

Paleo Solution - 244

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Robb Wolf: Howdy folks, Robb Wolf here, another edition of the Paleo Solution podcast. This one is a weird one. You got two old crusty dudes and two balls. Something has gone seriously wrong. Dave Werner is hanging out in my office and we're both sitting on physio balls so.

Dave Werner: Two balls between the two of us.

Robb Wolf: Two balls between the two of us. So we're --

Dave Werner: Right.

Robb Wolf: We're seriously--

Dave Werner: I think we've knelt down about as far as we can.

Robb Wolf: Possibly, possibly. Dave what's going on?

Dave Werner: Oh just grinding away Robb training people and it's great to get down and run around in the hills with you some and that's been pretty awesome but--

Robb Wolf: I've been taunting Dave with doing some rabbit hunting and it still hasn't happened but we --

Dave Werner: It hasn't happened

Robb Wolf: --get whipped into a frenzy nonetheless. So I think folks remember Dave what's on the podcast may be about six, eight months ago with the release of Move Skill. Dave, what's going on with Move Skill? What's happening in the gym?

Dave Werner: So MoveSkill.com has been up and running for eight, nine months now and it's going great. Got signups from all over the world and people seem to be getting some good benefit from it so that part is good. We've been constantly working on and getting a little more polished I guess is the way to think of it at our internal process how we juggle all the different factors we're trying to juggle in the programming. And that's going better and better so we've got kind of a formal, nice approach to this, which is

nice because then it lets us start to experiment with some different parameters. You know, work in a little bit more mobility or try some different strengths protocols and just juggle some factors.

Robb Wolf: Nice.

Dave Werner: Having a kind of a formal system and then it lets us tinker with variables.

Robb Wolf: Cool, cool.

Dave Werner: That part is going really well. And we have started to run gym Level 4 Crossfit Seattle. We run our gym on Move Skill programming. So we've got multiple levels of class offerings and those like our level 1 class is the intermediate offering on Move Skill and our level 2 class is the advanced offering on Move Skill. So we are I guess kind of proofing these ideas.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Dave Werner: They don't exist just in an internet vacuum; they're run through quite a lot of real athletes every week and so that part is holding really well.

Robb Wolf: Nice. So Dave remind folks because we get new folks to the podcast and I think probably 80% of our listeners end up on an ether binge at some point and so damage their memory and their brain cells but so you cofounded the first crossfit affiliate in the world , which was then Crossfit North. That eventually transitioned into level 4 Crossfit Seattle. You had a pretty extensive background. You're a SEAL. You did a bunch of other physical activities, wrestling, swimming, all kinds of things. We started doing this training and really enjoyed it. But we –you know, you in particular notice some kind of holes in the game. Like I arrived at the crossfit scene as a power lifter and mainly a strength athlete and had some gymnastics background, had some Capoeira, had still had some decent power lifting numbers and I found my transition to be pretty seamless you know, other than vomiting and wishing that I died from the previous workout but you know the ability to hit prescribed weights and all that type of stuff was pretty trivial for me. But we noticed a lot of holes in the game from there and --

Dave Werner: Yeah, you were definitely the first kind of light bulb moment for me watching how you would take to the more intense crossfit workouts and thrive with that. I was more in a rehab state at that time working my way through a back injury that was pretty significant. So I never was the strongest guy in the room to begin with at my best. Endurance and perseverance were more my kind of natural skillset. So I wasn't – never

been a super strong guy and then at that point I was hurt anyhow. So I was you know, even though you and I were working out together, I was coming at this from a very different place using much lighter weights and often simpler versions of movements.

As I recall you already had a decent handle on like a pretty technically proficient clean, power clean and full clean whereas I was working for instance on just getting my front squat depth back and didn't really have that in my whole trunk low back area was pretty spicy at that time. So I was working carefully into just learning how to squat properly and the overhead squat for me was – I had to start with a broom handle and really worked to learn to engage my shoulders, which have been dinged up some over the years and also keep my trunk engage. So and while you were may be not setting the world on fire, with your weights but you had – you could load a few plates on a barbell and do some decent barbell snatches.

Robb Wolf:

Right.

