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WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



Luke Allison Interviews Chad Smith



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

CS: Doing pretty well, Luke. How about yourself?

LA: Hanging in there, man. I want to kind of set a background for people that might not be familiar with you or sort of track and field in general. You had a successful throwing career and I want to kind of get into that, wherever you think is the right place to start.

CS: Okay. Well, after high school I went to the University of California, Berkeley, on a scholarship. Things kind of didn't pan-out for me there. I was then out of track from basically January of 2006 to December 2007, and then came back in 2008 season and kind of...a pretty rough year the first year back after almost two years off of training. And then, in 2009, won two NAIA national championships, both indoor and outdoor title in the shot put. I was ranked as high as 12th at one point during the year, but finished-up at 17th in the US in the shot put, and 3rd among all American collegiates.

I threw 63 feet, 10 ¼ inches and then competed as an open athlete in 2010. So, I kind of got to the point there where I was so busy with my business, Juggernaut Training Systems, that I couldn't really put the time towards it that I wanted. So, I decided to retire from track at that point, which I was 23 and I'd been competing in track since I was 9. So, that was kind of a tough deal. And then, I turned my efforts towards powerlifting, which has brought us to this point.

LA: And definitely some things that I want to touch on, the track background is sort of interesting. You have an implement and you're sort of manipulating the implement. And that kind of attracts different people and it requires different things. Can you talk sort of how that influenced some of your training, possibly?

CS: You know, throwers in track and field, I think, a lot of outsiders would be like, you just have to be a big, strong guy, or whatever. They're not good athletes. But, people who are the top level track and field athletes, the throwers, they're as big as the biggest football players, as strong as the strongest weight lifters and some of the most explosive athletes on the planet.

My senior year of track, I had a 35 inch vertical. I weighed 290 pounds and I could dunk a medicine ball, like a 8-pound medicine ball. I was 6-foot, 290. So, you know, in training, taking a lot of those concepts from track and field and brought them to the training of all the athletes I really work with. Because, in my exposure to track and field and the throws and the sprints, you have people who run the fastest, who jump the highest and who throw the furthest and you just take those training concepts and apply them to a basketball player or a football player. I train my skill guys like sprinters and

my linemen like throwers. That's a pretty good recipe for success, to have big, strong, explosive athlete.

LA: Certainly, certainly true. I think Bondarchuck who put the idea out there that it's not necessarily the strongest thrower who makes the best thrower.

CS: Yeah, Vonderchuck has done a lot of stuff and he coached Yuriy Sedykh and Sergey Litvinov, the two greatest hammer throwers of all time. Did a lot of research and stuff about how Sedykh got weaker in the general lifts, the squat, clean and snatch, for him, but stronger in the specific exercises like throwing different weighted hammers and some other unique exercises. His throw continued to go up.

Things that I've experimented with to a degree, as far as throwing different weighted shot puts and things like that. But, at least for me, I never had a good enough grasp on really what Bondarchuck's ideas were to go all in on them for myself. I felt like if I don't really hit the nail on the head with the specific strength that he's talking about, then I'm just going to end up being weaker and not having the specific strength. And that's obviously not a good recipe for success.

But, his ideas about dynamic correspondence and the transfer of training are great ideas and something that can be applied across the board, regardless of what sport you have. The term 'sport specific' in my industry of training athletes gets thrown around so much, and misused by such a large portion of the population. But, Vondarchuck's ideas about sport specific, specific strength and dynamic correspondence are really, really what people should be aiming for there.

LA: I would agree. I think it seems like something worth mentioning, simply because some of the athlete you work with do seem to come from skill-intensive sports, which is sort of what your background was. I thought that was an interesting parallel.

CS: I think one of the toughest things to manage when dealing with an athlete, especially like volleyball players and water polo players are two of the biggest populations that I train. It's like a hotbed of the sports in Southern California here. It's not really... Lifting weights and strength training is not really a part of those sports' cultures like it is for football or wrestling or something like that.

They are much more skill-driven sports, I think, than some others. So, like how you manage the bio-energy demands that you're putting on them, because I'm really strong, but I have no appreciative water polo skills. So, obviously being really strong doesn't make you good water polo player, because I'm not a good water polo player. So, how do you balance their skill development there and them being strong in the water and doing different drills like egg beating with holding med balls out of the water and things like that, with their general strength development in the weight room.

