

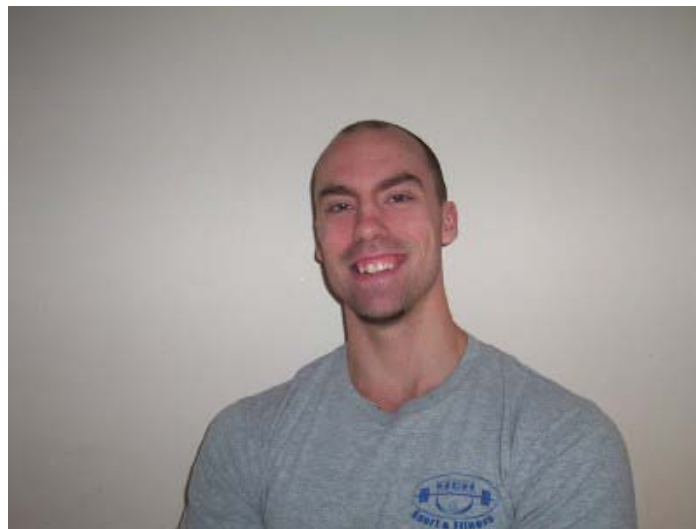


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WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



Luke Allison Interviews Tony Gentilcore



LA: This is Luke Allison from CriticalBench.com. I'm here with another weekly Muscle Building Expert Interview. This week is Tony Gentilcore. Tony, how are you?

TG: Good, how are you, Luke? Thanks for having me.

LA: Doing great. I appreciate you coming on. I want to get right into your background. You have a sort of interesting background. You played college baseball and you're now working at Cressey Performance with baseball players. Talk a little bit about that.

TG: Well, yeah, so my entire childhood, I was a pretty active kid. So, I played anything from wiffle ball, kickball, riding my bike around, pretending I was Knight Rider, playing baseball. I was all over the place. But, I was fortunate enough to earn a scholarship to play collegiate baseball. I started at Onondaga Community College in Syracuse, New York and played there for two years. And I ended up playing at Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania. I played there for two years as well.

I had a couple big league teams looking at me, unfortunately, being a 6'1" right-hander with a mid-80 fastball, I was kind of a dime-a-dozen. So, nothing really panned-out. I finished my degree at Courtland State back in New York with a degree in Health Education and a concentration in Health/Wellness Promotion. After that I did an internship in Corporate Fitness in Skaneateles, New York, which is just outside of Syracuse. I was there for about three years.

Eric and I knew each other through T-Nation and various other forums. We would always exchange emails and discuss a lot of strength and conditioning stuff. He ended up, after getting his masters, getting a job on Connecticut in a fitness facility out there. He knew I was looking to get out of central New York, because central New York isn't exactly a mecca of making money as far as being a trainer.

He mentioned to me that the place that hired him was looking for another trainer. Everything fell through; I moved out there. The rest, as they say, is history. So, Cressey Performance, we're going on our...coming up on our 4th year of business and things are looking pretty good. So, we're definitely having a good time.

LA: Sounds like you're making it work, if you're in business for four years.

TG: Yes, we started in the fall of '07, so actually it's been three years, not four. We've been lucky enough to be very successful. We definitely have a niche market with the baseball population. So, my background in baseball bodes very well with working with those type of athletes. Because, I mean honestly, I look back at how I trained back when I was in college and I kind of wish I could go back in time and kick myself in the head. I did a lot of stupid stuff. But thankfully, I got smarter as the years went by and

my job now entails showing these guys the right way to approach their training and prepare them for the season. So, definitely having that background in baseball, they know that I know what I'm talking about. And Eric, being the shoulder guru, it works well in addition to that.

LA: I actually had the opportunity to interview [Eric](#) not too long ago and it was sort of an interesting thing to sort of...

TG: Yeah, we kind of fell into it in a lot of ways. When we both moved to Boston, we were rooming together and he was working at another facility near Boston and I was working at Sports Club LA, which is right in downtown Boston, as a trainer. He started working with a handful of local baseball players, of which they ended up winning the state title, one of the players won the state player of the year, and it just kind of snowballed from there.

Each off-season we've progressively gotten more and more professional guys in. So, I think our first off-season we had three or four minor league guys training with us. As they've progressed through the organization, we've gotten...I would say even exponentially busier every year. It seems like it doubles every year as far as the number of minor league guys that come through, in addition to all the college kids that come through and the high school kids that come through, as well.