Dave Werner:

For instance. So we came at this from a different point of view and that was my first kind of realization that you know, strength had to be pursued you know, separate and with your power lifting background it was this things that I learned working out with you were a bit different than I had always been exposed to more of a body building kind of flavor in the gym. You know, isolation movements and the three sets of eight, the kind of classic medium intensity and medium volume going more for a pump so.

As the years went by, my rehab approached worked well. I was able to rehab myself, learn some movements but I always noticed that folks who came into this with more of a strength background were they would take to it sooner and progress better and have fewer problems. So it very quickly became evident that we had to do some kind of formal strength training, some kind of planned methodical approach to strength training.

And like I said my skillset was always more the endurance guy, high rep calisthenics from the military and from you know, I grew up wrestling in the Midwest and doing two hours of calisthenics was not uncommon or it wasn't unusual for me at all. Those workouts were considered hard by a lot of people but it's not the same thing as strength, being strong. So moving on to harder movements or adding more weight to movements that was tough for me and tough for everybody else that came in. Of course a lot of folks come in with a strength, I'm sorry an endurance background and they always struggle a bit and have to not just adapt

their body but shift their mindset a bit before they can really start to get some benefit out of the strength training. I think your power lifting background was an enormous asset in that.

But just over the years, I think Michael Rudder first did this with his Any Black box plan. He is the one that I recall way – what was it-

Robb Wolf: 2005 may be that he --

Dave Werner: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: --threw that out. Yeah Yeah.

Dave Werner: he threw out this plan and it was the first kind of formal working the strength training into the metabolic conditioning plan. It was the first kind of formal amalgamation of those things that I had seen.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Dave Werner: Certainly, it's not the first time anyone has ever done it. It's just the first time that we heard of it. And it helped people. It was a good plan. So ever since then in my practice, and my gym, we've been trying different schemes to weave together these strength-training elements with metabolic conditioning. I've always found a great deal of value in body weight strength training elements and I've noticed that folks who just strictly strength train with the barbell they get – it's good, you know, having a decent deadlift, having a decent squat, military press, bench press, bent over row perhaps.

These are good movements and folks will get stronger and they definitely get something out of it. But for instance you take somebody with a good back squat and then throw a workout with single leg squats at them and they can't necessarily do that at all. So there's not necessarily a great carryover to mobility or other you know, throw in a unique variation of a movement at folks and if they've just been doing barbell training they won't necessarily thrive in this new movement.

Whereas if you flipped that around and folks have a solid background of body weight strength training as well then they almost always do just fine with the barbell. And you know, I'm not really discouraging barbell training. I'm just saying it's not the only tool in the toolbox there and we need to. So I've always found value working a combination of barbell and body weight and other tools kettle bells, dumbbells as strength training tools, some kind of tool agnostic rope climb for instance.

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You know, without using your feet, using rope climb as a pulling strength development tool for instance is a fantastic way to build some scapular stability and upper body strength and then from that you get qualities that carry over to brachiation and they carry over just fine than regular pull-ups as well.

Robb Wolf: And when we've had had Chris Sommer, Coach Chris for summer on the show, he looks at the rope climb as being indispensable with developing high level ring strength and it's kind of the gateway to get into that yeah.

Dave Werner: This was something back, I'm old enough that high schools and even junior highs when I was growing up still had solo bars on the walls, still had ropes in the gyms, still had mats. There was tumbling and climbing like every school I remember, you know, going through as a kid, I'll have ropes. So in wrestling team practices and stuff, we'd climb rope and walk on our hands although I never was any good at that skill but we'd spend time on our hands and time on the ropes and of course wrestling is nothing if not a body weight strength pursuit.

And yeah early, some of those early days when Coach Sommer wrote articles about using gymnastics as strength training tools, I really took that to heart and not that we're anywhere near his level of applying those things of course but...

Robb Wolf: Just a bit of validation that there was definitely something to be learned out of that body weight.

Dave Werner: Absolutely, absolutely.

Robb Wolf: yeah, yeah.

