

## The Strength Behind the Super Bowl Champion Washington Redskins: Strength Coach Dan Riley

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This fall, millions of us football fans will plant ourselves in front of our color T.V.'s, recline in our lazy-boy loungers and begin another season-long debate on which city has the best team in football.

Now, at the beginning of the season we can talk big, but if we set our emotions aside, stopped bragging with our hearts, and objectively reviewed the upcoming season, the Washington Redskins are the odds-on favorite to repeat as world champions. (That's hard to say coming from a Buffalo Bill's fan.)

### So what is the secret to the Redskins success ?

The answer you get will probably depend on who you ask. Putting aside excellent recruiting of skill, and since this is an article on strength training, I say the secret lies with the man behind the muscle: the Washington Redskins, strength coach, Dan Riley. The eleven year veteran Redskin coach is humble, polite, soft-spoken and passionate about what he does. He'll credit the team's success to everyone and everything except himself. But the facts speak for themselves. Riley has a conditioning program that works. The three Superbowl rings are just one indication.

The program's primary objective is to build general overall strength. How do they do this? "The key to any strength program for a football player is balance. Develop each muscle group to its maximum," says Riley. He also states, "Many young players don't have the correct balance in their workouts. Consequently, they aren't spending enough time developing their neck and shoulder capsule."

Riley tells his players, "Your program lacks balance and the proper priorities if you spend 25 minutes on bench pressing each workout, and just a few minutes on your neck and shoulders."

The Redskins Conditioning program is divided into 5 major areas: Neck, Hips and Legs, Midsection, Torso and Arms. And the emphasis is on giving each area of the body equal attention. Riley's 7 key ingredients to overall fitness are: muscular fitness, cardio-respiratory fitness, flexibility, specificity of exercise (not to be confused with) specificity of skill, nutrition and rest.

Riley noted that what makes the program successful is that it's a consistent year-long program. "Our in-season program and our off-season program are identical except for the frequency of training. We train twice a week in-season and three times a week during the off-season. We do the same number of reps, same exercises, same equipment, same number of sets and same intensity."

Riley commented that other teams change their programs once the season starts. Players that workout 3-4 hours in the off-season tend to water down their training program once the season begins. Riley warns against this practice, stating, "As a coach, I tell my players the most important time of the year to protect them and in which they need to perform is during the season."

Riley adds, "It's useless to do something during the off-season and not continue it at least twice a week during the season. Any physical benefits gained will be lost rapidly if the program is not continued. The body does not have a long term memory when it comes to skill retention or developing a fitness level."

It's because the body lacks a long term memory, that Riley discourages the use of plyometrics. He contends that they are useless and dangerous. "There are some built in dangers involved with depth jumping and lunging especially for bigger people.

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## The Steroid Gamble : Do Ya Feel Lucky?

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Welcome to the Steroid Casino. What's the bet? Well, if you gamble with steroids and win, then you just might look better and you just might get stronger. But, remember, the key words there are "just might" because there's no guarantee. Although there's been some strong anecdotal evidence, research findings have actually been contradictory as to whether steroids work or not. On the other hand, if you gamble with steroids and lose, then you've increased the likelihood of experiencing one or more mental and physical disorders. In fact, Ken Mannie (Strength Coach at the University of Toledo) says, "The list of adverse effects reads like a Stephen King horror story." An examination of the "horror story" in greater detail will show you that coach Mannie isn't exaggerating. Before you gamble with steroids you may want to take a gander at the dangerous side effects that are well documented in the medical literature:

For starters, there are **mental side effects** which may include psychiatric disorders, severe depression, manic depression, paranoia, grandiose delusions, visual and auditory hallucinations, irritability, feeling of invincibility, extreme mood swings that can be borderline psychotic and an abnormally high level of unpredictable hostility and aggression (ROID RAGE).