I would say...he might have told you the statistics, but I believe 70% of our clients are athletes and 80% of those are baseball players. So, we keep busy and this type of year, we're kind of dwindling down into our quiet time, which is definitely a breath of fresh air for us, because we're pretty much on our toes from the end of September all the way through the winter. So, once spring hits we get a little bit of a break with the high school season starting, but then we start right back up in the summer. So, we're looking forward to a few weeks of down time.

LA: Understood, certainly. Because you have your own facility or work at a sort of private independent facility, this is something I thought you would be able to answer. What is your feeling about music and listening to music while you train?

TG: Well, we pride ourselves on having a little bit of attitude when people come to train with us. So, you're going to walk into our facility and you're going to have Metallica, Rage Against the Machine. If it were my way, I'd be playing techno all the time. But, unfortunately not a lot of guys like techno.

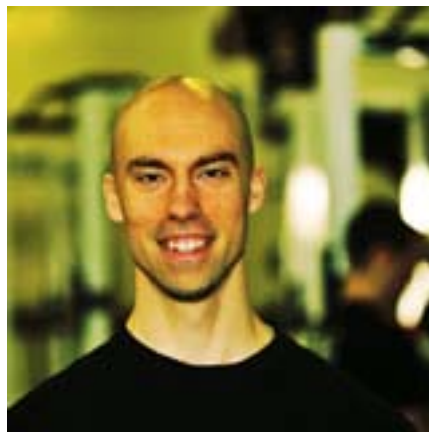
But, I think it's important because I just think it sets the tone. You get loud music going and guys being around some weights and it just kind of provides a conducive atmosphere for guys getting strong.

I mean, I do see importance of being able to do the exact same thing without music. I mean, you should be able to kind of fire yourself up to a degree, but I definitely think the music adds a little bit of an element that I think a lot of people lack at times when they workout like at a commercial gym or something like that.

LA: It just seemed like a nice extra that you can have on top...

TG: Yeah, and like when we moved into our facility, we had to put in our lease that we're going to be playing loud music. So, just so our neighbors, they lined the walls of our facility with soundproofing the walls. So, our neighbors don't complain too much. We maybe average a complaint a week, which isn't bad considering how often we're here and how loud we play it. But, certainly we consider it part of the atmosphere. And people tend to...they seem to appreciate it. We have Tony's Techno Tuesday from time-to-time. So, we get a pretty eclectic mix of music that goes through here.

LA: That sounds like two good tips right there, for people that are interested in their own warehouse-type gym. Put it in the lease and then get the soundproofing.



TG: That's very important. We had to make sure when we were searching for a venue for our facility that that was going to be known. We are going to be making noise. I mean, we don't purposely try to make a lot of noise and piss-off our neighbors, but certainly we're not tiptoeing around. Certainly we had to put it in the lease and let it be known that there was going to be some loud stuff going on. So, yeah, that's definitely an important point to consider.

LA: Certainly. Good to know. In sort of reviewing your blog, one of the things I noticed was you're one of several people recently, just in the last few weeks, that has mentioned Dan John. I'm wondering if there anything that the listeners should read into that?

TG: Well, I've been a huge fan of Dan John for quite a few years now. I've been talking about Coach John for a handful of years. It's hard not to listen to a guy that has

over 30 years of experience. There are times I worked with trainers at other facilities that they read one or two books and they feel like they know everything there is to know. And I remember vividly having a conversation with a trainer, he's like, "Oh, I've learned all I need to know in the industry." I looked at him with the most dumbfounded look. I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" You have guys out there like Boyle, Mike Boyle who's 25+ years in the industry, Dan John, same scenario, who are constantly trying to get better and constantly acquiring new information. It seems a little conceited and pigheaded to think that you know everything there is to know in the industry. I just find it disconcerting that there's a few trainers out there that feel that way.

But, in terms of Dan John, he's been a big influence on how I structure programming and how I approach certain progressions with lifts, like the squat, even the Olympic lifts. He's recently gotten certified in RKC. So, reading into a lot of this kettlebell stuff has been very, very valuable for me as far as learning how to cue people and using the proper progressions when teaching them how to do like a Turkish get-up or even just the swing. I mean, going to a commercial gym, you see people doing kettlebell swings and it just doesn't look like a kettlebell swing. It looks like they're going to break their back.