Dave Werner: For instance one of my staples of beginning upper body training for people and this is across the board from elderly too young to middle age and super athletic to male, female, like everybody starts with at least a certain amount of horizontal pulling in the form of ring rows. At different heights, I find it easy to scale the load to an appropriate level for people. You can make it extremely hard or extremely easy. But what happens in your shoulders when you're hanging on to those rings the way you need to stabilize your shoulders and getting this nice range of motion, it's not quite a unilateral movement but that each ring is somewhat independent so it will really show up weaknesses on different sides. And you know, with just as one example of taking you know, in a sense that's a body weight strength movement but again it's got a lot of carry over.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Dave Werner: That's something that I definitely got using rings like that I definitely got that from Coach Sommers' early days as well as of course just taking a standard movement like a dip and then making it harder by doing it on the rings. There's just an awful lot of carryover on that. So in our programming, we will program dips on parallel bars or regular dip handles, we've programmed dips with added weight. And then parallel to that development we also are programming first straight arm support and dip supports and then dips on rings. Straight-arm supports on rings and dips on rings and eventually weighted dips on the rings.

Robb Wolf: Yeah.

Dave Werner: It's all part of this progression of upper body pushing that's not – it's not exclusively on the rings but the rings definitely add some complexity and some difficulty to the movement and then again what we get out of that is more stable shoulders that are able to you know, jump into new challenges better I think than --

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Dave Werner: --than if we had certainly better than if we were just sticking to barbells. Barbell is a fairly stable tool. It's great in the sense you can load a lot of weight on it and you can --

Robb Wolf: Or do micro loading.

Dave Werner: Or do micro loading exactly. This incremental loading and that's of course the value of a barbell. But also I like to use dumbbells so that each side has to stabilize and move itself without the aid of the other side. And then get on to even more unstable loading. Like I'm not a big fan of unstable surface training but I'm a big fan of unstable load --

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Dave Werner: --training. So and just over the years to circle back to your question, we first realized that we had to do some formal, some methodical strength training if we were going to keep people making progress and getting the most out of the metabolic conditioning.

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And over the years, that's taken I think more and more weight that and your strength and your ability to apply your strength end up being the

limiting factors. You can't produce great amounts of work if you can't produce force to begin with and control it. So the strength has just become certainly not the exclusive focus of our programming but it's an important chunk of it and we've also over the years had to expand our scope of strength training. In the beginning it was squat, deadlift, military press, dips and pull-ups and those five moments would –and that's certainly a decent start. There are some good, good basic foundation there but for instance the dips and pull-ups and military press that's the upper body component of that list.

And certainly there's a little bit of shoulder involvement stabilizing the barbell when you're squatting and even a little bit more when you're hanging on to a barbell for deadlifting. But military press, dips and pull-ups I now think are – it's a decent start but it's not sufficient for having a robust set of shoulders. Right? We need more complexity than that. So we have to add in horizontal pulling for instance and more straight-arm work form of handstands. Handstands, planks and supports in different positions, side planks on one arm and you know, face-up planks tables if you will things like this. So just a lot more variety in the positions that we use, a steady foundation of straight arm strength to include just hanging, hanging in both passive and active which I got from Coach Sommers again and a certain amount for me. Those work, I do Portal.

We found that that passive hanging as a recurring element in our warming up and cooling down and even sometimes a little bit of a workout element in our movement classes has really helped to open people's shoulders and thoracic spine.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Dave Werner: It takes time. It's not a quick intervention but I've seen some dramatic improvements in folks with shoulders. They're –so I think there's a growing awareness in certainly the body weights strength training, a gymnastic strength training community of the value of just hanging.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Dave Werner: So these elements we've had to figure out every new thing that comes up like that you know, here's this cool new movement turns out is pretty important. Now we have to figure out how to work that into a regular... Because hanging it doesn't do any good at all unless you can do it consistently. You know, or another movement. Handstands, we've gotten huge amount of value out of bringing people through a careful progression toward a handstand. A lot of scapular stability, a lot of upper

body strength, a lot of thoracic opening , which is a fantastic antidote if you will to kind of modern culture sitting at a desk and hunching over a keyboard. The handstand work has been a huge addition but again every time you get a –you know, a great new idea for a fundamental piece of the strength training you have to figure out how can I work this in to the program in a way that it comes up often enough to be meaningful. And then tinker with the variables with the intensity and the duration and the volume of the work and again figure out how can I you know, put this out in a way that’s going to be meaningful for folks following it.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Dave Werner: So that’s what Move Skill does. We have as opposed to five fundamental strength movements it’s now the number is more like 27. And a lot of that is adding unilateral movements in. Some of it is adding some hip and leg we could call it supplemental work like weighted hip bridges or it turns out that we need some specific I guess targeted work for gluts.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Dave Werner: Ever since. Squatting and deadlifting are great but they don’t necessarily fix a problem if somebody isn’t all that good at using their gluts. So we really need to do some specific glut supplemental work call it.

