



WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



Luke Allison of CriticalBench.com Interviews Rob Shaul

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

RS: Good, how are you?

LA: Doing all right. Thanks for being here. Give the listeners just a really quick insight into your background. You have a really interesting background. Talk about that for a second.

RS: Well, I'm kind of late to strength coaching. My athletic background is in pretty unspectacular, to say the least. I'm a lifelong benchwarmer and 2nd teamer and I never did anything much past high school, except play some rugby in college. But, I had been a lifelong gym rat. I always loved training and training hard. One thing lead to another

and here I made a career change a few years ago and I started strength coaching. So, that's kind of where I've come from.

In terms of this stuff, my formal education is not in exercise science. I'm kind of self-educated. I guess my main certification is through the National Strength and Conditioning Association. I'm a Certified Strength and Conditioning Coach through them. I've also done a lot of certifications and seminars with other organizations out there. But, for the most part, I'm kind of a gym rat who kind of picked up the books and started studying and became a strength coach.

LA: Now, I've read that you're a graduate of the United States Coast Guard Academy. How has that influenced what you do?

RS: Yeah, I went to the Coast Guard Academy and spent five years in the Coast Guard as an officer. With our work with the military now, it just helped me understand a little bit about some of the guys I'm working with and some of the things they face, not specifically, but general terms. I guess my stretch in the Academy was again, just a guy who was in the weight room all the time, training and training really hard. I started getting people, even then, to kind of follow me around and do what I was doing in the gym.

LA: I guess that's sort of what differentiates you from many other Strength and Conditioning Coaches. You've sort of been there, did that and then decided that you wanted to make a career out of it, much later on. Correct?

RS: Boy, you know, I hate to say, there are all types of different levels of Strength and Conditioning Coaches, and at the collegiate level, a lot of those guys come up, a few internships and weight rooms, then have formal education in exercise science with masters degrees or even above. In the kind of commercial fitness world, it seems like there's all types of people with different backgrounds.

I hope that, I guess, maybe what would differentiate me is just I am kind of self educated and I'm kind of voracious reader. I think the work that I put into my own education may make our stuff a little bit different. Plus, I train myself and I do the stuff that we do. So, I have some firsthand experience with the training that we're putting out there and using.

LA: You have two operations right now, Mountain Athlete and Military Athlete. What was the origins for each of these?

RS: Well, I live in Northwest Wyoming, and I wanted to...Mountain Athlete came first. I wanted to start a gym with my career change and I live in a small town up here. There's a bigger town north of us, Jackson, Wyoming. Jackson is a mountain town in

the classic sense, in the west, lots of skiing and mountaineering here. I thought it would be unique to start a gym and try to focus on training mountain athletes. So, that's how I started Mountain Athlete.

We were rolling with that for a couple of years, and it turned out that more and more...I was getting more and more emails and phone calls and stuff from guys in the military who had started DR sessions. We train climbers, but we also use general and hybrid fitness programming for that. And many military guys turned out to be using our sessions, especially in special forces community.

One thing lead to another and some folks at special operations command in the Air Force base in Tampa brought me down there to kind of show them what we were doing and how I programmed. And that lead to us starting another company, Military Athlete, which is different programming, but specifically for folks in the military and tactical athletes, law enforcement and even emergency services. Who have really unique fitness demands, who are as much professional athletes as any NFL or NBA player, who have long careers, have durability issues. So, there was actually a lot of carryover between my elite Mountain athletes here.

I work with a lot of mountain guides and other professional athletes who, like soldiers, need their bodies for their work. They need to be strong and fit and durable. They have careers that can span 20+ years. There's a lot of carryover. In general, our Military Athlete program is quite a bit more intense than the Mountain Athlete stuff. It's more frequent. The Mountain Athlete stuff is cardio intense, but also gives those guys time to get out in the mountains and do their sport. The military stuff, they get a training session every day.

LA: Just having reviewed some of the programming for each, it looks like there are many similarities, as you mentioned, possibly more similarities than differences. Is that the case?

RS: I think so, yeah. There probably are quite a few similarities. Again, in general, the difference is on a different cycle. In other words, the emphasis for the cycle that each is on is different. We have specific programming for my climbers at the Mountain Athlete. Again, the sessions and the frequency of the session for the military guys are more intense and the sessions are more frequent and more intense. So, they're doing a little bit more work than my general session for the Mountain Athlete.

