



WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



Like Allison Interviews John Wild Buckley

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

JB: I'm good, Luke. How are you doing?

LA: Doing all right. Been trying to chase you down, got your name originally from Jason Dolby and just kind of wanted to hear a little bit about your background with kettlebells and training people and give the listeners a little bit of an idea of who you are and what you do.

JB: Sure. Well, I was born in New York. I lived there most of my life and I started training in New York in about 2001. Before that I was a football player and just kind of a weight lifter. In 2003 I started training with kettlebells and moved out to Oakland and it became kind of my full time thing.

I've slowly been transitioning out of personal training into just straight kettlebell coaching and strength coaching. Now, I pretty much just run the Orange Kettlebell Club and travel around with Dolby and Steve Cotter and Ken Blackburn and stuff and teach kettlebell all around the world, which is super fun.

LA: I'm sure that that's going to make people very jealous, to begin with. That sounds kind of like a dream come true. Is that kind of how it happened for you, what you wanted to do?

JB: Well, I guess so, I mean. After my first kettlebell workshop, I was a trainer. I was doing my 20 sessions a week or 25 sessions a week and just getting by. And then, it was actually Jason Brown who came in, Jason Steve Brown, and he did one of his kettlebell athletics workshops and it was great, a lot of fun. I looked at him and thought, this guys really got it together. This is what I want to do, you know?

Then, I just started trying to learn as much as I possibly could and I realized that there's kind of almost an infinite amount of things you learn about lifting a kettlebell, which kind of shocked me, to be honest with you, because it seems like such a basic tool. But, yeah, I began to model myself after that and the more people I met and the more workshops and certifications I went to, the more confidence I started to build. A little over a year ago I just decided to bite the bullet. I quit my job at the big gym and put all my eggs in the big kettlebell basket.

So, I guess it's kind of like a dream. It certainly feels like a lot of work, but it is nice to enjoy what I do. That's true.

LA: Now, you sort of mentioned some things that I think most people are going to be familiar with in terms of kettlebell. It seems simplistic, it seems it couldn't possibly be as complicated as it is. But yet, it's really effective. Maybe what drew you to that and convinced you that that was what you wanted to do.

JB: Well, I was really bored. I had been bodybuilding for a while and doing some kind of rudimentary powerlifting and after ten years of just lifting weights and hanging out in the gym, I was bored. My body showed it, my physique showed it, my strength showed it, my health definitely showed it.

My friend introduced me to my friend Gavin, Gavin Van Vlack from New York. He just kind of introduced me to kettlebells one day because they were dropped off at our gym. As soon as I started playing around with them I realized, okay, this is fun. This is something that you don't just get stronger at, but you can actually get better at. You're clean can be better, your swing can be better, your snatch can be better. So, it's something I could practice and not just train at.

With the bench press for me, it was always, how much can you bench? And I would do it until I got some kind of shoulder impingement, a minor tear I my pec or something. Then, I had to stop, get real heavy and then start again when I healed up.

But, with kettlebell I wasn't getting injured. I found it very interesting as far as all the different things you could do. And then once I started to learn a little bit more about the technical aspects of kind of the three core lifts, then I just really fell in love with that. Yeah, it totally saved me, I guess, from the boring death of a weight lifter.

LA: Well, I think sort of your story about bench pressing, I think, is probably something most people can relate to on Critical Bench, the idea of this really big bench and this North American, sort of socio-cultural thing. But, say something a little bit about...the kettlebell, a lot of people think of it as I can do swings with it and maybe it can help with general physical preparedness. But, it actually is its own sort of competition and style of training in and of itself, isn't it?

JB: Sure, I mean, it's all of those things, really. There's definitely a sport for kettlebell lifting and the main concept that I try to get across with kettlebell lifting in general is that it's really an endurance sport. It's an endurance tool. It's not a strength tool.

A lot of people pick up a kettlebell and say like a 32 kilo or even say a 48 kilo and that's the beast, the big nasty kettlebell. Their reaction is, this is really heavy. And my reaction to that is, really? It's 110 pounds, what do you bench? You know, what do you squat? If we're talking heavy, we're talking heavy. So, when you look at a tool that's in competition at most 70 pounds or so, to me, that's an endurance tool.

So, I guess what you were saying before about comparing it to something like a bench press, a bench press is, how much can you bench? And the kettlebell is, how many times can you lift this kettlebell.

That concept came out of the idea that kettlebell lifting really is something that came out of poverty. You didn't have a whole gym full of equipment. You didn't have the option to go up in weight. You just didn't have it. You had one kettlebell...you're little village had one kettlebell and guys like me and...I don't know I haven't met you, so we'll just say Dolby. We'd be sitting around challenging each other, saying, well, I can lift that more times than you.

