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WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



Luke Allison Interviews Jordan Breen



LA: This is Luke Allison with the [Critical Bench](#) weekly Muscle Building Expert interview series. Today I'm joined with a special guest from Sherdog.com, Jordan Breen. Jordan, how are you?

JB: I'm well. It's my pleasure. I'm not sure that I'm the most apt person for Critical Bench or anything bodybuilding related, but nonetheless, happy to be with you.

LA: Well, I think you have specific expertise that I hope we can draw out, but we'll certainly let the listeners be the judge of that. There was a particularly interesting quote from Joe Rogin, the UFC commentator, not too long ago where he said there's been more new development in martial arts in the last 15-years than in the last 1,000 years. Do you think there's any voracity to that at all?

JB: I think that is fair to say. I think it depends on how you view evolution, though, because it's not something like technology. Now, this is a phenomenon that's fairly routine. The more intensive you get with something and the more development you make, the easier future development is. We see this in technology, for instance.

I mean, if we think about the first thousands and millions of years, there wasn't a ton of technological advancement. But then, think about the kind of technological advancement that would have taken place say starting in the 1600's up to the 1800's. I mean, considerable, but yet, think about what we've accomplished from the 1800's until now. I mean, still a 200 year span, yet vastly more rich.

Think about even the technological differences between say 1900 to 1950, versus 1950 to 2000. So, with something like technology or things like that, or even letters and humanities. The more sort of theories and ideas become more pronounced, the more tools people have for orienting them towards further evolution. And I don't know that martial arts is any different in that capacity.

The sooner people figure out how to kind of put different things together and synthesize them, how to train properly, what it meant to be a well-conditioned and prepared athlete. All of these things have drastically altered martial arts, and I think altered prize fighting as a result.

So, we've seen...not even just since the spawn of MMA. I mean, even just think about MMA in and of itself. We've seen more evolution in MMA in the last five years that we had in the 15 years previous. And that's compatible with the way that other things in history have tended to evolve.

So, I think that's probably fair to say, but it strictly depends on to what extent you're imagining evolution in mixed martial arts or in martial arts, I should say. And that's one thing that becomes cloudy. Obviously, martial arts and mixed martial arts are

kissing cousins for clear and obvious reasons. But, what's suggested by evolution is a move towards a particular form.

When we talk about a maturation in a biological organism, we have the idea that it starts as a sex cell and then develops into an embryo and then a child-like form of whatever and reaches maturity and becomes an adult. And there's a clear and obvious endpoint.

With martial arts, I'm not so sure. In a way, there's a narcissistic conceit in calling it evolution. It suggests that we're moving towards something better or something ideal, or something adult. I don't know that that notion exists. I think people are better equipped to fight better and perhaps if we're saying that the adult form of martial arts is what's the best way to defend yourself, what are the most cogent and rational ideas about what it means to engage in hand-to-hand combat. Then yeah, I would say it's fair to say that there's been more evolution in 15 years than the thousand beforehand.

LA: And I think that that sort of frames where I would hope to go with this. One of the next questions I want to ask is, to get to a more specific idea, what do you think about the ontology of MMA, specifically, as that item of sort of focused development that we're trying to achieve performance in?

JB: I think it's tough to discuss, strictly because I don't know...we don't really have a great sense of where we're at. You know? The thing that distinguishes talking about... I mean, when we're talking about ontology, normally you're talking about, like I mentioned, biological organisms. And the great thing about them is there's millions of them out there. Their life spans are relatively short comparatively and they're easy to study. With MMA, there is no... You know, there wasn't, you know... There's not an Adam and Eve of MMA. There is not a predecessor that we could have studied, and then it died and this is MMA 2 or MMA 3 and we know how it's going to develop.

It's a continuous existence, a continuous entity and an idea. So, we don't have a sense of, oh, we're in this period of its development. We can only attempt to postulate where we might be in regard to what kind of athletes are involved and how international it is and the kind of techniques that are being used.

The one thing I will say is I think... I don't know how far along we are, so to speak, but I do think that there's an interesting assumption that people make, and that's that we're not that far along. There's this constant idea that we, in mixed martial arts, are just scratching the surface of what might become of it. People imagine a future where basically everybody who competes in mixed martial arts is something akin to George St. Pierre or John Jones or some kind of extraordinarily well-rounded, freakish athlete who can assimilate all the skills of mixed martial arts readily, easily, capably and

at a fairly young age for the next two decades after they get rocking and rolling in the cage.

I'm skeptical to some extent that we get to a point where everybody really does behave like that. People imagine a future for mixed martial arts where like literally everybody that competes is super well-rounded and I don't even know if we ever get to that point.

I certainly think, obviously, the best fighters in mixed martial arts are always going to be well-rounded, great athletes. I don't think that the highest of the high won't reflect that. I think that's something we could safely say. But, people definitely have an assumption that everybody will get to a point where everybody who fights MMA is great at everything and that that kind of super-athlete is going to come and change the game entirely.

I think, to some extent, it's just not realistic. Obviously, MMA at the point it's at, it's not in a place where it competes for the best athletes, in a lot of cases. You know, the most incredible physical specimens, for the most part, still tend to play other sports, because they're more lucrative, they get into them earlier, there's a passion for them culturally. Whatever.



However, we do have a lot of really good athletes in mixed martial arts, and sometime they're not... You know, the capacity isn't necessarily the way that people imagine it for success. I mean, obviously Brock Lesnar would have been more suited to play in the NFL than Cain Velasquez. I think in North America, at least, we see the NFL as the peak of athleticism because it requires... There's an obsessive fanatic focus on numbers and metrics and really impressive ones. I mean, guys the size of Vernon Davis aren't supposed to be able to run 4.38 in the 40. So, we kind of use the NFL as the gold standard of, you know, if you're a serious athlete, you can do this.

And obviously, Brock Lesnar, if he'd wanted to stick around in NFL Europe for however long it existed, you know, who knows? Maybe he'd be on the Vikings right now. Cain Velasquez, I'm not so sure that he ever would have been a great football player, but I think there's different kinds of athleticism in mixed martial arts that get underrated and under-valued. And so, I think it creates a bit of a false idea that the direction of MMA is moving toward a super athlete like John Jones, when John Jones represents one kind of possible athleticism. I think the kind of athleticism he presents is obviously a really obvious, fast-twitch kind of explosion. He's very long as well. His body type is problematic.

