it was... The idea of that statement was mostly when I was trying to explain what was... People would ask, "Well, what's different about your training than me going to the gym and doing super sets?" It's just the focus on that idea of training for a bigger purpose. When someone talks about philosophy, it's usually something lofty and life-changing and about the grander world. And so, the idea of philosophy with consequences was just that this is the window that we operate in. This is the world that I can touch and change and that all this talk and all these words that we say all the time, this is where they get measured.

You either can keep talking or you need to change. So, there's a pass/fail a lot of times. I think it's really good for people to have both of those experiences, to pass and to fail occasionally. It keep them humble.

LA: Nothing wrong with that, certainly. One of the questions I really wanted to ask was, it wasn't clear how you determine if you're making progress or you're improving. Usually that's tied to a lot of numbers or sports performance or things like that that are really sort of available and empirical.

B: Yeah, I mean, everything depends on the goal. For someone who is say a sprinter, that's going to be a very... You test it on game day. You test it on the day of

the challenge. If it's a fighter, you have your fights. If you're a climber, you have your task.

There are a lot of people out there who do not have a specific sport. I train a lot of people who are simply trying to get healthier. A big thing is the drive. It's a little harder to measure progress for individuals who do not have a sport. It's harder to measure, are we doing this right? Some people it's weight loss and energy levels. It's very much tied to how they feel.

And interesting thing that I've noticed with some of the people I've been working with is the way they approach a problem, the difference between the first day and six months in. Little things. The fact that getting your chin over the bar isn't enough. They want to hit their chest to the bar. People who initially, when things get hard, will start whining or short-stroking reps or this kind of trying to pass-off their effort as good enough. It's usually frowned upon and pointed out.

If someone sticks around for a couple of months, their knee-jerk reaction is to drop off the bar and say, "That one didn't count." They'll do extra work on their own without being told. They start to take pride in their training, in the fact that they give 100% and that that's the only thing that actually counts.

And so, I think that's one of the really interesting early-on changes, is just again, the integrity that comes from being around people who will not accept anything less than your absolute best.



LA: It's all very interesting. It's a totally different paradigm than I'm sure what people are used to. Chasing numbers or sort of following a class or anything like that.

I made note of a couple of quotes that I sort of wanted to spend some time on, things that you have written. If they have attributions to other people, I'd be curious to hear about that. One of the ones I think you sort of mentioned before was "physical conditioning governs the possible and the impossible, separates game from sport from test and impasse. Physical conditioning is the exchange rate which we trade work for results."

What does that mean? Does that mean that everyone has to pay something and then if you don't pay you don't get anything? What does that really mean?

B: Basically, it was just...again, when I first started training I was doing a wilderness survival program in Montana. It was pointed out just in the context of wilderness survival, in the context of hunting and fishing and just making it through, day-to-day. Your physical conditioning was an important factor. Your life and the life of the people you cared about depends on your ability to perform certain tasks.

So, that whole thing basically was kind of how I framed the need for me to actually start becoming...taking a little bit more...paying a little closer attention to my physical abilities, to what I could and couldn't do. Basically, to simply ask the question is, am I strong enough? Am I fast enough? For what I want to accomplish, is the body I inhabit good enough?

At that point, if not, you either change your physical ability or you change your desired goal. If you physically are never going to be able to attain a certain goal, it's either... You've got to make a decision at that point. Is it okay with you to be second best or to be a hobbyist? Or, do you want to be a world class athlete? Or, even on a simple level, if you don't have any specific sport goals, you just want to be relatively healthy. That might be your goal. It's all just kind of... The idea is just realizing where you want to be and where you are, and not lying to yourself about it.

LA: Have some sort of awareness about capabilities and capacity and whatnot, not being completely misled about...

B: Right, and to be honest with where you are and how much time you're willing to give and where you can be with what you're willing to pay. I guess that idea, Mark has stated, that's where I got it from, is the idea is everything costs something. If you're not willing to train a certain number of hours, you're never going to be even better than... You can be the best person on your block. If you put in another ten hours a week of training, you might be the best person in your state. If you put in another hunk of hours

of training and you have some gifts, you might be the best person in your division, in the country even.