LA: Your work draws from a really diverse group of influences. Is there a story behind that?

RS: Yeah, I'm not that smart. So, I need to read and draw from coaches who have come before and have proven themselves and I really respect. I find that I pull nuggets

of technique and programming and information exercises from these great coaches who I've read and learned from in my own self education.

I guess some of the big influencers for me are Dan John. He's a strength coach there out of Salt Lake. I kind of call him my primary mentor, especially in the strength world. I hung out in his weight room for a week and kind of mentored under him and everybody from him. Dan's kind of an old school Strength and Conditioning Coach. He works in a private high school down in Salt Lake. Everybody from him to Mark Verstegen at Athlete's Performance who is at the cutting edge of the sports performance world, big into movement, big into core work, big into physical therapy and everything in between.

My work capacity influences come from Greg Glassman, who is the founder of CrossFit and I've been to a couple of CrossFit certifications. I think Glassman is just a genius, and his top athletes are just incredible monsters. I spent some time at a seminar with Mark Twight and Mark and his coaches had been a great influence on me.

Another coach named Joe Kenn, I'd never met him, but I really rely on his work and one of his books that I have used for strength programming. Coach Keen now, I believe, is the Football Strength and Conditioning Coach for the University of Louisville. He used to be at Arizona State, I think. He has a little book, and you should see my copy. It's all dog-eared and written into. It's just amazing work that he's put together.

Another guy is Vern Gambetta who is another well-known Strength and Conditioning Coach. Joe Frio is an endurance guy. I'm learning from him. So, I can go on and on, but yeah, I do try to learn and pull from as many great coaches as I can. Eric Cressey, all those guys. I used stuff and pull from those guys to put together I guess my own kind of unique programming.

LA: Definitely. I had the pleasure to speak to Dan John recently, and that was for sure the thrill of a lifetime. So, I can see why you mentioned him first. Who is a typical client at Mountain Athlete and what type of climbing are you preparing them for?

RS: I guess one of the things that is different from us and other gyms, I don't call the people we train our clients...I call them athletes. I think that's just a little bit different. Our typical athletes, you know, I have people who train her...everybody from a housewife with a couple of kids to some of the top mountaineers in the United States. So, just about everybody in that gamut, in between.

The mountaineers that I work with, we work on them. I treat them as industrial athletes in the sense again, they need their bodies to work. They have long careers, as important in performance for them is also durability. So, I think the best thing I can do for most of those guys coming in is just to get them strong.

One of the interesting things in the mountain sport world is there is not a tradition at all of the weight room work or inside gym work. Mark Twight kind of pioneered that a little bit, but most of the guys who come through my doors who are very accomplished mountain athletes have not only not worked in gym settings, but really avoided them. They've always looked down on them.

As a consequence, they're all generally pretty darn gym weak. So, the best thing I can do for those type of folks straight-away is just to get them stronger. I'm an old school strength guy, nothing fancy, just the classic barbell lifts, Strongman work, that type of stuff. Just to get them stronger.

On top of that, we try to develop for them work or sports specific or in their case work specific work capacity sessions where we train them in the cardio and their muscles that they're going to use on the mountain, in their sport or in their work. So, we get sport specific with them.

We have developed a really unique way to train climbing in my gym. What we found is that the gym setting is not a good place...or my gym type of setting, is not a good place to train rock climbing or mountain climbing technique. But, it's a great place to train the specific strength you need for those sports. So, we develop our own system and have been very successful with my professional mountain athletes in terms of getting their forearms and grip strength strong and their cardio for that type of work really strong and polished.

So, I guess in general, we do some general strength and conditioning. We do some general work capacity work and then we take that foundation, once we get that foundation, we hone that to a sharp point using sport-specific programming on top of it.

LA: I think what you're referring to, you have a YouTube channel that's very interesting. You have people working on the different rock climbing holds and doing density work and speed work and things like that. Is that sort of what you're referring to in terms of the sport-specific preparation?