But, the fact is, there's not tons of guys with the kind of fast-twitch explosion of John Jones, coupled with the kind of coordination he has, combined with the kind of natural aptitude he has for mixed martial arts.

We see this a lot. Guys who simply don't...the light bulb doesn't turn on quickly. I mean, you look at somebody like Bobby Lashley, Bobby Lashley clearly is someone that, in terms of metrics, I mean, yoked out of his mind, can probably lift enormous amounts of weight and can probably move pretty fast for a guy who is that large. Especially considering the fact that his body frame is much smaller. He wrestled in college, I think, at 177-pounds. So, he's almost 100-pounds larger than he was wrestling collegiately and still is a fairly able-bodied athlete.

And yet, we've seen, he doesn't acclimate to MMA that well. He doesn't seem to have the same sense of things that someone like John Jones had when he immediately, in his MMA career, I was like, hey it's great that I can elbow someone in the clinch, even though I haven't trained that extensively yet. He doesn't have that kind of sense of Mozart being able to sit down at the piano and instead of seeing keys, just seeing music.

So, with that in mind, I think there's a lot of obvious examples that we've seen in mixed martial arts that great fighters aren't necessarily the kinds of athletes that people imagine being the evolutionary next step. Nobody thinks of BJ Penn as a great athlete because he's portly and balding and kind of looks like an overgrown child. And yet, he is blessed with an incredible ability to take punishment, he hits incredibly hard. He's very, very coordinated and he's other-worldly flexible. These are all great athletic virtues, and certainly ones that apply very directly and very obviously to mixed martial arts, perhaps in a way that in some ways being a fast-twitch freak doesn't in some way.

So, I think there's this assumption that the kind of John Jones's of the world will be the next step and that's what MMA evolves into, and everybody will look like that. I think it's wrong because the idea that...like the idea that there's that many guys like that who not only share those physical specs, but also share the natural aptitude for it. I

think that is a bit misguided, but I think it's also misguided because it pigeonholes athleticism into one kind of normative athleticism that doesn't necessarily apply. And I think that happens because of stick and ball sports, because in basketball, in football and these kinds of things, even if in some you're supposed to be bulkier than others or taller than others, the kind of athleticism that's prized is definitely one that springs, that flies, that explodes. And that's valuable for MMA, but it's not the only kind of athleticism that's valuable.

And we see that different kinds of athletes in mixed martial arts can be highly successful with different kinds of skill sets, very much still athletic, but not athletic in the traditional sense that people imagine as being an evolutionary step.

LA: I think this is going to sound familiar very soon when we pick back up on this. Just to make sure that I'm not going astray, you're sort of thought is very much having logical insights, being able to think through problems, things like that. Do you see anything in MMA that's explicitly sort of truncated or abstract, whether that's a 32-foot octagonal cage or not being able to wear footwear or five-minute rounds, sort of the current version?

JB: I don't know that I would call them truncate or abstract. I think some things in MMA are arbitrary, and that's tough, because one of the ideas of mixed martial arts is that it's somehow supposed to represent a fight. And when you try to turn that into a sport, the very nature of making something sporty, you have to introduce arbitrary rules, I mean, in some way.

I mean, things like football and basketball, they're about the imposition of will and yet, they're turned into these very rigid and concrete notions where you're putting a ball into a goal.

So, there's always going to be some level of arbitrary factor. I mean, why are rounds five minutes instead of three or six or eight? Why are there three rounds instead of two or four? Why are championship fights five rounds in the unified rules instead of six or seven or ten?

So, I think there's a kind of arbitrariness to it and I think one thing that seems difficult about MMA is people acknowledge it's a young sport, but I don't think that people realize how arbitrary a lot of these rules are or the fact that they're still fairly young. I think people take them kind of as entrenched and I think people ascribe a level of inherence to them, sort of this idea that... I mean, this comes up a lot. We know, ten-ten rounds or my notion that like all fights, basically between relevant competitors should be five rounds. And people have, I think, a resistance to the change because there's almost this idea that this is how things are or why would you change it? Like, almost this normativity that's ascribed to three, five-minute rounds.

But, that's just some total construction that was created by people making the unified rules, you know, over a decade ago and going, that's a fair amount of time for people to fight. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that and a lot of three round, five-minute-a-pop fights are still fantastic. But, I think we've seen demonstrably that there are many, many fights out there that would strongly benefit from a final ten minutes and that we're not getting the kinds of conclusion, the kind of sense of satisfaction about knowing who a better fighter is in that period of time.

So, I think that there is a bit of a trouble in mixed martial arts, not necessarily due to any kind of truncation or abstractions or anything like that. I think there is a problem, though, with the fact that people think of unified rules and the way in which MMA takes place in most parts of the world as somehow being preordained. And there's nothing that way about it. It's highly mutable and it's something that I think requires us to continue to think about.

The idea that, you know, a bunch of people in the room said that three, five-minute rounds is great, so we should behave that way for the balance of time, as long as guys are fighting in a cage, seems a bit silly to me.

LA: It does seem very much sort of in-process. That's sort of reflected in a lot of different ways.

JB: Yeah, and I mean, this is...this whole idea of inherence is something that comes up more often than not in discussions about religiosity, you know, ideas about morality and stuff like that. People, you know...the assumption is it's somehow preordained that we be good to our neighbor or that we care about the biosphere or these ideas that we just assume are things that were preordained. And very much, they're ideas about the world that are relatively new or came along as a result of people. I think people see them as kind of somehow being inherent or having some kind of primordial existence. And I don't think that is the case.

And it seems weird to me as well that people implicitly acknowledge that mixed martial arts is a dynamic and moving entity, because look at the call for knees to the head on the ground, for instance. Why is it that knees to the head on the ground are seen as something undesirable...like an undesirable rule that we can change for the better and to get knees to the head on the ground into mixed martial arts under the unified rules? People see that as something we're striving for, and yet, other changes are seen as kind of impractical or quixotic. I don't think that's terrible appropriate, because there's very little that separates either one of those categories. The only difference is knees to the head on the ground were an obvious part of pride, they were great, there were obvious positions that their...their obvious utility is so obvious that it

leads people to question it more frequently, so people are more comfortable with the idea of saying that maybe it's a good idea to have these things.