I think that goes back to Bondarchuck, how you can bridge that gap from the weight room to the pool, the weight room to the court or with basketball players, another really skill-intensive thing.

LA: I just thought it was interesting. I wasn't sure how far to push that sort of discussion. But, you know, it seemed like a more beneficial background than I think what a lot of people come from, typically, in the United States. So, I wanted to sort of explore that a bit.

But, you've made sort of an interesting transition recently. You did a raw powerlifting meet last fall, I believe. What was the total? I think it was 1963. What was that experience like for you?

CS: You know, it was interesting. I kind of decided once I left track last May or June of 2010, that I still wanted to compete in something. I was already lifting really hard for track, and was strong. I figured the natural transition and as I was already sponsored by Elite Fitness, as well, was to compete in the meet.

So, I just kind of laid-out a plan to get ready for this meet, which became...that plan is the Juggernaut Method, which I'm sure we'll talk about more, to get ready for it. And it was an interesting experience because you've got about ten seconds or fifteen seconds that these nine lifts are going to take. I had 20 weeks building into this. And it's kind of like a track meet. With the track meet stuff I would spend all this time to get one throw right, really. I mean, it would be nice to have all six throws, right? But, I just needed one. I only needed one to be right.

I'd spent hundreds of hours, thousands of hours, preparing for something that was going to take a second and a half. I think it kind of prepared me...my track background had prepared me well for that as far as being able to perform when the bright lights are on and you're up.

But, it was a small meet, which was nice. I think that was a good place to start. And it was fun. I made all my goals going into it. I had said in June that I wanted to squat eight and pull seven and bench 455, and I ended up benching 463. So, I went seven for eight. I passed on my last deadlift and missed one squat. But, it couldn't have really gone too much better.

LA: Is that something you plan to continue in the future, just sort of isolate meets and sort of train up to them? Or, what is your thought about that moving forward?

CS: I'm going to definitely continue to compete. My next meet is March 5th, the SPF Ironman, Pro Am out in Tennessee. I want to go 2150 at that meet, in the 308 weight class, which would be one of the two or three biggest totals for a 308 in the last couple

of years. It's a way bigger meet. The American record holder in the squat, Troy Nash, from my weight class is going to be competing at it. Robert Wilkerson is the super heavy weight world record holder in the squat is going to be competing at it.

And then they have all the pro guys in the multi-ply the next day. So, Westside's going to be there. Big Iron guys are going to be there. So, it's going to be a lot different than my little meet in the high school gym that I was at in October.

I want to keep competing. I don't see myself competing more than two or three times a year, just because being so busy running the business. When I do something I want to put everything I can into it. So, getting ready for these meets is kind of an all-consuming process at a lot of points. I'm in a de-load week this week. So, I'm decompressing. I don't see myself competing more than two or three times a year. I've got some big aspirations in powerlifting. So, I'll definitely continuing to compete there.

LA: I want to see if I can smash two ideas together. I want to ask about your preparation and the development of the Juggernaut System, but also, see if you can work-in the idea of only competing two or three times a year. Because, that begins to sound like a season, like track, like other sports where a lot of the philosophy for powerlifting is there are meets all the time. You can stay above 90% all year long and you don't need to break. It's very sort of contrasting.

CS: Okay. The Juggernaut method came out of an idea of some training cycles I was using with the athletes at my place, Juggernaut Training Systems that... It was a very basic cycle where the first week they would do five sets of five at a manageable weight, like 75%. The second week they're ramp it up a little bit and do three sets of five at 80%. And then the third week, I was having them do a five-rep max, which for me is usually going to fall about 85%.

So, I was having these athletes do it and they're making good progress. They'd get that 85% for five no problem, and the maybe I'd have them go 20 pounds up from there. They were usually getting that for five. So, I had a little break between my indoor and outdoor track seasons. I was like, okay, let me see how this works for me.

So, I go in with the squat. Let's say I squatted 455 for five sets of five the first week, and then went to 495 for three sets of five the second week. The third week of the wave...so like 550 for five. As soon as I racked it I thought to myself, man, that was easy. I should have done it for more. I shouldn't have racked it.