There's time that needs to be spent. There's a lot of energy that needs to be spent both on training and on recovery, on technical practice and to really just realize that, to accept that and to either... To be honest from the get-go, if you're willing to pay that price or not.

If you're not willing to pay that price, well then, it's probably best to reassess where you feasibly want to be so you're not banging your head against the wall and you can still make progress towards a goal that's meaningful and without deluding yourselves.



LA: That increase, the weight is in sort of more hours, it became apparent that the only way to really do that at a certain point would be to train for specific goals, like you said. You need work, have skill work, have extra sessions, end up doing your own work. That would be the only way.

B: Just like a big thing is simply with martial arts. Physical conditioning is important, but after a certain point it's a technical game. The time you would spend training in a gym scenario would be to keep yourself balanced and keep yourself from getting injured. It would be a support effort at best.

When you're making a big change, you might have to spend a lot of time in a gym changing your body composition to better suit your new goal, really to see the broader picture than just the inside of a gym. It just so happens to be where we all meet and kind of help support each other in our own goals.

LA: One of the other ones, I think this is something that I enjoyed probably more than anything I've read in quite a while. It was, "learn to tell the difference between wanting answers and wanting attention."

B: Back when I was doing the wilderness survival program somebody, a friend of mine, got me a book of Sufi Knowledge. Idris Shah is the author and he had passed-away, I think, in the early '90s. But, he had a lot to do with just the whole Sufism. It's basically kind of like psychology. One of the essays that I read that he had pointed out that human beings seek attention like food. It's a need.

But, sometimes we, just like with food, we overdo it. We take more than we need and as a result, it has a negative impact on your health. That fact that we don't understand, we don't look at attention as being a necessity like food, we don't observe the fact that sometimes people are seeking attention and they don't even know it. The kid who constantly asks the teacher questions or even when he doesn't need the answer. He asks framed questions to show the whole class that he knows. People who bug teachers because they want to be entertained, not because they are actually wanting to learn.

It's a slippery slope and to really just notice that sitting in a classroom and you want to ask a question, but you realize that it's not that you want the answer, it's that you want to be acknowledged by a teacher. You want the pat on the back. To really ask yourself, is that really going to help? Would it be better to shut your mouth and work than to just try to get noticed by any means necessary?

It was a simple thing that I read that kind of threw a whole lot into a different light. Kind of like when someone gives you a pair of glasses for the first time and it clears-up a lot of things that I didn't understand or that made me uncomfortable or annoyed. Finally it's like, oh, it's attention seeking behavior. It's a little easier to understand now what's going on when you can understand some of the root causes of behavior.

LA: I think you just wrote about this again a couple of days ago, talking about attention masking the desire for information, for learning or even a desire to teach.

B: Yes.

LA: That's pretty broad. That's a lot of behaviors. That's a lot of professions.



B: It's there in most things. I mean, we definitely have that desire for someone we respect to nod to us, to say, "Oh, yes. I see you've done good work." We love the pat on the back. It feels empowering to have someone look to you and say, "You have someone I want, teach me." But at the same time, just to be aware of some of the other things that go on.

If you find... I have personally found myself wanting attention and caught myself waiting for the thumbs-up or the pat on the back. And it's just...it's a gut check. It's that reminder of like, what am I really trying to do here?

There are a lot of ways to get attention. If you really want to teach, sometimes the best way to teach someone is to never even get noticed as a teacher. It's possible to share and teach without getting noticed as much and it doesn't make it any more less useful. I guess it all comes back down to the methods we chose to use and that just awareness of our true motives.

It takes a lot to change someone. And so, just being constantly aware can kind of keep you out of some of the worst pitfalls.



LA: One of the last quotes that I pulled out was from the post on group dynamics, pressure and pain. And it says, "Remember that the group exists to push you beyond yourself, to protect you and inspire you and to give you the confidence and the skill to

exist on that level, apart from everyone else.” Is that sort of what lead you to go out on your own and sort of create your own sort of environment, your own station?