But, for other rules that go, you know, usually little regarded or unchallenged, people take the stance almost like you're trying to reinvent the wheel by suggesting that they be altered in a way that they almost think that these rules are concrete, cement and that to change them would be to represent some kind of upheaval in mixed martial arts, something that would be un-do and unfit and it seems incredibly weird since that, in and of itself, is an entirely arbitrary distinction between why knees to the head on the ground would be acceptable to argue for change and why five round fights and seven round title fights wouldn't be.



LA: Yeah, I think you've opened a can of worms with orthodoxy and things like that that I'm not sure we can fully dispatch in the time that we have. But, all of those things have implications. If you've been fighting with knees on the ground and all of a sudden there's not knees on the ground, that's changing the way that people do their jobs. That's not insignificant, especially if you've wrestled and done things that way. You're talking about rewiring the way your brain works.

JB: Yeah. I think there's some guys, too, that... I can't say that there's any guys out there that drastically would have changed the course of their career if certain things weren't outlawed, but the one that always comes to mind is, you know, what if Mark Coleman still got to headbutt? You know? I can't say if Shogun would have been UFC champion forever if he got to stomp on people. I don't know if Vitor Ribeiro's career would have been markedly better if he could have elbowed on the ground forever.

But, yeah, there's no way around the fact that some guys are without the kind of best tools in the game. I think it says a lot that we're coming up on a fight in Melendez/Kawajiri that people are pretty excited for. Everybody acknowledges,

basically, you know, two top-ten light weights, had a great first fight, pretty close, controversial. We want to see a rematch.

One of the foils in it is, how big of a difference do elbows make to Tatsuya Kawajiri? We're talking about a guy that's fought MMA for a decade, that is one of the most achieved light weights we've ever seen. And this is like the first time he's going to have the ability to use this tool, that based on his physical style and how he fights, people have always acknowledged would be a huge asset to his game. It seems weird that we're talking about a guy who's had this level of success, is heading into a big fight and this is the first time that we can genuinely say, well hey, maybe elbows will actually be extremely, extremely advantageous for Tatsuya Kawajiri.

LA: Similar discussions with Fedor, except for the Strike Force promoters.

JB: Yeah.

LA: I think you might have answered this, but there's a lot of talk about approaching a generation where kids have trained exclusively mixed martial arts. They're not kick boxers, they're not wrestlers. They've had gloves on, they've had headgear on and they've been kicking each other the entire time. Is that significant to you?

JB: It is and it isn't. It's significant in that the more familiarity people have with mixed martial arts, the better; the better change to get good athletes into mixed martial arts, the better. And I think the better chance for some guys to make a living. You know, it sucks to watch a guy like...we'll say Aaron Simpson. Aaron Simpson is a guy that...he's never going to be UFC Middle Weight Champion, but he's a good middle weight. He's good enough to stick around in the UFC.

Because he's in his mid to late thirties, and is still in kind of the prospect stage, even if he's in the UFC and making decent money. Like, how realistically long will he be able to fight? What if Aaron Simpson was ten years younger? If he used his money wisely, that would represent a much larger egg to store away for his family and so forth.

So, there are like externalities that come out of training earlier and fighting earlier that I think are beneficial. But, most people see it as if guys start training when they're 12 and they're wrestling in high school and doing jujitsu throughout their whole life, and boxing, that by the time they're 18 and ready to fight, they're going to be absolute killers. And we know that's not the case, because we already have lots of evidence to suggest that guys who start young aren't necessarily going to be that much better. I mean, they can still be... I mean, they still can be great fighters, but they can still be duds as well.

I mean, you look at someone like Rory McDonald. Rory McDonald is a very good fighter and he's going to be in the UFC for a long, long time. But, is Rory

McDonald really way, way better than other welter weights at his age, despite the fact he's been training longer? I mean, Rory McDonald started training when he was a young teenager in middle school, was fighting professional by the time he was 16. Is he really so much better now as a...I think he's 22 or something like that. Is he really that much better now at that age than other 22-year-olds at other points in mixed martial arts? I don't know that he is. Rory McDonald is...or, excuse me. He's 21. He turns 22 this year.

John Jones is 23 and you know, started training basically 2 ½ or 3 years ago. Would John Jones be that much better if he started training that much earlier? Are guys that are training that much earlier...why are some of them not as good as John Jones then?

I mean, the fact is, some guys do things their entire life and become better at them incrementally. Some guys hit a wall. Some guys, that's as good as they get. Conversely, there are some guys who it doesn't take them long at all to become great, whether it's Brock Lesnar, a John Jones or somebody else.

So, I think that it's definitely a benefit to have that kind of awareness, have people grow up with mixed martial arts. I think that's good. But, just this cavalier assumption that, oh yeah, think of the world of fighters when everybody grows up playing. I don't know that that is ultimately going to lead to this vast crop of markedly better fighters.

Never mind the fact that... I think the rigors of MMA, what it means to train, I don't know that that's something you want to court potential Todd Marinovich's with. You know?

LA: A 15 or 20-year career.

JB: Yeah. It is tough. And when I see kids that are seven and eight-years-old who have a Mohawk and are wearing Tap Out shirts and their father has already...

LA: You were going to go there. I knew you were.

JB: Yeah, and their father has already decided that they are the next Chuck Liddell, think who well adjusted is this child going to be? What are the odds that they even still like MMA by the time that they're old enough to fight.

So, I think the evolution of the overbearing MMA dad, people don't realizes that it exists. But, if you go to wrestling and jujitsu competitions, they're all over the place and they're in MMA gyms as well. There's a lot of grown men who are already living vicariously through child...you know, like school-aged children who they've preordained as mixed martial arts fighters. And that is another sort of negative consequence of this

idea. I mean, we're going to be in for a lot of failed cases. I mean, that's as simple as it is.