So, that kind of sparked my mind on the idea of taking like a rep max for the last week, that weight to near failure, at 85%, in this case to near failure. And also, driving the progress of your plan from phase to phase through that rep max. It's an idea I took from Doug Young, who was a great powerlifter in the '70s, great bench presser,

incredible physique. All his training was based around these limit sets, as he called them, that he would do every week and adjust his weights based off of that.

So, the Juggernaut method just came from that. It was really like a light bulb hit, lightning struck me as soon as I racked that rep with 550 and just kind of got the wheels turning. It grew from this one little three-week thing out to a whole 16-week training cycle.

As far as competing two or three times a year, you know, like I said. For me, doing that, I'm doing that because of the demands of my business. If I'm smashing it every week at above 90%, it's sort of taxing to the CNS for me when I work a 14-hour day of a very active job where I've got to be on and demonstrating things to people that it makes recovery too difficult for me. But, for other athletes, I think they're better off to compete less and do more submaximal training, because it's so much easier on the body as far as not getting injured. When you're dealing with like a drug-free lifter, I don't think that they can...they can't stay up at 90% for weeks and months on end. I mean, even if they're taking a de-load every fourth week or something, and it not break them down physically and mentally.

At the same time, with that being said, I know Louie, who I think talks the most about staying about 90% and that his guys are always ready for a meet. People talk so much about GPP and the lifter having that high level of conditioning, I think that is something important as well. Just because I'm going to compete only three times in 2011 probably doesn't mean that when I'm 20 weeks out from that I'm going to be weak, you know? Or, I'm not going to be...that I wouldn't be ready to compete. I'm just going to focus my training a little bit differently and I can take a month and maybe do some more bodybuilding kind of stuff and try to put on some size or really put a lot of focus towards someone I identify as a weak point.

LA: I think it was just interesting. It seemed like a credible alternative. It's just this idea that there's this one way to powerlift and there's this one way to train. I just thought it was interesting, the way that you sort of moved away from that and then are really looking at a very serious meet with very strong people coming up in a couple of months.

CS: I mean, another reason why, besides my commitment to my business, that makes me only want to compete two or three times a year is that it will allow me to do other things in the strength sports world, which I have aspirations to do, like Highland Games, like Strongman. If I have 20 weeks between meets, if I want to take the first eight weeks of that and kind of focus it towards doing the Highland Games, I can do that and then have a 12-week cycle into the next meet. That is my goal.

John Cole, who is the world record holder for the total at my weight class, 308's, held 2364 in 1972, and that's my goal, is to break that total. But, John Cole was not just a great powerlifter, he was a national champion in the discus throw and he was a serious contender to make the US Olympic Team in Olympic lifting.

There are a lot more guys like that in the '60s and '70s. George Frenn was the world record holder in the weight throw and squatted like 840 at 242's. And Kazmaier, a great Strongman, great powerlifter, pretty good in the Highland Games as well. Guys who are just so well-rounded in their strength and they could do everything. That's what I aspire to be, is not just to be a great powerlifter or a great shot putter or a great Olympic lifter or whatever your field it. I think the more well-rounded you can be, that's just being a strong man. Not a Strongman competitor, but just an overall strong person. And really an athlete. That's what I never want to lose. I'm an athlete first and a lifter second.

I want to be able to go out and do anything. Whether it's play pick-up basketball games or squat 800-pounds. People say you can't ride two horses with one ass, or serve two masters at once. Not to say that I'm going to try and do that, but I want to be well-rounded in my strength. So, only competing in powerlifting two or three times a year will allow me to pursue some other related fields and I think be very successful in them as well.

LA: No question, that would be something to see, to bring back a renaissance like that. Caber toss and weight for height and people doing Strongman and things like that. I mean, if you're strong you can do that. I don't know where the intense pressure to specialize comes from, necessarily. Maybe you have some theories on that? I don't know that it's good for everyone in every situation.

CS: Sorry, what was that last part?

LA: Just the over-specialization, the idea that I'm only going to throw or I'm only going to powerlift or I'm only going to do Highland Games or things like that. Because, like you were saying, in the 70's or the 60's, that's not how it was. People did multiple sports.

CS: A lot of people would make the argument that if you want to be the absolute best at something, then you have to just focus on that. But, as I said, John Cole, he's got that 308 total world record. It's been out there for...since 1972. I mean, almost 40 years. No one that I know of has really even approached that at 308. Maybe he was just that good, that he's the only person who can do that. But, I'll be out there trying to prove people that they had it wrong. And hopefully, be just as successful in Highland Games and Strongman as I was in track and as it would appear I'm going to become in powerlifting.