As far as the pressing goes, from what I've been taught, over in Russia there is no bench press, there's just press. There's just, put it over your head. There's no side press or bent press or anything like that. it's just press. So, it's definitely an attitude shift when you start working with kettlebells, for sure.

LA: Now, you mentioned that you've been able to travel around. Where are some of the interesting places that you've gone, places that respond really well that people may not associate with an interest in physical culture?

JB: Well, I just got back from Japan and Japan is a really interesting place because I've never associated it with any kind of physical culture. And when I was talking about going over there, the people that I was talking to were basically telling me that, no, it's definitely not an industry over there that we can work with.

When I went over there, I couldn't really tell if you if that's true or not because the people that I was working with were incredibly enthusiastic and really excellent students and completely obsessed with getting better at what I was teaching.

So, I went there last year and I give kind of a seminar along with my friend Ken Black. Basically, everything that we worked on, these guys had built up over the last year. And when I went back there I was really amazed at how well they learned everything that we taught them, including the things that we've changed. I've evolved as a lifter and I'm watching them lift and I'm thinking, holy cow, they're lifting just like I did last year, which is incredible.

The kettlebell culture over there is kind of like a huge underground cult. It's crazy. But really fun to work with, for sure.

LA: It sounds like you're basically finding like-minded people wherever you go that have this interest in the implement sort of drives them in the different skills and facets that they develop in working with that.

JB: Oh, yeah. The kettlebell has kind of turned into this idol. People worship it, it's weird to me. I always think of kettlebells and I tell people, you might love your kettlebell, but your kettlebell hates you. It's like, believe me. It's not looking out for you. If you're not careful and you don't watch what you're doing, that kettlebell's going to hurt you really badly.

But, yeah, people just completely...they seem to really love being associated with the kettlebell. I know I do. If you came over to my place, there are kettlebells everywhere. It's kind of embarrassing, really. All my shirts have kettlebells on them. I see people with tattoos and earrings and all this crazy stuff. Yeah, I guess it's like of like a gang, you know. If you throw, you're in. It's really nice.

I know my clients, the people that I still do train, when they walk into the gym they have this kind of aura about them of unbreakable confidence, for sure.

LA: That seems like a different sort of mentality as opposed to something that's interesting in going to the gym and doing sort of cardio like a gerbil or something like

that where they really do want different things. They want the confidence and they want longer range fitness with better attributes being developed.

JB: Sure.

LA: That seems like a movement away from the sort of corporate, global gym type thing that we see everywhere.

JB: Definitely. It's basically going at it from the other direction. When I was younger, I grew up really heavy and I started bodybuilding because I wanted to feel good about myself and I wanted to look good. I would read all the magazines and look at all the pictures and think, that's what a man looks like.

As I grew older, I started...I was a lit major in college. So, I started reading a lot about Greek mythology, under the gun, actually. But, I really got a lot out of it. But, the thing that applies most to weight training is, a lot of people took on the aesthetic pursuit of bodybuilding. You look at an athlete, you look at a sculpture of an athlete and you think, okay, that's what a man is. I want to look like that. But really, that guy looked like that because he was a great athlete and he just happened to look like that.

Really, people kind of want us to be aesthetic and didn't really go after the athleticism. Kettlebell really addresses the athleticism. So, we're not dealing so much with hypertrophy and symmetry as we are focusing on performance. As a result, you end up very, very strong with really good endurance and excellent joint mobility and tendon and ligament strength and everything, and great grip and incredible confidence. It's really much more fun for me, personally, to be super strong than it ever was to have 22" biceps. By the way, I'm really huge, so like they didn't look like monster on me. They were just like, kind of proportionate.

LA: Fair enough. You know, it seems, as you mentioned, this idea of sort of the obsession with aesthetics, that if people would sort of step back and reassess and do something to train for performance that the way that the aesthetic dimensions would take care of themselves, if they were strong enough or they were capable enough, things like that.

JB: Yeah. A lot of the people that I train, a lot of my students are women, and actually, this spectrum is really wide: the very young and well, I'm still not going to say very old, but you get the idea. In my experience, starting as a trainer, a lot of people don't want to be thick, women especially. They always say, "I don't want to get too big." But, nobody ever complains about being really strong.

Kettlebells will make you incredibly strong, much stronger than you think you could be, without making you very big. I'm certainly not as muscular as I used to be, but I'm way stronger than I ever was at my max peak, for sure.

LA: Just go into that for a second in case people aren't as familiar with why that's not adding size. Is it because you're working on sort of anaerobic or power endurance? What's the sort of capability that you're developing that's going to keep you from getting really big, actually.