I don't think that every kid who starts young isn't going to become that way. I'm not suggesting that. But, we're definitely going to get our fair share of MMA Todd Marinoviches in an absolute way. Because I think... You know we see kids get burned out on basketball, on football, and they wouldn't necessarily... I don't want to create the idea that MMA is harder than they are in this kind of abstract sense of being hard. But, there is a kind of structure to what it takes to train MMA that I don't see these kids keeping up with.

I mean, imagine you're 14-years-old and trying to be normal. You know, do homework make out with girls, smoke, be academically enterprising, do your homework, whatever. And on top of that, you have to go to jujitsu three times a week, you're being driven X amount of miles to go to jujitsu for a few hours and coming back. You're wrestling on your junior high team. You probably go to a boxing gym as well. And if you have some kind of psycho father, you're probably doing conditioning on top of that,.

Like, there are so many components to it, it's a lot different from simply having two-a-days in football and then playing on the weekend. The kind of commitment that's required is much more robust in a lot of cases.

So, I think that there's definitely a potentially negative and deleterious effects to some of these kids who we're already seeing becoming the burnouts of the future, and it's unfortunate because there's a lot of irresponsible parents out there who have already decided their kid is the next UFC champion when they're four. And not kid is a UFC champion when they're four.



LA: Understood. That's notice to people. That's you. You better watch it.

One of the interesting things that I realized in sort of listening to other people breakdown fights is people have very sort of one-way, constricted, this is how I see this fight, if this person doesn't do this, they're going to lose. When in reality, it should probably be a trinity where you include physiology, style and strategy. Does that seem appropriate to you?

JB: I think that is... I mean, in a way, all sports are that. Like, I don't think it's terribly appropriate to think that's a distinguishing feature of mixed martial arts. I think you could say that... I mean, name a sport. Any sport.

LA: Football.

JB: Oh, I mean football is an incredible obvious one. Physiology, style and strategy are pivotal. We know the extent to which strategy and style... I mean, strategy and style are inherently comingled. I mean, you do certain things and you plan to do them, and you have tendencies that you build strategies based around. So, I mean, those things are intimately comingled.

We know that different football teams play in different ways. We know that Andy Reid's Philadelphia Eagles pass the ball 70% of the time. We know that a Mike Martz offense is going to use a tight end to block and might not run linear pass patterns. Like, we have very, very obvious notions about how certain football teams perform and what they try to do. And obviously that plays in with strategy.

Obviously there are certain kinds of teams that turning the ball over against them would be an absolute death nail in the way that it wouldn't be against another team. Or, certain teams, it's far more pivotal to prepare for a blitz scheme that they're going to pull than to prepare for their offense. So, strategy and style are obviously part of that.

And physiology plays in as well, because I mean, we're coming up on the draft. I mean, why is it that with drafting in the NFL we hear about, well this guy is a one-technique, but he can't play the three-technique. This guy, I mean, all he can really do is be an outside rusher. This guy, he's a convert. You're going to want to play him outside in a 3-4 scheme as an outside linebacker. Because, guys have physical specs that make them more suitable to do some jobs than others.

And conversely, there's a lot of guys that...there's a lot of teams that are able to do very creative things by being contrarians. You look at the 3-4 defense that Wade Phillips set up in Dallas. They had possibly the best nose tackle in the league in Jay Ratliff, and Jay Ratliff is undersized. I mean, he's like kind of the size that you would

imagine a 1-gap defensive tackle being, and yet, he's playing nose tackle in a 3-4 and he's able to do it.

So... Or, more pertinently, we've seen in the last, I don't know, I would say the last five or six years, we've seen a lot more small outside pass rushers like height-wise. Dwight Freeney was kind of the start of it, but now we have guys like Elvis Dumervil and stuff like that. Guys who people said, oh, well, they can't be pass rushers in the NFL, they're too short. But now, we're actually seeing that some offensive tackles who are 6'8", 6'9", basically massive dudes, they're so big they can't bend their knees and get low enough to block a guy that's 6' tall, 250 pounds and coming screaming with a 7-yard head start at the snap of the ball.

So, all of those things, I mean, that's just football. I'd never answered that question about football before, but what makes it easy is that it's generalizable about all sports.

So, in MMA, I think a better question would be, is there anything unique about MMA's intercession of physiology, style and strategy? And I think it changes a bit because of...weight classes is the one thing that springs to mind that makes it interesting.

One thing that we've talked about recently is the idea that any mediocre light weight should basically drop to 145, because they will experience an appreciable gain in relevance. Now, that is owing to the fact that they're bigger, physiologically speaking. I mean guys that routinely fight at light weight and are cutting down to 145 and hadn't done so before, will probably... I mean, there's a lot of reasons not to have done it, but they're probably bigger than your average feather weight.

And in terms of style, changes are they're better fighters as well, because the biggest thing is that there's a talent gulf between 145 and 155. A lot of the guys who are having success recently at 145 were basically flunked-out light weights. Mike Brown, Michihiro Omigawa, Manny Gamburyan. These were guys that just weren't good light weights that cut down. There wasn't as much talent there; they succeeded.

So, likewise, I mean, you see this with heavyweights and light heavyweights as well, a lot of small heavyweights cut to 205 and don't have the kind of success they imagined. Like Brandon Vera, you might say, well, why are they not as good as we imagined they would be when they cut down? Isn't cutting down great? Doesn't it make everybody better?

And we quickly find out that as far as style and strategy go... First of all, physiologically speaking, there's a lot of big, 205-pounders anyway. But in terms of style and strategy, 205-pounders are vastly beyond heavyweights, because they have a

different kind of physiology, one that can carry them cardiovascularly a lot better, and one that is often much more in-tune with becoming really good kickboxers or being really fluid grapplers in a way that being a rocked-out, 265-pound guy maybe isn't.

So, I think physiology, style and strategy are...like that kind of a trinity. I mean, that's important about any sport. Any sport, especially if it involves sort of contact or different sizes of people, that's going to be really relevant. With MMA, I would say that thing that puts a different spin on it is weight classes. I mean, the idea of where you fit in the particular weight class, how you happen to fight, how that sort of gets in that mix.