LA: Right. It could be a trend, right? Probably not too big of a surprise if you did it.

I remember reading, I think it was your meet write-up after the powerlifting meet, after you deadlifted 700. You had some second thoughts or desires to improve on the deadlift. I think it was something to do with like a lack of familiarity. Is that right?

CS: Yeah. You know, I only started training the deadlift when I began training for that last meet. So, about June of 2010. I never had anyone teach me how to deadlift, like at least...I just kind of read articles on Elite and stuff and look at videos. I know what it's supposed to look like. I mean, I know how to teach it to an athlete. But, having someone more qualified than myself watch me do it is a different ballgame. So, I had, I'd say, limited experience.

I've never missed a deadlift. I've never missed a deadlift since June of then until now. I'm sure at some point I'm going to miss one, but I think when you're pulling heavy singles... Josh Bryant, he wrote an article talking about committing to the pull. That's something that I'm working with right now, is that idea of committing to the pull. I'm looking to pull high 7's maybe 800 at this meet in March, close to 100 pound PR. The idea that as soon as I get that bar in my hands, it's not coming out until it's locked-out and I put it back on the ground.

The pain and stuff that's associated with that is something I haven't experienced. I'm trying to kind of wrap my mind around it. Josh Bryant is actually who I've been working with going into this meet. He's been helping me a lot with my programming. I think really doing some good things for my deadlift. Last week I pulled 700 for a double pretty easily. So, deadlift's really been on the move. It's been a lot of work, but doing well.

LA: That's certainly something to remember, because I've talked to people before who played sports in college and competed on the national level in whatever their sport was. They had a similar story where they didn't deadlift or they had coaches that said, "Don't deadlift." And yet, it's in powerlifting and it's kind of hard to bet away from.

CS: Coming up through high school in my first couple of years and in college, I didn't deadlift because I didn't need to. No one was making me do it. I've always been such a good squatter that I liked the squat, but I wasn't such a good... I didn't feel like I was as good a deadlifter. So, I didn't like to deadlift. So, I just didn't do it. I just squatted instead.

We do the Olympic lifts and stuff, my first couple of years in school, and we'd do a little bit of deadlifting then. But, nothing too drastic. So, until it got to the point where there was no other option besides either get good at deadlifts or embarrass myself by

not being good at it when I do it in front of a bunch of people. I was like, well, time to learn how to deadlift.

LA: Specific demands and whatnot.

CS: Yeah.

LA: We've talked about your gym that you recently opened. I want to give you a chance to sort of talk about that, talk about what you have in there and sort of who you're working with right now.

CS: My gym is, Juggernaut Training Systems, in Laguna Hills, California. We opened in September 2009. Myself and Nathan Winkler run it. Nate was a college basketball player, a point guard, and then he became a sprinter after that.

We work with athletes of all ages, from junior high kids up to NFL guys and MMA guys and people who make their living playing sports. It's a 6,000 square foot facility, broken up into half turf and half weight room, all Elite FTS equipment. Pretty much anything you could have, we've got it. Great power racks, competition benches, tires, hammers, Prowlers, sleds, ropes, reverse hyper, GHR, the list is pretty extensive as far as our equipment goes.

The bulk of our clientele is high school and college athletes. Surprisingly, it's like, like I said, volleyball players and water polo players, which my background is certainly not that. But, after some critical thinking, it's not too hard to figure out what they need to be successful.

I think some of the more notable athletes I work with are in Jiu-Jitsu. Romolu Barral is I think my poster child. He's a six-time world champion in his weight class and three-time runner-up in the open weight class. So, hopefully this is going to be the year where he brings home that open weight class title, and I can have a hand in that.

LA: Very nice. I know, just because of the popularity of mixed martial arts and Jiu-Jitsu, it's something that a lot of people think that they can train. But, what do you sort of observe, from a strength and conditioning perspective, when you watch a Jiu-Jitsu match or when you watch an MMA fight?