RS: Yeah, yeah. One of the interesting things about those sports, and just about every sport, is you can get your general fitness down, your general strength, everybody needs that. But, if you can pile on top of that solid foundation, sport-specific training, you can really see an increase in performance. Yeah, so that's something I think is different and unique to my facility and our way of thinking here. We've done that not only for our mountain guys, but also for our military guys where we'll take a look at what they're actually doing and develop programming around the movements and the muscles that they use in their sport and try to hone that even more using that after we have a good solid strength and conditioning foundation set.

So, yeah, you'll see some of the stuff that we do in terms of using climbing holds, using system boards, using hangboards, using HIT strips, doing step-ups, having guys hanging their ice tools. We do stuff like that that is really sport specific in this type of gym setting. Of course, our setting here is artificial. It's not the real thing. But again, all I'm trying to do is make these guys as strong as I can and as fit as I can in their sport so they get up to the mountain that much stronger.

LA: Now, there's been a trend recently, an idea in the mainstream media that very normal people sort of in questionable physical condition can hire guides to essentially drag them up an 8,000 meter peak. Is that something that I can get your opinion on?

RS: Probably not. I'm a Strength and Conditioning Coach, not a mountain guide. I really can't comment on that. I'm sorry.

LA: Fair enough, fair enough. It seems like maybe that's the wrong way for things to be going, but if you're not comfortable, I can definitely respect that.

What observations did you make about military fitness that prompted you to create Military Athlete?

RS: One of the things that I kind of saw right away was that... I guess the main thing is that the military nor the athlete themselves would treat themselves as professional athletes. As a result of that, they kind of pull from all these different types of training techniques and do them and hope they work in the field. I thought that these guys are professional athletes and they deserve programming and strength and conditioning coaching that's catered to their type of activity. So, that would be probably the first thing that I kind of saw a need for.

We've had pretty good success with that idea and the thing has built quite a bit. And it's continuing to build along those lines in terms of just changing the thought out there that these guys are professional athletes.

I was talking to a Master Sergeant in the Green Berets just the other day and he's going, "Geez, I need a Strength and Conditioning Coach. I need a fitness Coach." They have scuba coaches, they have shooting coaches, they have EMT coaches, but the military has always kind of left it up to the soldiers and sailors themselves, and Marines to do their own fitness. Where, these days, as the country invests so much money in these guys and fitness is such a huge part of their work, starting to think of them as professional athletes and treat them like that is important. I feel that we're leading the way in doing that.

LA: it sounds like an important paradigm shift.

RS: Yeah, again, I think they're coming to realize that, too. Not only in terms of what they want in terms of their coaching, but also in how they treat their own fitness, with the understanding that they are professional athletes and fitness just can't be a second part. It has to be important, but also, it needs to be directed. It can't just be random; it should be directed.

LA: How out-moded are most military PT tests?

RS: I think that they are fairly out-moded, but I'm not too sure we need to change those. Most of the PT tests evolve around body weight, callisthenic exercises and a run. I guess a bad thing about them is I'm not certain they really test the fitness that soldiers need when they're in combat or tactical situations.

The good thing about them, though, is that they're not that difficult. And so, most of these guys can do other training that may be more specific to their tactical work and still get in there and do their fitness twice a year and do well on it.

The fitness test, some units, how you score on that can be a big part of your performance evaluation. So, there's quite a bit of stress that goes along with them.

One of the dangers of having a fitness test is ideally it will reflect what the requirement is of the soldiers in the field. The problem with that though is that the requirements of soldiers in the field changes, and it can change frequently. These tests don't change that frequently. It takes so much to get one of those through the bureaucracy and double standards and stuff.

We've seen that kind of recently with the shift from Iraq to Afghanistan. There are some fitness requirements for Iraq that aren't the same as Afghanistan. I would recommend training for soldiers going to one area or the other differently, it would have different programs for them.

But, if you have a fitness test that is required by everybody and they train to that test, then you may not be required or be ready when you get to the Seals. I don't know if you kind of follow what I'm saying. But, in general, there's a lot of criticism about the fitness out there, but again, I'm not too sure they do test what is really required when they get into combat.

But, because they are simple and fairly easy to pass, I'm not too sure you want to change them. Because, having a fitness test that does reflect what's required in combat, I don't think it would be flexible enough to change as those combat requirements change. It's kind of a long-winded answer to you, but in general, I think they suck. But, I like them all the same.