There are also numerous **physical / physiological side effects** which may consist of insomnia, increased cholesterol levels, hypertension ( high blood pressure), cancerous tumors, cardiovascular dysfunction, kidney dysfunction, dermatologic syndromes such as acne (usually on the back and face), alopecia (loss of scalp hair), unprovoked nosebleeds and a predisposition to tendon and ligament injuries. (Apparently, connective tissue does not respond to steroids to the same degree that muscle tissue does. This creates a situation in which the connective tissue cannot keep up the demands from using heavier weights. Shaun Brown, Strength Coach at the University of Kentucky, formerly of Providence College likens it to putting a Mack truck engine into a Volkswagen.)

Gambling with steroids also increases the possibility of various liver disorders such as peliosis hepatitis (the pooling of blood in the liver), hepatoma (liver cancer) and jaundice (which gives the eyes and skin a yellowish tint). If you inject steroids into your body, punctures, bruise marks, scar tissue, and a callused butt are the least of your worries. Individuals also run the risk of septic shock (" blood poisoning ") and the spread of communicable diseases ( including AIDS) from contaminated

needles as well as neural dysfunction as a result of improperly placed needles. Pre-mature closure of the epiphysis ( growth plates) which may result in stunted growth among adolescents.

Wait, there's also several **gender-specific side effects** as well. When a man starts to introduce extra testosterone into his body, then his body will reduce it's own production in order to maintain a stable internal environment. If too much "foreign" testosterone is added, the body will no longer produce it's own supply and the result is a feminizing effect. This chemical balancing results in testicular atrophy ( your "family jewels" shrivel), gynecomastia (enlarged female-like breasts develop) and a high pitched voice. So instead of developing a more muscular body, you've merely acquired the prerequisites for employment in a sideshow attraction at a local carnival. If this bit of hormonal irony isn't enough, males can expect fluid retention (giving the skin a bloated, puffy look), prostate enlargement, a decreased sperm count, functional impotency, and an increased or decreased libido. Females may experience irreversible physical changes, including an enlargement of the clitoris, reduced breast size, uterine atrophy, a deepening of the voice, amenorrhea (cessation of menstruation) and hirsutism ( increased facial and body hair). Sounds like more freaks for the sideshow, huh? Women who gamble with steroids also increase their risks of developing breast cancer and of bearing children with birth defects.

Here's a tip that may interest some of the chemical high rollers: **Deaths** have been directly (and legally) attributed to steroid use. Snake eyes, dude! You lose.

Just in case the facts from the medical literature doesn't scare you, let's look at a small sampling of personal "horror stories":

**Lyle Alzado** - a former All-pro NFL lineman who claims that he developed a rare form of inoperable cancer due to his steroid use. He pumped as much as \$30,000 dollars worth of growth enhancing drugs into his body in one year.

**Tommy Chaikin**- an ex-college football player at South Carolina who experienced just about all the classic side effects of steroid abuse -- severe acne, hair loss, insomnia, depression, testicular atrophy, hypertension, rectal bleeding and elevated cholesterol levels. Heightened aggression involved him in numerous brawls and created violent thoughts like "crushing people to death" and "tearing off their limbs." He also developed a heart murmur as well as a tumor in one hand and a tumor the size of a handball in his chest -- both had to be surgically removed. Several years of

steroid abuse nearly drove him to suicide.

**Steve Courson** - a former NFL linemen who believes that steroid use caused his current coronary problems. In 1984, his *resting* heart rate hit 160 beats per minute (bpm). When he checked himself into a hospital in 1988, his resting heart rate was measured at *200 bpm*. His medical problems forced him to seek a heart transplant . . . at the age of 33.

**Samuel Fussell** - an ex-bodybuilder who developed acne all over his body, heightened aggression, rectal bleeding and a resting heart rate of 120 bpm from steroid use. He wrote about his experiences in a book called *Muscle: Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder*.