He's been instrumental as far as helping me learn how to be a better coach. So, anyone listening who's never heard of Dan John, if you go to T-Nation he's a regular contributor there. He also has a fantastic book called Never Let Go. It's kind of like a compilation of a lot of his articles that he's written, and they're very practical, easy to read and it's just a lot of knowledge from a guy that has a lot of experience in the industry.

Certainly there's a lot of people that reference Dan John and I was lucky enough to meet him in person a couple of weeks ago, which was kind of cool for me. So, I definitely recommend people look into that a little bit more.

LA: The weird thing is that's actually not a plug. It's just one of those coincidences where the people who you follow, follow the same people. You're looking in on yourself.

TG: Yeah, I'd like to think I follow the right people and I use my blog just to kind of relay information to other people as well. So, whether it's Dan John or Mike Boyle or Robertson or even [Eric](#). I'm influenced by a lot of the same people that they're influenced by, which is always a cool thing.

LA: One of the other things I really wanted to ask you about was if you think strength and conditioning is looking increasingly similar in terms of what people are doing and if so, is that a positive trend?

TG: I think as far as strength and conditioning, I think a lot of times people try to do everything at once. There's no... It's basically competing demand. So, yeah, there are guys out there that want to get strong, but at the same time they want to be shredded and they just don't know how to structure their programming. It really comes down to managing fatigue.

You get these guys that think more and more and more and more is better and they've never put in like structured de-loading weeks or have any sense of regulation. So, as far as strength and conditioning and equipment... I'm an old school guy. I think if you have a barbell and a power rack, you're good to go. There's handful of times that I've had to train at commercial gyms and I watch the trainers train their clients and not once did they touch a barbell, which absolutely dumbfounds me. I can't believe... They'll just stay in one little corner and do all these cute little exercises. They don't even using something as simple as a barbell, which to me is a bit asinine.

I think people just try to fit way too much into any one given program. And there's always these competing demands.

LA: Something to keep I mind, certainly. Maybe you don't need quite so many toys or so many chains, so many bands.

TG: I think everything has its place. I'm not a big fan of... I love the TRX. I love kettlebells. I like to think that we're able to take all these things that are tools in the toolbox and implement them into a pretty well-rounded program. But, what I don't necessarily agree with is when people just use kettlebells or they just use a TRX. I think that's a trend in the industry that I feel is becoming more and more common, and one that I think is unfortunate.

LA: Is that something you think is based on the consumer or the people who are sort of the authority pushing it?

TG: Yeah, because I think a lot of times... There's a lot of trainers out there, there's a lot of strength coaches out there and they try to look different and unique. And when people see a trainer using a TRX or a kettlebell it's like, oh, wow. That's different. I'm going to try to do that. There's nothing wrong with that, but certainly to just limit yourself to one or two pieces of equipment, I think you're kind of putting your hands behind your back to a degree.

LA: Certainly, that does make sense. Something else to keep in mind. I really want to spend some time on an article you wrote for T-Nation a while ago. It was titled "Deconstructing Computer Guy". Take a second and just sort of introduce that and maybe let people know why that's really important, why you wrote, I think, two articles on it.

TG: Yeah. That was actually one that I wrote, I want to say, probably within the first year that I was writing for them. I just noticed that... At the time that I wrote that article I was working in a commercial gym and I worked with a lot of clients who spend the majority of their day in front of a computer for sometimes, 10-12-15 hours a day. I just noticed there was a predictive pattern of tight and overactive muscles, or we can call them tonic muscles, and weak and inhibited muscles, or another term we can use are phasic muscles. So, they have rounded backs, weak glutes, tight hip flexors, forward head posture.



So, I felt that with that article and considering that most people that were reading it were going to be in front of a computer themselves as they read it, that it would help them start to kind of realize that sitting in a chair all day in front of the computer isn't necessarily the healthiest thing in the world.

A lot of that, too, is like...they spend 10+ hours at work sitting, and then they go to the gym and they do a lot of patterns that just reinforce that same sitting pattern. So, a lot of these guys who go...while they were going to the gym and doing a good things, supposedly, they're still doing their bench pressing and their lat pull-downs and their biceps curls and their crunches and they're getting on the bike. And they're just doing a lot of stuff that just reinforced that really bad aberrant motor pattern.