LA: I noticed that you recently prescribed your own sort of fitness test or sort of diagnostic. Is that something that you'd be interested in describing?

RS: Yeah, yeah. It's kind of an interesting idea. We kind of thought about that for a while in terms of trying to create something that could kind of catch some of the things that I think are important in my site and kind of sort out and see how guys did on it. Our tests or assessments, we kind of developed three of them, and two that we've been able to try out so far. The first one is kind of just a gym-based, work capacity based test. I think there are four or five parts of it.

The first is a max bench press for reps at 185 pounds. And then the second is a max front squat for reps at 185 pounds. Just about those two lifts. The bench press, I like the bench press just as a great test of overall upper body strength. So, that's how come that's part of my assessment. It's pretty hard...when you're doing pushups, it's kind of easy to...there's some questioning of strength that comes up in terms of form and stuff like that. But, the bench press has less wiggle room for that type of thing to come up. Range of motion is pretty set.

In terms of the loading, I thought it was intriguing. At the NFL combine they use a 225 for reps, and I kind of like that format going ahead. I think that maybe it shows a little bit more working strength endurance rather than just a max effort test. So, I thought that type of formula where we have a weight for reps, rather than a max effort would be a way to go.

In terms of the loading, I've worked ranges in weight from 145 pounds to 250 pounds. So, I had to choose a loading that I thought was possible by those type of guys, amongst that body weight scale. But also, something that a reasonably fit professional athlete should be able to do, and 185 pounds if not a very heavy bench press. So, I weigh like 155 and I've gotten it up like 10 times. So, that's not very strong, but I think that's just a good loading to do. The most we've had yet is like 30 reps for a big guy getting that up.

The front squat is just a great leg strength test. Again, 185 is a good load to use for that. One of the things I learned from Dan John is that in terms of strength balance, your upper body and lower body strength balance, your front squat and your bench press should be about the same. And we're finding that here. My front squat and bench press reps for the test were both the same at ten reps. The guys who are balance, it's about the same. They guys who are imbalanced, I get results in from guys who are getting up 15 bench presses and 7 front squats at the same loading. And that tells me they've been doing kind of upper body, bodybuilding diets.

I also get guys who are the opposite. They have lots of front squats and low reps on the bench press. That tells me they're kind of geeky endurance soccer players their

whole lives. So, they've neglected their upper body strength. So, those are the first two tests we use.

The next one we have is a max dead lift at 225 in 60 seconds. This is kind of unique to me. We wanted a loading that we thought would be a good test of strength. Again, 225 dead lift is not that much weight, something that should be able to be done by all these different body sizes, from 140 pounds up to 250. Putting a time limit on it at that loading, I mean, some big guys may be able to go on forever doing that. A time limit kind of touches a little bit of speed strength. The dead lift can be a dangerous lift to do for people who start letting their back break. If we're putting on a time limit, hopefully will limit some of that.

We do dead stop dead lifts. We can't bounce them. I require my athletes to dead stop at the bottom. I think that's just a great test of full body strength, a little bit of speed strength.

The next test, we have a 25 meter sprint and we do four rounds of that, 60 seconds work, 60 seconds rest. The score is how many total reps or lengths you get of all four rounds. So, you sprint back and forth 25 meters, touch the ground at each end. Let's say you get 10 lengths in the first round. As you go through, you add your round totals together and you come out with a final score at the end.

Sprinting, I can't think of any more functional exercise for military athletes than sprinting. A 25 meter sprint is a great effort to do and this also tests anaerobic endurance. I don't know if you've ever done that before, but it puts you down metabolically and it also helps tap a little bit of the recovery to be able to get up and hit it again.

LA: It's what makes you question what you're doing, that's for sure.

RS: Yeah. We really prescribe a lot of sprinting for military athletes for metabolic work.

The next test is just max pull-ups, body weight, dead hang pull-ups. I needed to get a pulling exercise in there, and max reps pull-ups is the best one, I think, to do. And then finally, we finish the first part of the assessment off with a 10 minute effort for reps of sandbag get-ups at 80 pounds. A sandbag get-up is an exercise that I just absolutely love here. It's, I think, the best core strength exercise I have. We do a lot of them. It's also a very metabolic exercise. I really think that core midsection strength is important not only for performance, but also for durability.