JB: Well, there's several elements there. The first one is obvious. You're using the same weight and you're doing hundreds if not thousands of reps in a workout. So, anyone who does any kind of bodybuilding knows, if you got a weight that you can move 1,000 times, you're not going to get big doing it. You're just not.

Another element is that the kettlebell really deals with the sequence of force. So, we want to teach your body to generate force sequentially so that you move much more like a whip. If you see a professional baseball player swing a bat, you can see his body building up force one on top of the next. You can actually see it generate through his legs, through his hips and his upper body whips around. Whereas, if you see something who's very unathletic swing a bat, it's basically just their arms hawking at the ball.

The kettlebell really teaches the body how to work in sequence, which transfers immediately to any kind of sports application that you can think of. Another aspect of it, the one that is probably its best selling point, I guess, is it teaches your body to use large muscle groups to accomplish large goals. What I mean by that is somebody might look at a picture of a kettlebell swing, for example and think, okay, that's a shoulder exercise. Or, they're look at a kettlebell clean and say, okay, that's a bicep exercise, that's a curl. But, really what we're doing is we're teaching you how to use your hips and your thighs and your calves and your toes and your back and your chest to move that whole kettlebell, not just your arm, actually, hardly ever your arm at all. Most of the lifts, the idea is to get the arm out of it.

But, we teach you to use your whole body. We teach you to use your inertia. We teach you to maintain your equilibrium as your driving a significant force away from you and the result of that is the load gets very light. It turns away from being a 70 pound curl into a 70 pound dead lift. One sounds very heavy; one sounds very light.

That's the basics behind why a kettlebell won't bulk you up if you don't want it to.

LA: I guess indirectly that's sort of a surreptitious way to address maybe muscular imbalances that people are having that they're not aware of by forcing them to cause

their muscles to fire in a certain sequence to perform the movement. Otherwise, they just wouldn't be able to perform it.

JB: Absolutely. The first one that you'll see is the way people change the way that they get out of a chair. Most people who are just kind of muggles, that's what we call them around here. They use their knee as their major fulcrum when they're standing up. Anybody who's athletic would use their hip as their main fulcrum.

The kettlebell, the first thing it does is it changes you from a knee dominated person to a hip dominated person. It's immediately going to relieve stress on your knees, almost instantly. That is super easy to teach.

In addition to that, it really teaches you to use your lower body to support your upper body so that your spinal erectors aren't working in some kind of crazy way that gives you back pain all the time.

I have at least one client who has two fused discs in his lumbar spine and he spent years not being able to do anything. He was very scared to do anything. Once we started working with kettlebells, as you can imagine, he was terrified. A scary moment. But, now he's got no problems, He works with the 24 kilos and he swing those one arm at a time, cleans them, snatch, no sweat. No pain, no problem.

LA: Very accessible even for special populations of people...

JB: Oh, yeah. I mean, they say that the kettlebell sport is the sport you pick up when you're too injured or too old to play other sports.

LA: Replacing tennis and golf, it sounds like.

JB: Well, I mean, you can't play tennis if you're injured. If you have a torn ACL or a torn MCL, you're not playing tennis.

LA: This is true.

JB: But, kettlebell sport, and this is the sport specifically, when I say kettlebell sport, I mean the jerk, the snatch and the clean and jerks. Okay?

LA: Sure.

JB: These three movements are movements that you can use to train your cardiovascular health and your muscular endurance and your power endurance. You don't really move your feet around too much in any of these movements, and your knees never go past about 35 degrees of flexion. You're staying in what we call high position. There's no impact that there's no excessive bending of the knee. Your hip is your major fulcrum.

If you have an athlete who's had some kind of knee injury, like I train an amateur hockey player. He blew out his knee playing hockey. As soon as he could walk, we had him back on the bells because he put his brace on and really, he's very good at the bells. So, he didn't need the brace, but emotionally he needed the brace. We have him back doing huge sets of kettlebell snatches just to keep his endurance up because his options are the hand bike or the kettlebell.

We can get his heart rate way, way up just using the kettlebell doing snatches. He's still under load, so he's not losing any actual strength for when he gets back to practicing for his sport. He may not be right on top of his game because he won't be used to playing because of being out so long, but at the same time he'll still be in much better condition than he would have been had he not been able to train at all.

LA: It sounds like this area of sort of applied...what would you say, sort of rehabilitation or sort of acute corrective exercise is something that has very serious potential, the ability to be scaled up. Does that interest you? Is that a sort of area that you would like to work in?