With that article, I just wanted to get people to be a little bit more cognizant of the fact that hey, we need to open it up and do pretty much the exact opposite of what you're doing right now. So, a little bit more horizontal rowing, doing a little bit more corrective exercise as far as like opening up the t-spine, getting that area more mobile, strengthening in the glutes, stretching out the hip flexors. And not only that, but realize that there's 23-hours in a day, that you need to be aware of that.

You can spend an hour in the gym fixing it, but then you have 23 hours to mess it up. Even stuff like how they sit in the chair or how they sleep at night, placing a pillow underneath the knees or even in between the knees, all this little stuff that will add up to help break those bad patterns and hopefully clean up that posture to a degree.

LA: It was fairly prescriptive, from what I remember. There was stuff that you could follow, and you can get really serious, which I think was the idea. You could sort of change everything about your behavior if you were involved. But, if someone wasn't... If they said, wow, that sounds like me, but I'm not sure. I need like 20 steps right now. What are two or three things that they really should focus on?

TG: I think a lot of them, especially for the "computer guy", I think thoracic mobility is a huge, huge deal. That's going to drive a lot of scapular function and upward rotation, overhead pressing and anything like that. So, clearing up that t-spine is going to clean up a lot of stuff as far as what they're going to be able to do a little bit more efficiently in the gym.



You know, doing simple stuff like extensions on the foam roller, doing some quadruped, just simple corrective stuff that they could do to just kind of loosen-up that area. That would be number one. And number two is just... I mean, glutes. I mean, Bret Contreras has done a great job at bringing the glutes to light and giving people some concept of how we can strengthen that area.

But, I think most people are very weak in their posterior chain and if they have stronger glutes that will help loosen up the hip flexors and just a lot of things come undone and good things start happening. So, if I had to pick any two areas that most people need to work on, those would be the two I would pick.

LA: And that's manageable. People should be able to...

TG: Yeah, I mean, the objective isn't to overwhelm people and I mean, really less is more. People think they need to do 15 different things at once. That might be true for some, but usually it just comes down...for 80% of the population, those two things alone are going to vastly improve their posture and their movement quality and just how they feel in general. I mean, I'm telling you, it's a law of averages. They're spending upwards of 50-60 hours a week sitting in front of the computer, not to mention the time that they're commuting to and from work, sitting at home, watching TV. Probably even on the computer even more on Facebook when they're at home.

So, the more time... I mean, and too, I think just moving in general. Just get the hell out of your chair and move will go such a long way as far as just kind of like reversing those bad motor patterns that they're developing at work and at home.

LA: Now, you mentioned that the article was somewhat older or a while ago now. Have you received any feedback or have you sort of changed any...

TG: Yeah, that was probably one of my more popular articles I've written. I actually co-authored it with a buddy of mine, Jimmy Smith. But, that was probably one of my more popular articles. But as of recently, and Eric can speak to this more so than I can, because he's actually been to the workshops, but the Postural Restoration Institute, we've been implementing a lot of that stuff.

This whole talk of being symmetrical and attaining symmetry in the body, if you really look at a lot of the PRI stuff, it's kind of a myth. We're kind of inherently designed to be asymmetrical. I mean, you look at a lot of our baseball players, they're going to have more external rotation on their throwing side than their left. Their throwing side shoulder blade is going to be a little bit more interiorly tilted. A lot of people will look at that, "Oh, we have to fix that." That could actually be the reason why they're throwing so hard.

With the PRI stuff, they're very much into the diaphragm and how it comes into play as far as how it rotates the lumbar spine and then how we have to compensate in the thoracic spine. So, a lot of the PRI stuff we've been throwing into our programming at Cressey Performance and it seems to be working really well. I mean, it's some very, very deep stuff and it's complicated. I know Eric will go to these workshops and kind of talk us through it, and even he's having trouble with it. So, you know it can be pretty daunting. But, the more and more we immerse ourselves in it and the more and more we're learning on it, the more and more it makes sense.

If anyone ever has an opportunity to go listen to those guys speak, it's pretty impressive stuff. While they use big words and long names for their exercises, it is

having a profound effect with our athletes and clients. So, that would be a lot of the...in terms of the computer guy that we're throwing in there is just that PRI stuff.

LA: Which I guess should not be that surprising that in 2011 we have pretty sort of technical and advanced strength and conditioning and applied research with it.