It's kind of a buzz word, core strength. You can get really geeky with it. We don't get too geeky. The sandbag get-up is almost a Strongman exercise. But, it works

every angle of the midsection. It works your legs and it makes you breath like a mother. So, we do that for 10 minutes.

So, that's the first part of the assessment, all those little mini tests. And if you hustle through you can get those all done in an hour. The second part of our assessment is another exercise. It's real sports specific to walking up hill, to climbing. It's specifically for these guys more typically who are looking at deployments to Afghanistan with the hilly terrain there. It's 1,000 step-ups for time with 40 pounds on your back.

This is pure drudgery. I call it the drudge. It sucks; it's terrible. But, in my experience, step-ups are a phenomenal way, very transferable way, to train hiking up hill in a gym setting. We just put packs on guys, tell them they have to go to 1,000 steps, 500 each leg. We use boxes, 17 to 19 inches high and you just go for time. It's an endurance effort. It took me over 45 minutes to do. I mean, the heart rate was probably at 200 at the end with just stepping up and climbing hills. Not only an aerobic, metabolic, cardio effort, but it's also a strength effort. You're essentially doing 500 one legged squats with each leg.

So, that's the second part. Our third part assessment will be a range fitness assessment. I haven't quite developed that yet. But, that's where we'll take them to the range and they can breathe hard and see if they can shoot straight.

LA: That's the stress/shoot type of format, correct?

RS: Yeah, I guess stress/shoot would be a military term for it. I call it range fitness. But yeah, that's where we... We've done quite a bit of guinea pig and experimenting with this. We get operators at a range setting and put them in a kit and helmet and make them sprint and do thrusters and burpies, all in an effort to get them to breathe hard. And then make them shoot at targets. We're trying to train the ability there to control your heart rate, control your breath, control your stress and put rounds on target.

It's the most sports specific thing I can do for military athletes. What I'm finding is, even the special operators I've worked with, really don't get to the range that much. They generally don't practice this when they do go to the range. They get a little bit of the stress/shoot work when they go to shooting schools, but I'm trying to develop ways where it's easy and functional to train and coach that ability in a gym and at the range setting. So, the idea is to train it more frequently. The more frequently you train something, the better you can get at doing it.

So, yeah. And I want to develop an assessment... It's kind of where it all comes together. If you're not very fit, then you're going to be worked that much more when you come to shoot. But, if you can't shoot straight, you can't control your movement and

stuff, it really doesn't matter how fit you are. Your rounds aren't going to be on target. So, it's kind of combining those two... I guess combining that complex motor skill of being able to do something very physical and putting it together with the fine motor skill of marksmanship and creating this complex motor skill.

LA: I think that sounds very promising. It will be interesting to see the feedback that you continue to receive, as you go forward. Previously you mentioned specific demands for those being deployed to Iraq, possibly operating in urban terrain or those going to Afghanistan functioning in an area of responsibility above 8,000 feet. Talk a little bit about who you find particularly difficult about those two situations.

RS: Well, in general, just the two terrain differences is what I am kind of concerned about. The main difference, of course, is Afghanistan and the rocky terrain and also just the vertical hill climbing these guys need to do in their kits and with rucksacks. So, they need to get there being able to ideally be pretty proficient at walking uphill, hiking uphill. Believe it or not, there's more to that than you think. It's own mode of cardio activity.

I know from firsthand experience you cannot just run long distance on flat terrain and then put a pack on and expect to climb up hill very well. Again, not only is it an aerobic cardio mode of activity, but it's also a lot of strength involved. You need a lot of leg strength to walk up hill. So, we've just developed kind of a six week pre-deployment Afghanistan training program for guys. And I'm just giving to these guys out there who are getting deployed. There's a lot of step-ups in it. Guys are doing to hate me for doing all the step-ups they have to do, because that's the best way I can train them being able to climb vertically in a gym setting.