JB: Yeah, I mean I play around with it with some of my clients. The guy that actually owns the Breakaway Performance Center where I do a lot of work in San Francisco, he and I have been working on a protocol with the New Leaf System. I don't know if you're familiar with the New Leaf?

LA: No, go into that for a second.

JB: Oh, geez. It's so his specialty. It's the kind of thing that you would use to find your optimal heart rate zone. So, if you're training for a triathlon, you would know how to expand your heart rate zones. And if you're training to lose weight, they have your optimal heart rate zone. We've been working out a protocol with the kettlebell to use it as a test rather than the bike or the treadmill, because it's really... The way we have it set up at the gym, it's designed very much for triathletes. I'm interested in expanding it to kettlebell athletes.

LA: Is that similar to the concept of VO2 max?

JB: Yeah. It's very much like that. Yeah, actually I guess that's exactly what it is, but certainly not my specialty. He's definitely the endurance guy.

LA: I think people tend to sort of break into groups based on their interest and personality.

JB: It's just not my style to overreach my bounds. I know what I do really well and I stick to that and if I have an idea like I did with this New Leaf thing, Joel's the first guy I

go to. I say, "All right man, we've got a project we're working on together," meaning, you're going to do this and I'm going to tell you what I want.

LA: Perfect.

JB: It seems to be going pretty well.

LA: It makes sense. And that way you can build networks and sort of get people referred to you and get people out...

JB: Absolutely, yeah. I learned way early in my career that it's not a good idea to pretend you're good at something you're not good at. So, I'd much rather ask for help and luckily I've been around long enough to have connections in high places in a lot of different branches of this industry. So, when I'm looking for information on something like VO2 max, I can go to a guy who's won I don't know how many triathlons and he's the captain of a national triathlon team and all this stuff. He's an expert. So, it's much better for me to have an expert doing it than for me to do it myself.

LA: Definitely, yeah. It's sort of always beneficial to hear that no matter how many times it comes up. It's always good to hear. Something else I became aware of in sort of learning about you from Jason Dolby was you do something called human lifting. What in the world is that?

JB: Well, what happened was, one of my partners in the Orange Kettlebell Club is a lady named Nazo and she's basically the physical opposite of me. She's tiny, she's cute, okay? And she showed me Jeff Martone doing a Turkish get-up holding his wife.

LA: Okay.

JB: She said, "Can you do that?" And I said, "Hell if I know."

LA: Hasn't occurred to me yet, actually.

JB: So, I did it and it was kind of slow going because with the Turkish get-up I had a lot of trouble transitioning to the split squat with heavy weight over my head. I didn't have the flexibility to maintain proper alignment for me to just pop-up, which was frustrating and humbling and everything. I just kind of went after it. Then, just kind of through an active laziness, I decided, well, I don't know why I'm doing this Turkish get-up. I'm just going to start jerking people.

So, I started doing that, which I guess kind of culminated in an certification course where Beef Cotter said, hey do you want to do me? And I looked at him and I'm like, you know, you're really kind of a jerk man. I mean, there's like 50 people here. I don't think I could pick you up. So, he's like, "No, no, no. You can do it." Then I did. Of course, we both almost died. But, we made it so it's okay.

Then one thing turned into another and now I don't know how many people I've picked up over my head, but I don't know, maybe 100. Like everywhere I go, every time I do a workshop, every time I go to a bar somebody ends up over my head.

It's not really a...it's not something that I train with, but it's super fun and I guess the only things I do... I'll do a press, a bent press or a Turkish get-up, and I'm actually pretty sure I can just snatch Nazo. So, that's pretty much it.

LA: It seems like this would be something where it's taking sort of your abilities, what you do really well and sort of going to the very end of the spectrum in terms of what people might want to do, what they might think is a good idea. But, it's sort of challenging to you at the same time. Does that make sense?

JB: I don't know if I've ever thought of this as a good idea.

LA: What I look at, and I'm not sure is a good idea, is I watch Steve Connor doing the pistols where he jumps on and off of a table or he does sort of loaded, I guess like box jumps with kettlebells in the rack position. I'm like, I'm not sure that's a good idea, either. You see this thing and it's motivation and all this kind of stuff.

JB: Well, yeah, it's definitely my circus trick. I guess I've kind of been getting a little more known for it. I actually wrote to Jeff Martone recently and I told him. It's like, "Look man, I want you to know that every time someone sees me do this I tell them I stole it from you." Straight-up stole it from Jeff. Who, by the way, has got to be like $\frac{1}{2}$ my body weight. I mean, there's no way that we're in the same physical realm. I'm 6'6", I'm about 340 pounds or so. So, way more impressive when he does it.

