ATHLETIC
CONDITIONING
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QUARTERLY

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

By Crista May, Staff Writer
Cincinnati, OH

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 frequentcy 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.

In This Issue

· Like tires on a car, shoes wear out. Get new shoes after runnng 400 to 500 miles, even though they may not look worn.

. Know how many miles you want to run. If you run over 40 miles a week, buy a shoe which will provide more cushioning and stability. All shoes should provide stability, cushioning, and motion control.

· Your bodyweight should also be a concern. Many runners over 180 pounds will need to buy a shoe that will absorb the impact of their body weight hitting the running surface with each step.These shoes should be constructed much more ruggedly than a shoe being utilized by a lighter runner. And again, depending upon how much running you plan to do, will require how much cushioning, stability,and motion control you will need. For the heavy weights I recommend the maximum.

· If competing on a track in shorter races, you may want to buy a lighter shoe, but be careful. Interchanging workout and competi tion shoes can cause soreness and possible injury. Train in the heavier shoe, although a small part of your workout should include use of the lighter shoe. This enables your feet to adjust to the difference in the shoes.

· Once you find a shoe you like which provides comfort, stick with it.

Most of today's better shoes have a molded heel cup for stability, a molded arch for support, high density padding for cushioning, and flex grooves in the toe box for flexibility.

Choosing the proper shoe is only one key ingredient for successful training. A proper stretching and warm-up program, a healthy diet, and a sensible training program can ensure years of successful and injury free running. So hit the roads, but make sure you have the proper shoe. If the shoe fits properly wear it!

(Bob Mead is currently Head Track Coach and Head Cross Country Coach at Ridgefield Memorial High School...the publishers alma mater, and has been a Track and Cross Country Coach for 24 years.)

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Tools of the Trade

(The Unconventionalism of Strength Equipment)

The Trap Bar

By Matt Brzycki

What in blazes is a Trap Bar? Well, a Trap Bar has an open, diamond shaped center that allows the lifters to perform from within the bar's opening. In a sense the lifter is *inside* the bar. As the name suggests, the Trap Bar is primarily used to exercise the trapezius or "Traps".

SHRUGS

A shoulder shrug is the best exercise for isolating the trapezius. I've been training my traps with shrugs on a regular basis for years -- sometimes using dumbbells and other times using the bench press station of a Universal multi-station gym. I make it a practice not to write or talk about specific weights and reps that I use when I train, but in this case it's important here to make a later comparison. I've done shrugs with 100 pound dumbbells for as many as 17 reps and with 315 pounds on the Universal for 9 reps. (Remember, I'm a 175 pound ectomesomorph -- not some big ape like Mannie or Castellano!)

Any way, I don't like to do shrugs with a barbell for several reasons. The first being that the bar rubs against my upper thighs creating friction and discomfort. Secondly, holding the bar in front of me pulling with rounded shoulders feels awkward and is not conducive to proper training posture. Finally, the angle of pull doesn't seem desirable for isolating the traps to properly fatigue the muscle. I feel that shrugging with the weight at my sides -- as when using dumbbells or a Universal --makes the movement infinitely more comfortable and gives me a much better angle of pull that is more effective for trashing the **TRAPS.**

However, after years shrugs this way it was time for a change. I was bored of doing them on the Universal and dumbbells over 100 lbs are hard to come by. Recently, I obtained a Trap Bar for our fitness center here at Princeton University. Since I had never used the bar before I wasn't sure of how much weight to use. After a little trial and error, I ended up doing 15 reps to failure with 135 lbs. Yet, despite this seemingly low weight, I woke up the next morning and *every* square inch of my traps were extremely sore -- from the base of my skull across to the rear delts and all the way down south to my L7 vertebra! Hey, I'd have to say the Trap Bar passed the Brzycki test. It's an excellent tool for training the trapezius in a safe, productive and comfortable manner.