In Iraq, you really don't need to be able to walk up hills training if you're going to be deployed to Iraq. But, in that urban setting, I think there's a little bit more of the need of close combat and maybe more obstruction removal, and a need for more upper body strength. So, my Afghanistan pre-deployment program, all we do for upper body stuff is body weight pushups, pull-ups and dips. I actually wouldn't mind these guys losing some of the upper body weight and mass. I don't think they need it as much in Afghanistan and that's just going to weigh them down when they're hiking around.

But, in Iraq, I think they're going to need a little bit more of that and for both, the sprinting is really important and they need to be able to sprint in their kits, in their helmets. So, that's another aspect of my sport specific training.

I've done it for Afghanistan. I haven't put together a program for Iraq, but it would definitely be a big part of my Iraq program.

LA: It's interesting to hear those recommendations. Those are things that I've seen sort of thrown around in sort of different places. But, to hear them sort of brought

together, I think it's important just because there's probably going to be operations in cities, built-up areas, and then there's probably also going to be sort of long-term counter insurgencies in rural places. So, I think that's probably very useful. And I think the step-ups, as much as they sound really bad, do sort of solve the problem of the Soviet experience where they had forces that were essentially immobile because of the weight of their packs and the environment. So, that's definitely a problem to tackle and it seems like you're addressing that.

Does the CrossFit style programming with the multiple rounds of the same exercise for time have particular benefits, possibly mental toughness?

RS: Oh, certainly, yeah. We use CrossFit type programming within our work here. I think that Coach Glassman has proven that in terms of developing general fitness and general work capacity, his programming...I don't think there's a better one out there. The stuff really, really works. And so, when we do work capacity stuff, we'll throw in intense multi modal circuits right along the CrossFit programming lines.

I do believe that mental toughness is something that can be trained and should be trained in a gym format. I do think that it's one of the most transferable things you'll get from the gym to outside the gym, is that mental toughness. I've heard that from many of my professional mountaineers who were world class bad-asses before they ever walked through my doors. But, when they're out in the field after training in the gym for some time, they don't feel stronger, but they just feel stronger mentally. So, yeah.

Those circuits are certainly probably my most effective way to train that mental toughness. We coach it here. We coach athletes on when to take a rest, how to limit their rest and we reward them for demonstrating mental toughness and criticize them when they don't. So, certainly yeah, there's certainly an element to it for sure.

The CrossFit circuit method or workout format is the tool that I use primarily to train that. I won't say primarily, but it's one of the major tools I use to train mental toughness.

LA: I notice you listed Mark Twight as an influence. Has his writing on topics like suffering or compassion or even sort of more general Eastern philosophical ideas shaped the way you work with athletes?

RS: I don't know so much that, more the strength and conditioning stuff. I went and I attended a seminar there with Twight and was just pestering with questions the whole time. I think... I'm not too sure I apply as much importance to the gym training in terms of character development and stuff as he does. That is maybe a difference between us. I don't want to speak for Mark. My impression is just that he thinks the gym is a good

place to test and build character and I certainly think it has that possibility, but I think it's still an artificial environment. I don't know, I guess it's just this application that stuff may be a little bit limited. And in terms of the philosophical stuff, Mark's far ahead of me on that stuff. I'm just a dumb gym rat. So, I don't really talk too much philosophy with my athletes, although some of them are practicing Buddhists. My philosophy is lift the damn weight.

LA: I go back and forth with a lot of his stuff in terms of whether I think it's really, really useful or not. I figured I'd put the question to you since you have more familiarity. But, fair enough.

RS: I will say that Mark is a really interesting guy and he's a phenomenal writer.

LA: Yeah, very much so.

RS: He really makes you think. He's a very smart guy and I think he's a wonderful coach. I've really learned a lot from him and respect him a whole lot.

LA: Based on your experience, have you come across fitness related limitations that could affect military capabilities or capacities related to power projection?

RS: Power projection is kind of a big concept for me. But, in general, one of the most interesting things that I've learned in working with the military guys so far is the most important thing I do with them or the most important gym type of thing or session I do with them is our range fitness stuff. One of the things that has been really interesting is the guys who seem to do the best at the range fitness test are leaner guys with endurance cardio backgrounds. Even when we put in strength type mode and exercises within the range fitness sessions, those guys do the best.