But, yeah, Steve, he does that thing with the pistols and he knows how important that was to getting his name out there. I'm sure that he feels that way about me and the way I pick people up. He's really pushing me to get Blackburn over my head. I don't really know.

LA: Oh, wow.

JB: Ken is huge. I don't know if I can do that. But, I've been training really well lately and my numbers have been going up, my strength has been going up. So, who knows, maybe someday.

LA: Yeah, well, keeping pushing, because it sounds like something has to come next. You know what I mean? Someone has to do something next to keep expanding what people think is possible. I saw human lifting. I saw Steve Cotter and I was like, I got to hear more about this kind of stuff.

JB: I'll tell you one thing, Steve definitely got my confidence up because the first time I ever tried to do it I couldn't even pick him up. And then, the second time I tried to get him was that time he made me do it in Texas in front of all those people. And now, it's just kind of a standard lift. I mean, after my set at the Arnold, I missed it because I was kind of nervous, exhausted, a combination of those things. But, I just don't miss it anymore. He seems really light to me and I think the heaviest person I lifted is about 85 kilo, something like that. But, I've had guys ask me who are just full grown men and it's like, dude! You want me to pick you up over my head with one hand? I'm just a guy, man.

LA: It sort of suspends disbelief. People are not exactly sure.

JB: Yeah. Now anytime I see something I'm just thinking, well, I can probably pick that up. I'll play around with kegs and mopeds and stuff like that and see if I can get it up over my head, whatever looks heavy, but manageable. I try to grip it and rip it.

I feel very natural when I lift kind of strange objects because the kettlebell is an asymmetrical object and getting good at working with it has a lot to do with being able to manipulate not only yourself, but the object in space simultaneously. So, when I'm picking up something that's very awkward, it feels very natural to me know.

The funny this is when I pick up something that's very symmetrical, like a barbell, I feel much more uncomfortable than I do picking up something like a big tire. I'm just not used to it anymore.

I think as far as everyday life goes, things are generally asymmetrical. So, it's translated very well to my life. Especially when I have to move like a television or a chair or something like that. it works pretty well.

LA: At the end of the day, if you spend your life moving things and that's your profession and you're strong and you can't help anyone, you move when they need to move across town. What good are you?

JB: Exactly.

LA: You've got to be able to do the stuff going up the stairs and everything else.

JB: Yeah, I got to tell you man, I just don't get the other stuff anymore, you know? I don't want to look strong, I want to be strong. I don't want to look fit, I want to be fit. And I'm not the kind of guy who's going to sell you a lifestyle and believe me, I'm nobody's cheerleader. I'm not that kind of dude. I'm not going to judge you for that you do on your own time. My job is to make you so strong that you can't believe it. That's what I do.

I don't know. I just don't get...the other stuff just really doesn't interest me anymore. Although, I do have to admit, sometimes I wish my arms were a little bit bigger again.

LA: Always back to that, isn't it?

JB: Yeah, you know, sometimes. You're just like maybe I should just do a few curls. But, I can't because it will hurt my numbers. At this point, my chest is very big because of all the bench pressing and my arms are very big from all the curling and both of those things hurt my lockout when I'm trying to get the kettlebells overhead. And if I can't get to a true lockout, it's going to hurt my numbers. I guess it's part of the discipline I have to give that up.

But, at the same time, my arms have never been stronger and my body is very linked. So, I've never been stronger. I've been segmentally stronger, like I'm sure that I don't bench press what I used to bench press. But, as far as like actual applied strength, I'm much, much stronger than I used to be.

LA: Isn't that sort of a matter of deciding what you're willing to give up to be sort of prepared for a specific sport, is to be sort of unbalanced and unable in other areas, by definition?

JB: I don't know if I'd say it's unbalanced.

LA: I mean, to be able to do your lockout means that you might not have the sort of symmetry in size in other muscles and things like that that you might want, but it would be a compromise, it would sort of be impossible to have absolutely both to the level that you might want.

JB: Yeah, I mean, you look at Cotter. Steve, he's got huge arms. He's just a very muscular guy. He's managed to make it happen. I think that's just kind of his body turning back to the natural order. Mine, the close I get to my body being what it, I guess, is supposed to be, my personal body, the way it looks changes. For sure.

I know, for example, if I don't drink 20 liters of beer in a week, I drop like 30 pounds. It's ridiculous when I lift every day. So, like my body is fighting to get to the look that it's supposed to have. When I resist that and I do a lot of curls and try to pump myself up, that kind of changes everything and it ultimately weakens me because I just can't stay healthy. I can't go without getting injured. Usually for me it's always my bicep tendon. That thing is a nightmare when I do a lot of chest pressing and a lot of curling, get all kind of aesthetic driven. But, I do sometimes. Every once in a while I just loose it and I'm like, oh, my God. I want to look better at the beach.