SQUATS

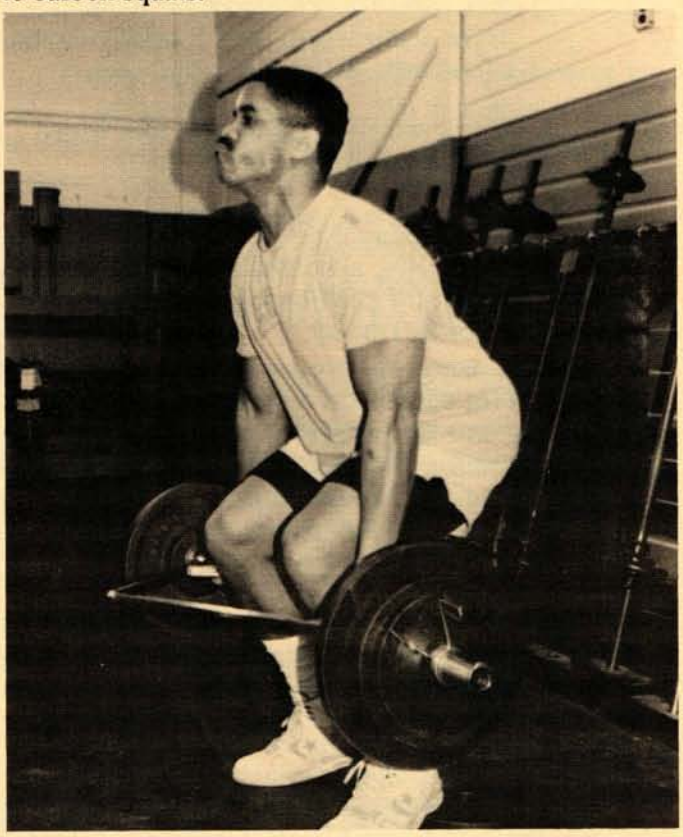
Those who know my opinion about barbell squats are usually quite surprised to learn that I actually used to do that particular movement all the time. In fact, I had competed for several years as a powerlifter in the Marine Corps and later for the Penn State powerlifting team. In a 1982 sanctioned powerlifting meet, I managed to squat 410 pounds (and deadlift 440) at a bodyweight of 162 lbs. That may not seem like much voltage, but it wasn't bad considering I'm at a distinct biomechanical disadvantage for the sport. Hell, I was almost 5' 11" tall! Anyone who knows anything about powerlifting will tell you that the best squatters generally have short legs, a short torso, wide hips and a thick midsection. Needless to say, I was not your prototypical squatter. (It seemed as if I was always competing against mesomorphic dwarfs!)

On May 10, 1983, I decided to bag barbell squats. The main reason was that after years of squatting. and (deadlifting) with heavy weights for low reps, my right hip joint became so inflamed that I couldn't even squat 135 lbs without experiencing a searing pain in my frontal hip area. My knees and low back didn't feel too swift, either. Not to change the subject, but anyone who tells you they use knee wraps to protect their knees is full of crap. Knee wraps are used to create an artificial rebound affect out of the bottom position of the squat -- similar to compressing a spring -- to enable someone to lift more weight. Anyway, my buddies used to laugh at me because my knees made the same sound as when you pour milk over Rice Krispies. I was 25 years old! (To this day my knees still go snap-crackle-pop and I can't stay in the crouched position too long because of pain.) I also didn't appreciate that after competition, my lumbar area was literally black and blue for days and so stiff that I couldn't bend over to tie my Adidas. NO LIE! There are thosexperts who claim that the barbell squat is the be-all and end-all in lifting and that anyone who doesn't squat is a geek. Well, I hate to pee in anyone's soup, but the fact is that barbell squats compress the spinal column and create excessive shearing forces in the knee joint. I think these experts forgot to read their books on physics and biomechanics. Sure there are a few wide-bodied mesomorphs that can do barbell squats in a relatively safe fashion but most of the general population has no business doing barbell squats. **PERIOD.** Except for a few times when I had to demonstrate proper technique for the beginner powerlifter, over the past 9 years I can remember squating with a barbell exactly twice. In both instances, I got a wild hair up my butt and just wanted to see how it felt to squat with a barbell again. My joints remembered realting with a barbell exactly twice. In both instances, I got a wild hair up my butt and just wanted to see how it felt to squat with a barbell again. My joints remembered real quick.

Since 1983, I've been training my glutes mostly with various leg presses (both plateloading and selectorized), a hip and back machine (dare I say "Nautilus"?), a hip abduction machine and a Safe Squat. Incidentally, the Safe Squat is a highly innovative piece of equipment in which a person squats with the weight load on his hips -- not the shoulders -- which essentially eliminates spinal compression. An individual can also position his or her lower leg so that it is roughly perpendicular to the ground thereby reducing the shear forces in the knee joint.

Let me tell you something: with no exception, training to failure on the Safe Squat is the nastiest, most demanding exercise I've ever done in my life. It's downright evil. After one set to failure followed by a few forced reps by a sadistic training partner named Foltiny, my glutes would throb so bad I thought they were going to explode off my pelvis.

Get this: If you place the trap bar on the floor and stand inside the opening, you can perform deadlifts/ hacksquats. With the weight at your sides, it's much easier to do the movement with proper technique, the bar doesn't rub up and down your body and there's no weight on your shoulders to smoosh your vertebrae together. Indeed, the trap bar provides a safe, productive alternative to barbell squats.



Tony Alexander, a 6'1" 230 pound Physical Education Instructor at Princeton University blasts his hips and legs with the trap bar.