B: In a way. A lot of it, too, came, again, that wilderness school was a really important part. Having the luck to be out in Salt Lake for a couple of day, it’s amazing to have that group surrounding you and helping push you. You leave something like that just completely fired-up and you go back home.

Many of us don’t that same support network to really realize and utilize that group as... They help create a feeling of momentum and you need to be able to touch that even when you’re not surrounded by people who are actively feeding you. it’s a lot harder to carry on that kind of intensity and that kind of integrity when you’re surrounded by people who aren’t trying very hard.

If by default, you’re the best, it’s not really much of an urge to force you to grow. It’s great to be surrounded by people who are better than you. It gives you that urge to like...you want to keep up.

And so, I guess the hard thing is when you don’t have that group. When you’re surrounded by the group, I find that what I really try to do is get a taste of that feeling, to really understand it and internalize it and then try my best to be able to touch that on your own. Because usually, our worst moment are when we’re not surrounded by peers, not surrounded by people who are there to help us.

We face our worst challenges alone, usually, and that should be something in your head while you’re training, while you’re using the energy from your training partners and your coaches, is to realize that at your worst, they’re probably not going to be there. So, you need to be able to listen to what they say, to take what you can from their encouragement and then to internalize it and be able to carry that on your own.

So, that was the whole idea to be able to...in a way, to create a group. But, with that knowledge that the group is there as a function to get everyone beyond needing it. That it is, in essence, a station. It’s a stage. It’s a moment in time to get you past needing it. In essence, it’s crutches. But, crutches are why we can walk again after being broken.

LA: Possibly, it’s a function of language, but I picked-up on that and I immediately thought of bicycle racing. There is one guy on the bike, but there’s a car full of people behind him with a second bike and a radio and water and things like that, and how you couldn’t sort of do it with only one or the other. It couldn’t possibly work.

I thought that was a good metaphor as opposed to something like Gold’s Gym or 24 Fitness where you’re not really sure anyone cares. You’re not sure of getting

seriously injured while they happen to be working out. That's neither here nor there, I guess.

But it was weird. I see this idea that people need to create their own place, because it doesn't exist. We can't all go to Salt Lake City every week. It's not realistic and I think that's interesting, that desire to sort of recreate that. There's something so lacking.

I wanted to ask a little bit about the content and the reason behind the blog. A lot of people have training journals, a lot of people write articles. What the sort of process between deciding to log a workout and to sort of dig deeper, sort of philosophically or...



B: For me, again, when I first started training, before I made it out to Salt Lake, I would read the Gym Jones workout blog for a half hour before I went to the gym. I would be getting ideas for how to train, but also be getting inspired to train and to train with more on my mind than just getting stronger.

Again, a lot of it came from the Sufi aspect of, there are so many corrections we have to make to our behavior to operate on a level that we want to. These lessons can

come in many layers, that the integrity, the willfulness to strike-out on your own, that when it's coupled with the physical work, I think it leaves a deeper impression.

There is Gym Jones workout, and I remember the first time I did it, it's called a Tailpipe. You row 250 meters while your partner hold two 53-pound kettlebells racked on their chest. It's three rounds, and it's for time.

When your partner's rowing, you're standing there with 105-pounds on your chest, watching them row and really wanting them to hurry up. You're in a lot of discomfort and in reality, if you simply relax, if you simply stop being so tense, you drop and weights and the pain goes away. But, you lose on the lesson.

The idea... We'd always end up talking a little bit while we were training at the Station with the people who I would train with, about some of the deeper lessons that could come out of this, some of the personality changing aspects of really taking control of your fitness, of taking control of your conditioning. Not just your physical conditioning, but the way you look at a problem, the way you deal with stress, with panic, with fear and with failing. These are all changed by your outlook and by the group you surround yourself with.

So, I find, a lot of times, that that's more important to me, is the deeper changes. The physical stuff, it's all relative. I've logged some workouts, but frankly, without knowing the person, without knowing what they do, their condition, how they're sleeping, how they're eating, what their goals are, those numbers are numbers. There's no context for them.