LA: Right, still always that voice in your head and sort of that desire.

JB: Yeah. But, I do have to say, being cool or being good looking aren't the same thing. So, when I think about lifting and being strong it's like, yeah, that part of me that wants to feel good about how I look. I just remind myself, it's like, well, you are who you are and you've just got to be happy with your body and you just have to be happy with what you're doing.

And when I think about it, I really am. I feel like I've found what I'm supposed to be doing and it just fits me really well, and I'm just really happy with everything that goes on physically with me. I haven't been hurt in so long, I don't remember the last time I was hurt. Of course, now I'm going to go and get hurt. But, you know, you get the idea.

I mean, I've been tired, but I just don't get injured anymore. And I was super heavy, I mean, Scott Helsley, this Master of Sport who lives in Pennsylvania, he builds these customer monster bells. His blog is called RationalFitness and it's one of the best blogs for kettlebell lifters ever. He's building me this custom Orange Kettlebell Club 70 kilogram sport bell. So, it's going to be like the same size as the regular sport bells, but it's going to weigh 70 kilos. Holy cow. I mean, seriously? I'm so excited.

LA: Very nice. I think there's definitely some words of wisdom in that to sort of find whatever your body is meant to do, and to try to not go so much outside of that.

JB: Sure. I don't know, when I was bench pressing a lot, I mean, the most I ever bench pressed was 455. Like said, I was 22, I was about 285 pounds, starting off. I mean, it's a good bench press, but it's not an elite bench press. But, I was just a guy who was screwing around with my friends and like I didn't know anything about technique. I didn't know anything about equipment, nothing. We were just throwing down and I was just a big kid.

Sometimes I wonder what I could have done with that if I had gotten into the technical aspects of it the way I've gotten into the technical aspects of kettlebell lifting. I don't know. I figure the timing just worked out.

LA: Sure. Well, you know it is what it is. You can be content with success or you can sort of wonder what might have been. I mean, I think people have that sort of feeling with regret or any kind of action. But, ultimately, you decide and you move from there.

JB: Yeah. One cool thing happened, I guess, about a year ago. I did bench press for the first time in several years and it was just 225, but I did it I think like 25 times. I had never done that in my life. Like, I had never been able to do anything more than like 15 times. But, it just...I just kind of banged it out because one of the other trainers was doing it and he was teasing me and my ego got involved, and what are you going to do? But, then I realized that this is awesome. I could be like an NFL defensive back.

LA: Right, that's always the thing. It's like every...what is it? When is the combine? It's sometime in the spring and everyone wants to bench press to see if they're stronger than the sophomore, 180 pound corner back, and they're like, absolutely, I am. Oh, but wait, he's like 20 and I'm not.

JB: Yeah, he could run all the way to the end zone and then all the way back to where I was before I got 20 yards down the field.

LA: Yeah, just a totally sort of different thing. But, it's like, on that one day, on that one thing, I was better. People always have that.

JB: Yeah, it surprised me, I'll tell you that. I didn't see that coming at all.

LA: I mean, I've heard sort of various stories, even going back to Pavel and different people like that saying, we don't really know why kettlebell went through sort of other unrelated attributes like that. It does.

JB: It totally does.

LA: Mysterious.

JB: Well, I'll tell you, it's not a mystery to me. I mean, I could tell by my own body...not that I know more than him. But like just how...how could I? I know that for me it's pretty simple. My body doesn't leak energy anymore. So, when I lay down on a bench or I go to do a pushup or something like that, my entire body is linked up. My glutes are tight, my legs are tight or rather taught. I always tell people, think palm tree, not oak tree. So, I'm all ready to go and when I actually do the lift, my whole body is working. It never used to be like that. It was always just chest and shoulder for me, triceps, right?

The breathing really helps, too, because once you learn how to breathe, you learn how to generate force on an entirely different part of your body than you did before you knew how to breathe. Obviously, one of the first things that you do when you start bench pressing is you learn to breathe, right? But, breathing technique gets more sophisticated the better you get.

And then the other thing is just the sequence, like when you watch real elite level chest pressers do it, you can see where they start their force. They start in their heels and then it goes straight through their body into their arms. They're pushing themselves down through the bench instead of pushing the weight off them. That wasn't a concept that my body got until I started lifting kettlebells. Then I realized, okay, I've got to get under this thing and I've got to push myself away. Otherwise, it's not going to work.