TG: Yeah.

LA: Imagine that. That brings up a really interesting topic of sort of special exercises and how those play in mostly to sports for athletes that have sort of unique demands. You talked about that briefly. Talk about sort of how weird throwing really is and if it compares to anything else in sports.

TG: If I was just throwing in like special exercises and new stuff?

LA: Well, I don't know. That might have been a bit too ambitious, but sort of what throwing requires, the way that it sort of can offset the body and then what you would do to allow the body to be able to throw, basically.

TG: Like, throwing in and of itself is probably one of the more violent actions in any sport. I mean, you're looking at about 7,000 degrees of rotation on every throw. So, I mean, the arm takes a beating when it's throwing. So, a lot of what we do is managing the arm and making sure that we're maintaining that glenohumeral internal rotation and total range of motion, that they're going to maintain their total range of motion in that throwing arm.

But, with our baseball guys, there's a few things that we don't like to do with them. You won't catch a lot of our guys doing a lot of straight bar pressing. So, any pushing movements they're going to be doing is probably going to be dumbbell based. We have a multipurpose bar that keeps more of a neutral position. We do a ton of pushups with them. So, we can load those up as heavy as we want. Just stuff that's a little bit more shoulder friendly. Because like I said, their arm takes a beating throughout the season anyways.

We have a lot of specialty bars, like the giant cambered bars, the safety squat bars, the trap bars. We use the cambered bars and the safety squat bars a lot, even with just our general population of clients. Just because, again, a lot more shoulder friendly. You get people with AC joint issues and the like, like that, and front squatting is going to be problematic. So, we can still squat them just with a safety squat bar or the GCB bar.

But, I think as far as throwing in new and different exercises, I think there's a lot to be said about getting people out of their comfort zone. We're creatures of habit. We like to do what's easy and we like to do what we're good at, which is why whenever you

go into a gym on a Monday afternoon, every guy in there is benching or doing bicep curls. The women are on the elliptical machines. We like to do what's easy and what we're good at.

I think the more you hate life doing an exercise, the more beneficial it is for you. So, doing single leg work and heavy dead lifts and squats and good mornings and hip thrusters and chin-ups. I mean, you don't see a lot of people doing that stuff, but that's what's going to be most beneficial for them. So, I think the more we get people out of their comfort zones, the better progress they're going to make in general.

LA: Right, which seems almost undeniable that people are going to have unique demands that we're really not going to be able to just tell them to go on a machine.

TG: Right. I mean, honestly, I'm not a fan of machines in general. Sure, we have a cable machine and we have a functional trainer, but outside of that, it's really dumbbells, barbells, Prowler. We're hitting tires, we're throwing med balls. I mean, it's not to say that we don't try to perfect the most simple tried and true exercises. Like, everyone is dead lifting. Everyone is squatting. But, it comes down to quality of movement, not so much as doing something for the sake of doing it.

So, I mean, on the flipside, I think a lot of mistakes a lot of people make is switching things up every so often that then they never make any progress with anything. So, unless you're squatting 800-pounds, there's probably not a need to put chains on your back, around the bar. I think a lot of people just get a little too overzealous with exercise selection that they never really take the time to master those lifts in the first place. Does that make sense?

LA: Absolutely.

TG: So, we are using... We're not throwing just exercises at people for the sake of throwing it at them, but we want to make sure that they perfect their bench technique or their chin-up technique or even their pushup technique. I mean, I can't tell you how many guys walk in the facility, they're banging out their pushups and I'm just like, my eyes are bleeding. I'm like, what are you doing? That looks horrible.

So, even something as simple as like a reverse lunge. These guys...people walk in and they can't even do a reverse lunge without tipping over and then yet they're asking me, when can I add chains to my squats? I'm like, "No. Let's perfect the simple stuff first and then we can move on to the more advanced stuff." So, sometimes it's a matter of my job as a coach is to kind of pull people back a little bit and get them a little bit in reality and say, "Hey, let's learn to walk before we run here."

LA: Absolutely. There's sort of a weird dynamic where people are not as familiar as they should be with sort of basic movements and body awareness. Yet, they really know how to load things up and get...

TG: Yeah, and make it look like shit.

LA: Like, oober speed and you know, all that other stuff. You can go on and on.