The philosophy, the discussion of some of the deeper aspects, those are applicable to anyone, either as food for thought, or as maybe a fire to get you training a little bit more, or to look at things a little differently. They're also a little siphoning off of a little random thoughts that I have and it always helps me, personally, to put them down on paper. So, it just so happens that they end up on the computer more than not. So, I decided to share a few.

LA: It's very interesting. It's certainly a personal perspective, and that's appreciated, hopefully, by others.

One of the things I really began to sort of pick up on or draw on was you're psychologically changing sort of everyone who's having these doubts. They're in the rack position holding kettlebells, they don't necessarily want to do it. It's not that much fun. But, we're all having conversations, but we're having different conversations about how hard this is or why they're doing this or how much it hurts. I think that that's sort of what you're getting to. Is that sort of one of the stories you're trying to tell?

B: Yeah. Like, there's a lot of reasons not to train like this, not to push yourself that hard. There's no one who really even expects us to train as hard as we do, except for ourselves, except for a small group of friends. This becomes more of an experiment in how far can someone push themselves, how much can you change your personality?

Everyone is... We hear so much about people blaming parents or teachers or society at large for their problems. The dialogue that goes on in our head, this is where we kind of turn it around and we decide that I'm going to change my surroundings. I'm going to change myself and how I interact with those surroundings.

Those are the discussions that I think a lot of people can really touch on when the question is, well, I could quit. Any runner at any moment, all they have to do to stop hurting is to stop running. But, there are psychological costs for that decision. They let people down. Physically the pain is over, but there's many types of pain.

And so, the whole idea is kind of getting familiar with those edges of your personality and the exchanges that we're willing to make. How far are you willing to go down the path of physical pain to avoid letting your coach down or letting yourself down? The more we understand about those edges, I think, the more it just becomes easier to deal with and to understand.

I mean, I'd a client who was a waiter and he had mentioned that on the days that we worked out his work was so much easier because no one could really stress him out anymore, bad tips or rude people. He felt a much deeper connection with his ability and his self-worth. And so, it became a little harder to shake that with rude comments or just being ignored.

So, I think another big thing about really touching those edges of your personality, it lets you taste the essence of who you are and who you're becoming. With that knowledge, a lot of tasks are a little less stressful because you kind of understand how far you can be pushed and how far you can push yourself.

LA: Very well said. I'm not sure I could possibly add anything to that.

To sort of wrap-up here real quick, I'll let you sort of decide if you want to point people in a certain direction, if you want to let them know where you are, if you want to let them know how to contact you online, any of those sort of details, I'll give you a minute to sort of talk about that.

B: Well, basically, I live in the Detroit area, in Detroit, Michigan. So, the warehouse I have is...it's in a little town called Madison Heights. The whole idea is that it's just because, like you said, that's not something that I've been able to find around here.

Gym Jones was where I got inspired. My website, it's StationFiveOneFive.com. That whole thing was just my interpretation and kind of the way that I choose to interface with what's around here.

I think that if anyone's interested in that kind of training, Gym Jones was probably... It's where I found it, and again, the big thing is to learn from people who've been there, to think deeply about what you're doing and why and that question alone can do a lot, just trying to have that answer. Why do you do it like this? What are the consequences? What are the long-term consequences of your actions?

I think that just a little understanding and a little bit of logic, you can get a lot of things done. And to realize, too, that there are people out there that when you show them the effort, they will meet you half way. But, talk...talk is cheap. And so, we need to put the work out there and to really just go at this and enjoy it, enjoy the ride and to make the best of everything that you have around you, including the people and whatever facilities you have access to.

LA: Well, with that, I want to say thank you very much, Burkey. I appreciate the time and hopefully we can sort of spread this a little bit to some more receptive audiences.

B: Thank you very much.

LA: All right, I appreciate it. Take care.

B: Yep.

**Visit Burkey's Blog Below**

**<http://station515.blogspot.com/>**