And then by going through different lifts, you work at different angles and it makes it easier for your body to get it. Because, you can get it conceptually, but if your body's way behind, then you just don't have it.

So, for me, those three things kind of working together definitely improved my other lifting and it really helps. Because, whenever I do workshops or seminars, it's inevitable that I have to do some kind of feat of strength that I don't even know what it is, I've never done before. Like, I don't know why I'm doing it now. But, I pretty much use all the tools that I got from kettlebell lifting to...I don't know, like rack a lat pull down machine with one hand or something...a small one. It was like 200 pounds or so. It wasn't like a giant lat pull down. But, in Japan that just happened and it was like, I can't even believe I'm doing this, but let's try it. I basically used all the tools that I had from kettlebell and quick training and everything and just ripped it. And it worked.

Yeah, that's my thought on why it applied. As far as the way it applied to athletics, that's even easier. If you go to any high school football game and you watch the offensive linemen, you're going to see two kinds of kids. I love when people say that; there are two kinds of people. There's the knee athlete and the hip athlete. The hip athlete is the one knocking his opponent on his butt and the knee athlete is the big, lumbering heavy kid, like I was. They stand straight up, they kind of waddle around, they're very slow.

The kettlebell changes one into the other. It will change you from a knee athlete into a hip athlete. As soon as you get the swing, it rewires your body. That's it. Once you learn how to do that, you will be immediately a much better athlete.

If I was running a high school football program, college football program, my kids wouldn't be doing the calisthenics I had to do in high school. They would be doing kettlebells and the freshmen would have to carry them out to the field, every day, for sure. Varsity could just kind of walk, right?

LA: I mean, having talked to you some football strength and conditioning coaches recently, that's a very sort of interesting idea, because just the disparity in sort of how train someone how to lift isn't as sort of easy to grasp as foot ball is. Unbelievable from full Olympic lifts to like power lifters to some schools not at all. Except for the ones that don't lift at all, that just get smashed.

JB: I'm a big believer in Olympic lifting for getting strong. If you want to be a powerful person, like really powerful, you've got Olympic lift. That's it. It's heavy, it's ultra fast. You've got to do it. There's a difference between...I'm talking about that 70 kilo kettlebell, that's like what, 160 pounds or so. You're Olympic lifting, we're talking like three, four, five hundred pounds. It's a huge difference there.

But, as far as conditioning your athletes to play a sport that required endurance, kettlebell lifting is very good for that and for something like football, which positionally requires totally different kinds of endurance all over the place. You can really put together a program to condition your athletes and even more than that, to kind of productively punish your athletes. We all know how much our coaches like to make us run, and running is great. But, when your offensive linemen have shin splints, they're no good to you. They won't get them if you just make them swing a kettlebell 1,000 times. They'll just get stronger, meaner.

Also, when it comes to athletes like quarterbacks, one of the things that's great about kettlebell is it really works on your joint mobility and your tendon and ligament strength. You'll learn to decelerate your arm. As we know, when the pitcher throws a fastball, they generally injure their arm on the deceleration. Kettlebell training teaches your body to decelerate as well as accelerate, and it strengthens up your tendons and strengthens up your joints to support your ligaments. So, very beneficial for quarterbacks and pitchers and things like that. It's like a super tool. It's cool.

LA: That's good advice because I think sort of in my very limited experience with throwing athletes, the idea seems to be that these people have sort of imbalances, not only between arms or sides of their body, but just the way that they train and sort of what they're being told. What they really need, is like you said, that sort of deceleration and the ability to be stabilized, to control that whip effect that they're creating.

JB: Exactly. I don't know, when I work with athletes I have a pretty strong belief that you train and you practice, and they're different. Because, if you're... I just remember my high school days, doing two-a-days in August. It's hot. It's 90 degrees, it's 90% humidity, it's hell. You're just getting crushed.

The idea that someone's going to run you and punish you and condition you and then expect you to learn anything, to me, is kind of crazy. It's like, all I'm thinking about is ice, lots of water, then throw up. I want to go home.

To me, you condition somebody and then you teach them stuff, but they're separate. If you're going to condition somebody on a football field, a very good way to do that is to use a kettlebell. Because, one, it's going to teach you all the things that you would learn doing things like running through shoots and doing little cone drills and everything, except you'll be under load. So, you'll be getting stronger the whole time. And it will actually be training your neuromuscular system to fire in the optimal way. After that, you practice, you teach.

But, combining the two, really tough, really tough. I've just learned that from teaching people how to lift kettlebells. If I'm going to teach you how to snatch a

kettlebell, there's so many little technical aspects to that, that are hard to grasp. If you're exhausted, I've got no shot with you. You're fried, you're not going to do it.