We see this a lot, you know, when we talk about maybe middle weights dropping to welter weight as well. There was an idea some months ago, Demian Maia suggested maybe he would be interested in cutting down to 170-pounds. And the response that a lot of people had is, hey, that would be great. There's not a lot of guys who have that kind of style at 170. And it's true. We don't have a lot of guys that have that kind of textbook jujitsu style. I mean, Jake Shields is definitely a great grappler, and maybe John Fitch and George St. Pierre are great grapplers. But, they don't have the same kind of style as Demian Maia. So, people thought that was kind of interesting.

And likewise, people, when they talk about Anderson Silva, they see like what Chael Sonnen was able to do as the blueprint to beat him. But, they bemoaned the lack of really high quality, physical wrestlers who could attempt to replicate it. And obviously, if there wasn't nuance and importance in physiology, style and strategy in MMA, then we would be talking about every weight class in the same way. There would be a representative homogeneity, and there isn't.

Different styles have been historically more present in different weight classes. There's different talent levels for various reasons. So, I think with weight classes, that's kind of the twist that physiology, style and strategy end up getting involved in with mixed martial arts. But just in general, I would never go so far as to say that those three components make MMA different, because I think they're present in all sports in different ways.

LA: It seems to be an interesting way to boil it down, but at the same time, MMA sort of seems increasingly sort of beyond arm's reach, sort of.

JB: Yeah.

LA: I think we've arrived at that at about three different ways now. One of the points I really wanted to get to is, is again, sort of style versus personality. And I couldn't think of anyone in MMA that I was really comfortable with holding up and saying, yes, this is purified, yes, this is a good idea. But, I did think that Wladimir Klitschko had an entire history and a sort of family structure and a place in time, even, that supported what he

does in the ring. And I compare that with people like Dan Hardy or Mike Swick, and I just shake my head. Does that seem to make sense where some people just seemed conflicted in what they try to do and others definitely do not?

JB: In what sense? When you bring up Klitschko, are you sort of referring to the fact that this was the guy who could have done a lot of things with his life? Or?

LA: Well, the extreme sort of privilege coming from a background where his father was an Air Force General, access to the Soviet State Training System, the change to be an Olympian, to then continue with education, which is...that's still pretty decent, box in the Olympics, speak multiple languages, fight in Germany professionally, and then have people like Chris Byrd try to punch him in the face. Which is just not going to work after he's trained with Manny Stewart.

It seemed to sort of make sense that someone his size is going to beat a smaller man. That this is a cohesive narrative, in a way.

JB: And yet, Vitali Klitschko quit against Chris Byrd, and they have the exact same background. Why did one brother absolutely pulverize Chris Byrd and why did the other one go a couple of rounds, hurt his shoulder and quit?

LA: Yeah. And that's the interesting thing. They are two brothers. It's not... It's very... I don't know. Maybe that was not one of my... It seems like there was something there.

JB: I mean, it's just tough to sort of...

LA: I think I'm asking you too much. That could be the problem.

JB: Yeah, I mean, that's kind of the problem with it. Is to say, you know... Because, my initial thought when I heard the question, sort of, do you think there are fighters with conflicting styles and personality. My initial thought was you were going to ask sort of about people like...someone like Mike Pierce, for instance, or John Fitch, guys who are seen as perhaps boring or prosaic in the cage. Yet, on an individual level, are extremely bright and funny and engaging, and the kind of people that in any sphere of life you would want to be around.

And conversely, there's a lot of fighters who are incredibly, incredibly entertaining in the cage, but outside of it, you know, they don't sort of have that kind of same essence. And yet, you went in a completely different direction with the question. So, I think... There's just so much to be said for the cultural component of how we come to MMA, what kind of personalities and what kind of experiences are represented across and entire sport. There is so much to be said for it that any kind of conclusion you would want to draw would have to be, I think, incredibly, incredibly pointed.

LA: Which would make it difficult to synthesize and reapply to the larger sport, in itself.

JB: I mean, it's just one of those questions. Yeah, I mean, there's... The whole Klitschko question alone is something sort of incredibly robust, because I mean, the whole sort of summarization of the Klitschkos is this sort of this joke that Wladimir has no chin and Vitali has no heart. And that's a whole question that you could spend an hour exploring maybe why that is and kind of the similarities and differences between the brothers. And, you know, that's merely...that's not even a question that you pose. That was simply an example that you brought up and that I happened to sort of counterpoint to. So, I think that says a lot about the nature of sort of personality and culture experience and the kind of people that end up in any individual sport.

LA: Certainly. I could not disagree. One of the, I guess, less of two questions I had was, I've noticed there are people like Martin Rooney and Jonathan Chamber, strength and conditioning coaches, primarily, although very good athletes, that are in the corner now at the UFC for very successful fighters. Do you see that as having any real implications?

JB: I think it depends on the guy. I mean, part... There's a lot of guys who corner fighters that offer valuable insights that people wouldn't anticipate. I mean, actually, it's funny. I keep hearing people talk about how Brock Lesnar's an awful coach. I always think back, if you've seen Cole Conrad's fights in Belatore, Brock Lesnar might win the Olympic gold medal for cornering. When he deals with Cole Conrad, he is loud, he's clear, he's intelligible, he's strategic. He clearly has a grease sense of his fighter. He's sort of motivational without being a cheerleader. He is stern without kind of being historyonic, like someone like Teddy Atlas. So, all of the kind of qualities that you would think would make a great cornerman. And that's someone that you wouldn't necessarily anticipate to have those qualities.

So, likewise, I mean, if someone decides, you know, in the gym, even if he's your strength coach, that person acts...does a great job at pointing things out or you think that he's someone who can offer you potentially valuable insight. I'm sure a lot of guys, frankly, have their strength and conditioning coach there just because they get three or four cornermen and they think, why not? I mean, he's one of my coaches. It's almost like kind of an obligation.

I think that's something that... I mean, that's always going to come down to the individual. I mean, there's plenty of guys who work with strength and conditioning coaches and work with them in a very hands-on and have a long-standing relationship and they never end up in their corner and that there are some guys that do. Likewise,

there's a lot of guys who have sparring partners that they do a lot of great work with, and yet, they never end up in their corner for a fight.