One of the limitations I've kind of seen in the military guys, and I think it just is like me, they're still trying to figure out their type of programming. But, I see a lot of guys with big-assed biceps and chests and all that extra mass and muscle. Their strength is almost too strong based on my strength standards. They're too strong in their upper bodies and that extra mass they carry around actually hurts them. It's just more weight to carry around. It hurts their cardio; it hurts their recovery. So, it's that result that I've seen that's causing me to think a little bit about my programming.

For example, right now we're dropping into a stamina cycle with my military athletes. We're going to be doing more long stuff and trying to build that base cardio and base aerobic fitness up. It's just that I can't argue with the number. I just can't argue with what I've seen.

In general, I would think that... Going in, I wouldn't have thought that. I would have thought that the military athletes, the guy who had the highest work capacity, a

combination of mental toughness and strength and the guy who did best on the hard circuits in the gym would do best at the range. But, that's not the case. They guys who do the best at the range are these tall, lean, geeky endurance guys who aren't going to do especially well in the gym. They were weak compared to some of the other guys. But, at the range, they did the best.

It's the range stuff that's as close to the combat situation that I can put them in. So, that's influenced me quite a bit in terms of my thinking about this stuff, for sure. So, that's the main thing.

The other thing that I've kind of noticed is that even guys who've been doing my program for a while are really hesitant to lift heavy in the gym. That's really an interesting aspect and I see this all the time. There's a lot of jeopardy for men in the gym, in the weight room. We're all afraid of looking weak and there's also some kind of cultural gym type of thing that says you can get hurt going heavy. Those things kind of combine to keep guys from going the one rep maxes and lifting and seeing where they're at.

And of course, if they're not lifting heavy... Like Dan John will tell you, you've got to lift heavy to get strong. And so, that limits their strength. That's the second thing. The main thing I've kind of noticed is there some unfamiliarity to lifts, but there's really a hesitancy for these guys to go heavy.

And so, we do it a lot in my gym, in my programming. I've got tiny house wives who weigh 115 pounds doing max dead lifts, max front squats. We do it often, and we do it often because not only do I think it's important for strength, but it's also important to get over the fear of doing it and to get over the hesitancy. My athlete now, who I work with regularly, it's not a big deal to do a one rep max test. They're excited to do it. They want to see where they're at, instead of that hesitancy.

So, those two things have been kind of really interesting to kind of observe amongst the military athletes. Given the testosterone in the military athlete, you'd think they'd want to lift heavy, but they don't.

LA: I guess the question that that raises for me is are there enough of those endurance type athletes, 5'6", 145 pounds with really low body fat to sort of fill the ranks of all those units where they need to be?

RS: Oh, the athletes I'm talking about are like 6'2" and 190 pounds.

LA: Oh, okay. You're talking about different guys.

RS: Yeah, they're tall, lean guys. No, I don't think this is... There are all types of different body sizes amongst the ranks, and especially the special forces units I've

worked with. From tiny, kind of meatbally guys to guys like me who have endurance background who are even leaner and skinner into monsters on the other side. It's not really a matter of lifting for the best type athlete in terms of body size, but I think it's just a matter of thinking a little bit about the type of fitness and training that they're doing.

And again, a lot of these guys are coming to my stuff and Jim Jones and CrossFit from gym backgrounds that were kind of based on bodybuilding stuff. So, they're coming into it with big biceps and big chests and there used to be a big culture in the military for that type of body. And I think that's getting changed a little bit.

But anyway, I don't think it's really a matter of finding the right body types, but just getting them in there and getting the guys mentally tough and then training them appropriately. And part of that training might be more of the long stuff, building cardio and maybe less of the upper body strength stuff.

LA: I think we're about out of time. We've covered a lot. If people were interested in following up with what you said, reading more about what you've written, where can they go to do that and how can they contact you?

RS: We've got a couple of sites. Mountain Athlete, it's website is MTNAthlete.com, and the Military Athlete, is just MilitaryAthlete.com. It has programming and my contact info on there and my phone number and everything else. So, in the email, people are welcome to ask me questions.

LA: Rob, I appreciate the time. Thank you and it's been a pleasure.

RS: Thank you, Luke, take it easy and good luck to you.

LA: All right, take care.

RS: Okay. Bye.