So, generally what I'll do is I'll spend time conditioning somebody with the movement that they already have down, like a swing or whatever elements of the snatch that they have down. We'll work on that. And then, once they're kind of rested a little bit, I'll take time out and just teach them some more technical aspects and then help them practice so that they can get better before they actually use it to train. If that makes any sense.

LA: No, that makes perfect sense. It sounds like a much more sort of sensible approach to sort of building sequentially.

JB: Yeah, I mean, it's worked for me. But, time is always an element that you have to take into consideration, too. I know a lot of coaches have time restraints that make it difficult.

LA: Certainly.

JB: I'll tell you right now, ten minutes of straight snatches and your cardio is done for the day.

LA; Yeah, that's a good time. That's more than most people what to do, I think.

JB: Yeah, you know, people say it, but I've gotten a lot of resistance on that. "I don't want to do ten minutes." And my reaction is usually, why? Are you afraid? It's like okay, it's not for you. it's for us tough guys over here. You stay over there. I just kind of tease them until they get motivated to do it. I'm speaking of my clients here, not the general population that I don't know. But, it's actually something I would say to somebody if they were in the same room as me. I would just goad them into doing it. And then eventually, once you start working towards something like that, you need to finish it.

Like for me, if I miss it, if I can't do it, it drives me absolutely insane. I don't run, I mean, I hate running. I'm huge, I'm heavy, I look weird. I run like a tyrannosaurus, like short arms, awful, okay? But, I'd imagine it's something similar to getting out a certain amount of miles in a day. Running and kettlebell sport are very similar like that. it takes a certain kind of person to want to do it. You have to be a little bit crazy. But, once you get good at it and once you really get into it, it's incredibly rewarding to be able to do it.

Coming from me it's like, I'm a guy who still does all those one rep lifts. I mean, bent pressing and just silly feats of strength and all that stuff. That's in my heart. I probably won't stop doing that until I absolutely have to. But, as far as the long training

goes, there's nothing better for me than getting good at something that I'm really bad at. I can tell you, I was really bad at it for a long time. It's nice to be getting better, finally.

LA: Right, well, what you put effort into is what improves. Usually, the hardest place to put that effort is your weaknesses because you're bad and the progress comes slow and everything like that.

JB: Yeah, it's so easy to do the things that you're good at.

LA: Oh, of course. Story of a lifetime right there. I hate to keep you any longer. I think we're about running out of time, but I wanted to give you a chance to sort of plug where you're working, sort of if people are interested in getting a hold of you, how to contact you, things like that.

JB: Oh, hey, thanks. Yeah, my club is the Orange Kettlebell Club. We're at OrangeKettlebellClub.com and we do workshops and seminars and we do them usually on a monthly basis. We travel all over the place to do it. So, if anybody's interested in having a workshop, they can always contact me at JohnWild@OrangeKettlebellClub.com. The site is filled with links and information to get people started learning about kettlebells.

The kettlebell community is huge on the blog circuit and there's a lot of information out there. If you're looking to learn about kettlebell and you're not in Oakland...because, if you're in Oakland you better call me. But, if you're not, my recommendation is to go on the blog scene and read what people write, because you'll find everything that you're looking for and the way people reveal themselves on the blogs. And you'll be able to find a pretty good coach. Also, feel free to email me and ask me, because I know tons of people and I'm always up for helping people find a good instructor.

LA: I very much appreciate your willingness to spend this much time with us and to be so open and honest. It's very, very beneficial, I think, for our listener.

JB: Oh, it was my pleasure, man. Thank you very much for calling.

LA: Yeah, no problem. Take care and I hope to hear from you soon.

JB: Absolutely, you, too.

LA: All right.

JB: Bye bye.

About John Wild Buckely:

"John Wild is the founder and head coach of the Orange Kettlebell Club. The OKC has over 200 members in 16 countries. They are a based in the San Francisco/Bay Area but have taught Kettlebell in New York, Dallas, Sacramento, San Diego, Boston, Sweden, Finland, Tokyo Japan and Johannesburg South Africa. In July John Will take his first trip to teach in Hong Kong."

"John Wild is a World Kettlebell Club Master instructor (WKC) and one of only two assistant instructors licensed to certify Kettlebell trainers with the International Kettlebell and Fitness Federation (IKFF). In addition he is a certified Kettlebell coach/instructor with the American Kettlebell Club (AKC) and the Russian Kettlebell Challenge (RKC). He has competed on the professional level in Kettlebell Sport taking first place in his weight class at the Arnold Schwarzenegger Classic on 2009."

<http://www.orangekettlebellclub.com/>



Michael Macor / The Chronicle