**"Superstar" Billy Graham** - an ex-professional wrestler whose doctors believe that steroids were a direct cause of his need for hip replacement surgery as well as the need for additional surgeries for his back and legs. *His legs may require amputation.*

**Terry Long** - a lineman for the Pittsburgh Steelers who attempted suicide after failing an NFL drug test for steroids.

**Steve Michalik** - a professional bodybuilder who won the 1975 Mr. Universe. Prior to the contest, his cholesterol hit *400* (240 is considered high) and his blood pressure was so high (240 over 110) that he had to pack his nose to stop it from bleeding. He pissed blood for months. By 1985, his cholesterol rose to *500*. In 1988, after years of steroid abuse, a blood test revealed that he had the testosterone level of a *12 year old girl*.

**Benji Ramirez** - a high school football player on steroids whose heart literally exploded. This was the first time that steroids were legally linked to a death in the United States.

**Tommy Sansone** - a former Mr. America who died of tumors all over his body.

You think it won't happen to you? Hey, neither did they. How'd you like your name added to this list of steroid casualties because you gambled and lost? ( If you think this is the whole list, you're sadly mistaken. The list goes on and is still growing.)

O.K. You know enough not to use steroids but you think you might want to supplement your income by dealing the drug on the side. Well, that's gambling of another sort. As of February 1991, steroids became classified as Class II drugs, which makes their use restricted in the same manner as barbiturates. The new law increases prison penalties, including a maximum \$1000.00 dollar fine and a maximum one year sentence for possession as well as a \$250,000 fine and up to 5 years in the slammer for distribution of steroids. It also gives federal drug enforcement officials the authority to regulate manufacturers, wholesalers, doctors and pharmacists, and allows for the seizure of

assets and money earned through drug trafficking. Think about it.

I hope it is clear that when you play around with steroids you are gambling with your physical and mental well-being . . . perhaps permanently. And for those at home chemists, pseudo-pharmacists, and self taught sorcerers who think you're too smart to lose and continue to gamble with your health, I've got one question for ya: Do ya feel lucky?

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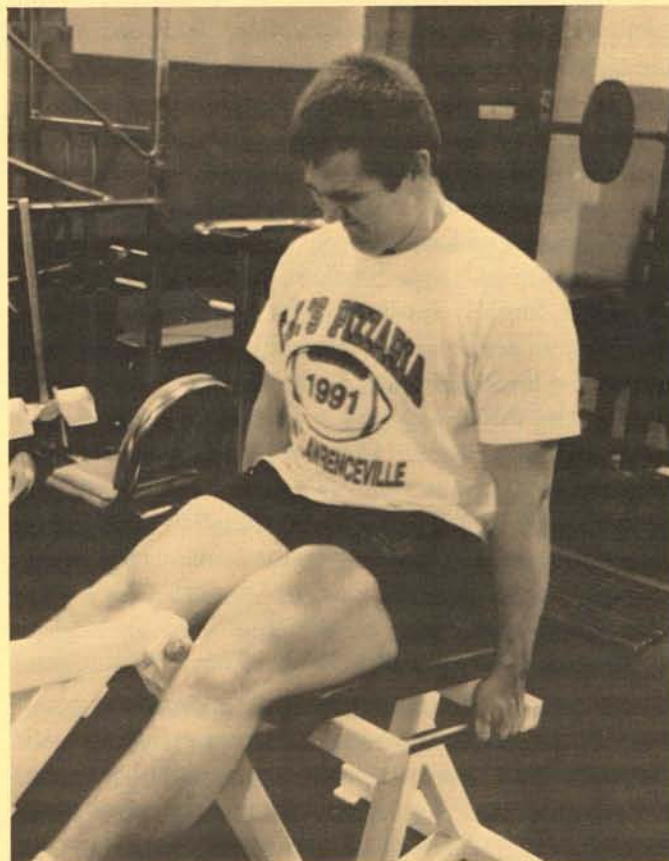
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*John Carlson, a grad student at Princeton University, cranks out great weight without the use of steroids*