So, I think there is no real...there's no real important takeaway, I think, from strength and conditioning coaches being in the corner apart from it coming down to the individual wants and whims of the fighter. I mean, your sort of goal as a fighter should be to sort of imagine, how many people can I bring to my corner. Can they work together cohesively, and are they people that will give me advise that will lead me to prosper at whatever athletic endeavor I'm trying to achieve.

I think it's perfectly feasible to think that in some cases a strength and conditioning coach would be able to do that. Then, in some other cases, probably wouldn't be able to.

But as for just the prevalence in general, I see a lot of people getting into sort of strength and conditioning because people are now kind of trying to accept it... Or, shouldn't say trying to accept it. People are beginning to accept it as something that is important.

There's very much a sense in mixed martial arts that if you're not preparing your body properly, you're not doing the best job possible and you're not putting yourself in the best position to win. And so, I do... And this is not to sort of single-out anybody, but just a general trend of guys who can pull a lot of weight and have read a couple of books, hook-up with a gym and that's their new strength guy.

I think there's a lot of people that really see MMA as their opportunity. I mean, it's not even just strength and conditioning. I mean, I think people now, because of the successful niche, people see it as their foot in the door to be the guy that does X for MMA. You see a lot of like, for instance, failed agents in football or guys who interned at a major agency and they were like the caddy for a basketball player. Now, they try to sort of position themselves as some kind of MMA super-manager because, oh, they're the MMA agent. They have experience in the NBA and the NFL. They're going to be the MMA agent.

So, I think there's a lot to be said for MMA becoming a very robust niche that I think a lot of these people feel they can be parasitic on.

LA: Do you think that would include someone like John Danaher? That might not be a name you're familiar with.

JB: I think John Danaher is... I mean, going back to your question about styles and personality and people's inclusion in mixed martial arts. I think Danaher is... I mean,

that guy's a different animal all to himself. I think he's the one that if you sort of want to bring up as an example would be more suitable for an entire case study around him.

He's definitely not someone whose interests... His interests in MMA is definitely not the same as other people who get into the sport and try to bleed certain guys dry or try to ride their coattails. John Danaher's interest in MMA, I think, is something different entirely. I mean, he's just a different guy. He wears rash guards everywhere he goes. Your average person doesn't do that. I mean, John Danaher wore a rash guard to Matt Serra's wedding.

LA: Right.

JB: And that's a different kind of cat altogether and I think his motivations are completely different in something that would be worthy of a treatise in an off themselves.

LA: That's probably more in the line of your work, possibly, a long form interview or something like that.

You know, it seems like there's an applicability for very different people that we really haven't discovered yet.

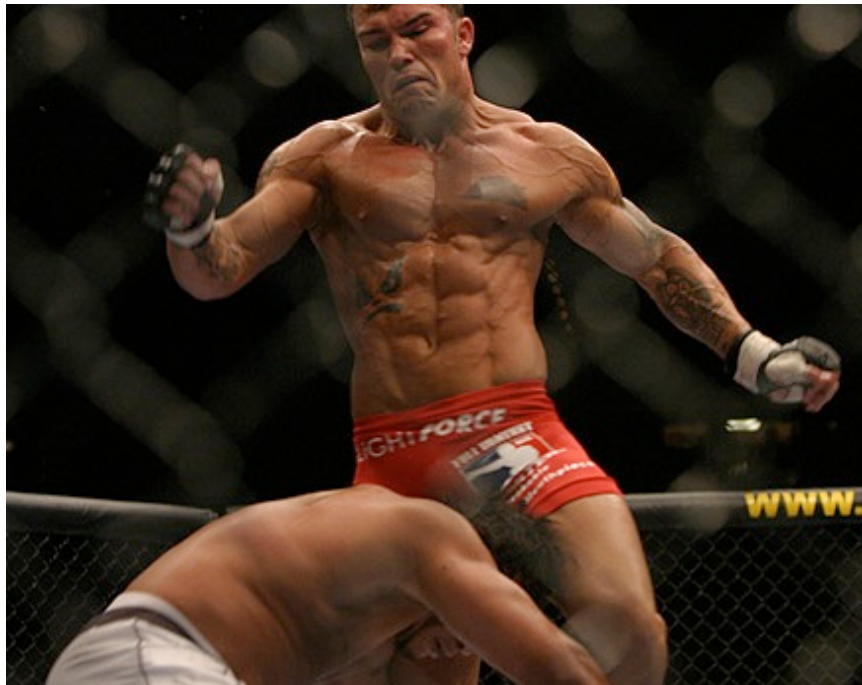
JB: That's a fair generalization about MMA and I think that's a fair generalization about sports. This idea that we're seeing different kinds of people and I think this is something that it's nothing terribly new in other sports, but still something that comes to light. I mean, look at how we see certain kinds of football coaches. Look at how we see someone like John Payton or Jason Garrett. We don't see them as like football guys. They played and they were both quarterbacks. They're both smart guys. But, sort of the idea is that they kind of have this mad scientist vibe.

Now, they're also these sort of smaller, compared to other football players, scrawnier, almost dork-ish looking guys. And that's nothing new. I mean Don Coryell was not only sort of book-ish in that way. Don Coryell also had a crippling lisp that makes it seem incredible that he's one of the most beloved and influential coaches in NFL history.

Like, it's not new that you would have like smaller, squirrely guys being seen as great coaches, but the perception of them has definitely changed, because sort of the idea now is that they have these kind of... They have specific kinds of personalities that are different or now, the notion of what it means to be a player's coach. What it means to be someone like Tony Dungy or someone like Mike Tomlin.

I think there's much more of a sense now about how certain kinds of personalities are far more vital in coaching and how sort of more outside-the-box

personalities can be valuable. I mean, also, up until he was basically pilloried by the media for turning out to be a bit of a psychotic martinet, look at someone at Texas Tech like Mike Leech. Mike Leech, you know, Sports Illustrated and ESPN and all these other journalistic outlets, dedicated massive amounts of column inches and TV time to like, oh, Mike Leech is crazy. Look at how his offense is. There's three-foot splits between his linemen and they don't ever run the ball. It's 95% passes. You know, he's really into military history and he has like suits of armor in his office. Sort of like this idea of almost making Mike Leech seem like some kind of weird Asperger Syndrome victim.