CS: I think a lot of people, they see videos of MMA guys and Jiu-Jitsu guys training on YouTube and stuff and they think that all they do are these balls-out circuits where they're going to be puking at the end. They think, well, MMA fighters are tough, so their training has to be really tough. And that's just not correct. Yeah, their training is really tough, like Romolu trains about 18 times a week, like 18 sessions a week, between three times with me, like 10-12 Jiu-Jitsu sessions and then he's looking to break into

MMA as well. So, doing some boxing and some wrestling and some Muay Thai training here and there. His body is beaten-up.

I don't need to add to that by having him do all these really hard conditioning circuits. Yeah, they look cool to put on videos, and there are times when we do them, but really, the bulk of my guy's training is focused around very basic exercises that they don't need to take a lot of time to learn how to do, because their sport is not powerlifting. It's not Olympic lifting. So, I'm not going to waste their time making them the best clean and jerk technique ever because they don't need to do that. They need to have strong legs, they don't need to be a great squatter. So, trying to do as little as possible to get the desired result.

They actually do a lot of training that would be similar to what a track and field athlete would do. They sprint, they jump, the squat and deadlift, they bench and pull-up and then we do some specific work as far as they need a lot of grip strength. They need a lot of hip extension strength.

So, we do get sport specific, even though I don't like to use that term, in those couple small areas. But, strength becomes sports specific when it's practice. If they're going to get strong with me, they're going to transfer that when they go and roll and they get on the mat and they learn how to use that new-found strength through their technique, and use it efficiently.

There are times, and you can go on our YouTube channel and see them flip tires and swing the sledgehammer and all that kind of stuff, because there are times that we do that. But, I think so many people see those and think, okay, that's what he does all the time. And then, you get great at doing circuits, but you're weak. Being weak is never a good thing to be.

LA: Certainly never ideal, obviously. One of the trends, just because you're in sort of that specific world, there's been a trend in the UFC to have Martin Rooney or Jonathan Chamber, you know, essentially a fighter's strength and conditioning coach in their corner, involved in game planning. Is that something that you see continuing or something that you're sort of involved in in any way?

CS: You know, that's not something I'm involved in. Martin, I think, is a brown belt in Jiu-Jitsu and has a martial arts background that I do not have. So, putting him in there would be a totally different thing. I felt like if I get to walk down to the octagon or something with one of my guys one day, that's just going to be a thing like, "Thanks for getting me ready. You get a really good seat to watch this." But, I mean, I would never see myself helping with the game planning of that. There are people who that's their expertise and I'm going to leave that to them and hopefully they realize that this is my expertise and they don't tell me how to do my job.

LA: I understand. I was probably fishing a bit too much. It just seemed like fighters are going to have ways that they fight that don't match up with other people quite as well, not to sort of talk about fighting here, but that would impact strength and conditioning. That sort of fight camp would obviously be different if you're trying to do different things. But, possibly not so much, I guess.

I don't know, did we miss anything? I've definitely taken-up about a half hour of your time. I didn't mean to do that.

CS: I got time. I'm not too busy in the middle of the day. I mean, that's the only thing I could say, is to buy the Juggernaut Method. If any athlete, and speed and power athlete, if being stronger, faster, more explosive and in better condition is going to help you succeed at your sport, which will help in pretty much every sport, I've got the program that's going to be able to help them do that. It's proven through my 800 pound raw squat that it's going to get you strong. I've got dozens and dozens of athletes who have put inches on their vertical, taking 10ths off their 40 and that's available at EliteFTS.com and at my website, JTSSStrength.com. It's a really good program, it's very well thought out, at least I think it is.

LA: I'm convinced. I'm telling people to go get it, too, because I want to see how you do later this spring and certainly keep tabs on you and see how things progress.

CS: Yeah, thank you.

LA: All right. Take care and I definitely appreciate it, thank you again.

CS: All right, yeah, if you've got anything else, you know where to reach me.

LA: All right, I appreciate it. Thanks, Chad.

CS: Thanks a lot, Luke.

Chad Smith Bio

1. Elitefts.com Sponsored Athlete and Q&A Staff member
2. 2009 Indoor and Outdoor NAIA National Champion in the Shot Put
3. Golden State Athletic Conference Record Holder in Shot Put
4. PR of 63-10.25, 4th Ranked US Collegiate, 17th Ranked US male in 2009
5. All-CIF Offensive Lineman, Orange County All-Star
6. Assistant Varsity Football Coach @ University High School, Irvine (Offensive/Defensive Lines, Strength and Conditioning) 2006-2009

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