TG: Well, people can talk a good game. It's like those people when they have like 10,000 posts on their internet forum. They can talk your ear off about research and this book and that book, but they talk about training more than they actually train. So, I mean, that's a whole other...

LA: Yeah, that's a different half-hour.

TG: Yeah, that's a totally different topic. Yeah, certainly I just think people need to learn to walk before they run, a lot of the time.

LA: And maybe that means going in somewhere and having someone take a look.

TG: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

LA: One of the things I wanted to get to was, we're into 2011 now. It's early March. Have you stopped doing anything? Was there a New Year's resolution or something that just seemed out-moded as of 2010?

TG: Oh, man. My New Year's resolution is to actually go on vacation this year.

LA: Okay.

TG: My girlfriend gets on me about that. Eric and I and Pete, we joke about it a lot. Well, Eric's going on a honeymoon soon, so he's got that to look forward to. But, yeah, going on vacation would be nice.

But, as far as anything like programming wise, I think my resolution, so to speak, with that would bet to kind of take a step back and again, going to what we were talking about previously, just keeping it a little bit more simple. I think... I make the mistake, too, of trying to get too cute with my programming. I deal a lot... As much as I deal with the athletes here, I also do a lot of the programming for the fat loss clients and a lot of the women that come here as well. There are times where I'll read a new article or I'll see this new exercise and of course, I use my clients as guinea pigs, I mean, why wouldn't I? But, I think it get, sometimes I get a little too cute in my programming and I try to throw in all these unique finishers and circuits. When in reality, these people, all they really need is quality movement.

So, I kind of told myself within the past few months, okay, let's tone it down a little bit, let's bring it back down to the basics and really hammer that fact and go back to what I know works and see what happens. More often than not, I mean, people...good things happen just by doing that. So, a lot of these times they think they need all these advanced techniques and finishers and fat loss...make me puke. That's not necessarily what they need.

So, I'm just thinking a little bit more of a concerted effort to be a little bit more simplistic with my programming, which sometimes is hard to do, because I do like to try out new stuff on clients. But, I think for the time being it's helping me kind of keep things in perspective.

LA: Understood. Fair enough. It's a work/life complexity/simplicity balance.

TG: Yeah, yeah. I mean, as much as we're here to get our clients better, we've also got to keep them healthy and keep them motivated. So, it's just finding that middle ground of what's going to get them better and also at the same time, keep me sane and not have to spend all my time writing all these fancy programs. But, I love my job and I certainly can't complain.

LA: I've definitely taken up enough of your time, but I want to give you a chance, if people are interested in sort of finding you, finding Cressey Performance, finding you online, how do they go about that?



TG: Yep. I have a website. I actually just revamped it. You can just go to TonyGentilcore.com. it's my blog. I try not to take myself too seriously with it. So,

anytime anyone reads my stuff, they'll recognize that. But, I try to update it daily and also, we obviously have CresseyPerformance.com and we try to update that as far as like how our athletes are doing. You can also go to T-Nation. I'm one of the featured authors on there, so I have quite a bit of articles on there. But, those would be like the three basic areas where people can find me.

LA: Sounds good, Tony. I definitely appreciate the time. Thank you again.

TG: Luke, I appreciate it. Thanks so much.

LA: All right, take care.

About Tony Gentilcore - <http://www.tonygentilcore.com>

Tony Gentilcore is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) holding a degree in Health Education with a concentration in Health/Wellness Promotion from the State University of New York at Cortland. Recognized as one of the premier trainers in New England, Tony has established an outstanding reputation due to his no-nonsense approach to training, unique perspective on program design, and corrective exercise experience.

Tony is also one of the co-founders of [Cressey Performance](#), located in Hudson, MA. His ability to relate closely to CP student athletes, aspiring professional athletes, and experienced professionals, dates back to his collegiate baseball experience. Tony was named Most Valuable Pitcher in 1996 and 1997 for Onondaga Community College (Syracuse, NY), where he was also named 1st Team all Conference and 1st Team all Region. He earned an athletic scholarship to play baseball at Mercyhurst College in Erie, PA where he was also named a "Division II Player to Watch" in 1998.

Tony is a regular contributor to Testosterone Magazine (T-nation.com), and has also been featured in Men's Health Magazine. Check out his [article archives](#).

Additionally, Tony is an occasional guest host of [The Fitcast](#), one of the top weekly fitness/nutrition podcasts featuring some of the top names in the fitness industry.

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