And yet, that being seen as incredibly productive and becoming to being a coach. And we see that in mixed martial arts. I mean, look at... I mean, speaking of military fascination, look at Greg Jackson. A bit part of not just the popular reaction to Greg Jackson, but even the intimate reaction to Greg Jackson.

One thing that allows him to win-over fighters is, I mean, not just that he's smart, but it's the way in which it manifests. He sort of has this great sense of military history that he can sort of tell stories and anecdote and have sort of metaphors that people respond to.

So, Danaher, I think, is that taken to the next level. He's perhaps the greatest example of how unique personalities can embed in mixed martial arts and be incredibly valuable. And again, they're only as valuable as the people around them. There are plenty of people that wouldn't see the value in working with John Danaher because they

think he's a crackpot or they think he's crazy or they just think he's full of shit. So, it wouldn't work.

And I think it comes down to something that I've kind of always said about coaching, is when most people... Like, one question that comes up a lot in boxing is sort of, if Teddy Atlas did such a great job with Mike Moore, why was he not such a great trainer? Why didn't more Teddy Atlas fighters not become great? Why do we know him more as a commentator than as a coach?

I think there's... And conversely, why is someone like Emanuel Steward someone who, whoever he works with seems to get appreciable better and achieve success?

A lot of times when people say someone's a good coach or a great coach, what they actually mean is, or seem to mean, is that they have the kind of personality which translates to everybody. So they have a greater chance of success of making a champion out of a greater number of people or a greater number of teams. Whereas some people would only work for specific niches. I think that's the kind of example.

I think what works with...why someone like Greg Jackson is great and why people flock to him or why so many people get along with Ricardo Liborio or why so many people like working with Dave Camarillo, Bob Cook and Javier Mendez, AKA.

These are people who, their personalities are such that they could get along... I won't say get along with anyone, but they can deal with anyone and they can sort of find the way to make them click.

Conversely, some people, the way they are, the way they teach, the things they say, the things they think, aren't compatible with everyone. But, for some people they would be enormously valuable.

I think John Danaher, as an asset, would be positively useless to some people, but to George St. Pierre, the kind of symbiotic relationship they have is extremely valuable and I think rouses the better of him.

So, people like John Danaher or people who have that kind of different personality, and they may even kind of stick-out like a sore thumb in that way, they're not going to be people that, I think, command large armies of awesome fighters. Everybody thinks like, oh, my God. This guy is the greatest trainer every. He can do anything. But, they're people that in specific situation will be enormously valuable and be huge, important components of people's development.

LA: And that's a lot to unpack, which I think really enforces just the idea of how complex this is, how personal this is, how little we know about sort of interpersonal violence, even though it's been going on for a while.

JB: Yeah, I mean, it's... It sounds kind of abstract, but I mean, the... Imagine all the difference in your fighting career was made by someone making one single insight for you. You think like, oh, that would be impossible. But, for a lot of people, that's all it takes.

If, for instance, let's say hypothetically, let's say that George St. Pierre somehow lost to Jake Shields. Let's just say. And in the wake of the loss, John Danaher, who's got this fantastic relationship with George St. Pierre told George St. Pierre that sort of really what's wrong with your performance is...people are right. You really need to be more aggressive. You actually need to go and attack.

And let's imagine that John Danaher used... I mean, this is not a particularly new technique, I mean, this is used in football classrooms everywhere. But, let's say John Danaher showed him a National Geographic documentary of predatory cats. What if that thing just enamors George St. Pierre and suddenly he feels like in his head when he's training that he is a leopard, or he is a tiger or a lion. Now, to a lot of people that sounds absolutely absurd, and yet, these are exactly the kinds of things that routinely go on in coaching.

I mean, that example to some extent is essentially cribbed from Rod Marinelli, who's the defensive coordinator for the Chicago Bears, who is famous for lining up, like he shows...he produces highlight films for his defense that show the opposing team's offense intercut with eagles ripping goats off a mountain side and throwing them into a canyon. Or, cats descending upon some larger prey to take it down, like cats killing an elephant or something. And, you know, the players say it's enormously effective. We start to think that way.

Those are things that, again, those were highly specific things and that's why the relationship, that kind of symbiotic relationship is important. If you have someone that understands another individual and feels like this piece of footage or this piece of literature or this song or this message I'm going to say to them is something that's going to resound with them, then you have the ability to affect change in a very real way and make them do things a particular way, which might be successful.

So, that's where stuff like that comes in. That's where the individual one-on-one, kind of the personalities in these kinds of people who seem to be more successful with a certain set of individuals than another. That's sort of why they thrive. Certain kinds of personalities respond to them and other don't. And sometimes all it takes is sort of one

change of mind or one sort of dogma to stick in someone's head that makes all the difference in them being a champion or being competitive where they weren't before.

LA: Which I think should open up more possibilities than it should close for people. Hopefully, if they're listening to this, hopefully they're not dispirited by that. That sounds uplifting, as much as...

JB: The thing is like all performance, all athleticism is...especially athleticism, is based on these kinds of ideas. I mean, obviously it's a radical example to say imagine you're a predatory cat, but as far as... For instance, as far as like weight lifting goes, since it obviously relates more directly to something like Critical Bench, my grandfather sort of always had this curious, philosophical maxim that, you know... If you had an object, like a ball, and every day you lifted it up 100 times, and every day it gained one pound, you could lift it up forever. Now, obviously we know that that doesn't work exactly like that. However, the very idea, for a lot of people, isn't that yes, I will have a ball of somehow adjustable size into the infinite and I will lift it 100 times a day. The idea that's actually offered is if every single day you do something with stern and staunch repetition, and gradually increase whatever sort of magnitude is involved, you will continue to get better as long as you're sort of steadfast about it.

So, for a lot of people, they would go, that's a stupid example, whatever. And for a lot of people they would think, yes, that idea is enough for me to realize how important being staunch, rigorous and routine in working out is. So, I mean, everybody has like maxims and ideas and philosophies about these things that guide how they perform, how they train, what they do. It's not just sports. It's everything. If you're a man of letters and read books or want to ascertain things or you want to be the guy who writes the next great American novel. There are ideas that you have that inform what you do, how you do it and how you plan to be successful. And you're at a much better advantage to do those things if you happen to have someone that can give you useful insights, glib comments, whatever happens to make the wheels in your head start turning and inspire you.

LA: I cannot overemphasize that enough. Whatever it takes, perception is reality. However you deal with the information that you need.

JB: The perception is reality thing is a key component of it, because... I mean, this came up recently. I had a conversation with a colleague recently and he brought up the Dolce Diet of Mike Dolce. And basically said, you know, this is bullshit. These fighters are all idiots, they all buy into this special diet and all that's happening is this guy, Mike, Dolce, this failed fighter, is sitting there with them and basically cooking them chicken and broccoli seven times a day, and that's it. Like, wow, what a genius.

And it doesn't matter if it's anything enterprising or new or cutting-edge. If the athlete feels like they've gained an appreciable advantage and feels much better, even if it's psychosomatic, it's still largely beneficial if it leads to improved success. If someone does the Dolce Diet and...whether it's true or not...

Let's say that a guy's cutting to 155 from 195 and normally he feels like shit when he gets on the scale and then he eats a bunch of ice cream and steak and pasta after it and he feels like horrible. And then, maybe performs half of what he thought he'd be able to do. Let's say he goes on the Dolce Diet, even if it's entirely psychological and his body on the inside is performing exactly the same. If he feels better on the scale and thinks, oh, wow, I feel great. I'm a new man. And somehow that line of thinking leads him to perform better, it's completely irrelevant whether or not anything in his body actually changed.

Now, there's a different philosophical argument to suggest, you know, shouldn't this person be occupied with the truth and why would they want to fool themselves? That's something else entirely. But, to the actual goal of...

LA: We're worried about performance, what happens in the ring.

JB: Exactly. If your ultimate goal is win or lose, I want to be the guy that gets his hand raised, then in that case, yeah. I mean, all of it matters as you think a thing that allows you to perform in a righteous way. I mean, I believe it was Cage Potato ran a thing recently about the ten crazies things that fighters think. You've got Court McGee there with a Key Ray bracelet on and Leo Dimishito drinking his urine and whatever. I mean, obviously, you know, I can't speak to what benefits drinking your own urine has, but if you do it and you feel like a super-powered athlete, more power to you.

LA: Yeah, it's sort of difficult to go somewhere from there, but I think embracing the sort of idiosyncrasy is probably okay. We probably all don't need to move to American Top Team to train with Liborio or move to Iowa to train with Miletich. They do it how they do it. I think that that's probably the future. Is that more or less what I'm taking away?

JB: Yeah. And I think MMA makes it a bit... I think the structured MMA makes it difficult to appreciate these as ideas, because there are things that stand in the way of them. For instance, for years I was able to use Fedorenko of someone who, because of the relationship and motivation and sort of the environment he had with his trainers and training partners, wasn't necessary for him to spend time training State-side. But now we're seeing that internationally, the development of high powered MMA gyms is so far behind America that it does behoove guys to move.

But, other things being equal, the guy who is preparing in a way that suits him is going to be more successful. So, I think that is an idea that will become more obvious or more digestible as MMA international as it is more fully and our gyms where guys can actually get that. I mean, because MMA, it just goes back to some of what we talked about when we talked about sort of youth getting into the sport. And that's just the simple fact that MMA is a difficult sport to train.

MMA is difficult to train in a way that say boxing isn't and that's not speaking about the physical toll or how hard it is in like an existential sense. It's hard in terms of like the logistics and the different things you have to do and fitting it all in. And as a result of that, that's why we still routinely see boxers from impoverished parts of Africa win titles. We have like boxing champions from Namibia and like all kinds of countries that don't exactly stack-up too well on the human development index. It's like, how was that even possible?

But, the blueprint for training boxing and what it takes to train boxing is much, much smaller. Even if you have a horrible ramshackle space, you set up a ring, get a guy gloves, get him a speed bag and a heavy bag, you're off to the races. Get him a jump rope. These are still the ways...

LA: Yeah, you're three-quarters of the way there. Maybe a live opponent, maybe.

JB: Yeah. Conversely, in MMA, think about what it takes to train jujitsu, or to work on your wrestling. I mean, not only do you need to find the people, you need to find different kinds of spaces, you have to find people with these individual skills. And often times, I mean, to do other things, I guess there's always makeshift things. But, I mean, what if you wanted to train your ground-and-pound? What are you going to do it on? Ground-and-pound dummies are expensive. They're a couple hundred bucks if you buy them from somewhere that produces MMA apparel and MMA gear.

So, there's a different kind of setup that makes MMA... I mean, there's a reason, by and large, still, that MMA is a middle and upper middle class pursuit in North America and in Europe, and these are parts of it. I mean, they're not the only parts of it, there are other reasons. But, those are parts of it.

So, I think the notion of being comfortable with your training and the kind of relationships you have being formative, I think that will become something that's... I mean, not that it isn't obvious in some cases in MMA now, but I think it would become more obvious when we get to a point where basically Russian MMA fighters actually have a proper wrestling coach and actually have real sparring partners who know what they're doing and things like that.

LA: Definitely understood, and perhaps that could be a segue to the next time, Russian MMA and Brazilian MMA, who knows? But, Jordan, I definitely appreciate the time. If people don't know where to find you, tell them how to find you, where they can contact you and things like that.

JB: You can email me, JBreen@Sherdog.com. If you have any kind of questions, if they're of the shorter variety or you're interested in the things I say on a regular basis, you can follow me on Twitter, [Twitter.com/JordanBreen](https://twitter.com/JordanBreen). And check out Sherdog.com and Tuesdays and Thursdays at three to five PM Eastern time. We've got the Jordan Breen Show on Sherdog.com, if you want to listen to more of me.

LA: Jordan, I definitely appreciate it. Thank you again.

JB: Oh, huge, huge thanks for wanting to talk to me, Luke. I finely appreciate it. Thank you.

LA: All right, take care.

JB: You too, man.

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