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And again it has to come up often enough to be meaningful so a combination of things like hip bridges and single leg squats, single leg deadlifts, unilateral work to help us sort out imbalances. And also provide a bit of a novel way to load your body. You can load one side to a pretty significant degree without taxing your axial skeleton, your central nervous system for instance heavy deadlifting can be very draining and pull away from other types of training. So heavy deadlifting is good stuff but if you’re going to do that a lot then you’re going to be making some compromises.

So and that’s what you know, we’re trying to find this particular blend that creates what I think of general fitness, which is you know, you just jumped into a big mud pit.

Robb Wolf: Right, right, right.

Dave Werner: What in the world is general fitness? So I’ve made my definition, my understanding of general fitness known with the athletic skill levels and finally I’ve talked about tips in the past and it didn’t come out on the timeframe that I said it would but version two of the athletic skill levels

are out now. They're up on our level 4 or CrossiftSeattle.com, they're up on that site. It's also the foundation of Move Skill. So the athletic skill levels are just some goals, goal setting tools at some different levels of call it your athletic development.

So on Move Skill for instance there's a beginner level of training and beginner assumes that you really can't do much of anything. You don't necessarily have a push-up, a good push-up. You may not be even able to do a sit up. You certainly can't do a pull-up or a dip. You are healthy, may be overweight but essentially there's nothing wrong with you that's sending you to the doctor for instance. But you can't do very much athletics. So that's the assumption for beginner level of training and then there's an intermediate level on Move Skill and the assumption there is that now you can do a few push-ups, you can do some sit-ups. You can hang. You still can't do dips and pull-ups those harder upper body weight but we're starting to make progress with your squat, with your deadlift technique. You've got some trunk stability, some decent just beginning to have some hip strength, hip extension strength and spine extension strength and spine stability.

So we're bringing those folks through progressions of very easy, preliminary steps in body weight strength movements. I think in the end body weight strength movements are often the hardest you know, the iron crosses is an obvious example here but it doesn't have to be that elaborate. A handstand push-up for instance is an enormous challenge compared to say a military press. You can load military press up towards a similar type challenge but you don't have to. You can keep military press at a very beginner level. So what we're trying to do is start folks at a real basic point in their body weight strength abilities and use a variety of tools and use some smart progressions and bring them along so that eventually we can do some really challenging body weight movements.

So our intermediate level on Move Skill is this range of folks that can do some push-ups. They can do some ring rowing not necessarily a horizontal right with their body parallel to the ground yet. But you're starting to get this some, a handle on body weight strength movements. You can't necessarily do pull-ups and dips yet. When you do get to the point where you can do some pull-ups and dips, now we're ready to move into what on Move Skill like all advanced, the advanced programming.

Again it's advance in the context of general fitness so we're just talking about building a really solid foundation here. And the –you know, the real idea is that these different parameters, these different measures of what

constitutes general fitness we're trying to bring them all along pretty much in lockstep not necessarily exactly together but we don't want to get too... For instance, you don't want to be a great runner with no you can't do any L sits and you can hardly do a sit-up. I actually know a number of folks who fall into that category. It can run for hours.

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And they can't do one good sit-up and so that's part of my both observation about what goes wrong with people's training, what leads them in their chronic pain and trouble scenarios. What limits their progress is when you get things way out of balance. Super good at a small handful of weight lifting movements for instance and no ability to run or do some sustained work. You've got some elements out of balance.

So you know, for details, folks can look at the athletic skill levels or they can look at MoveSkill.com. There's the Move Skill levels, which again the only difference between the two is some names we've given on Move Skill. The beginner level is really what I would call prelevel 1, folks that are actually ready to start.

Robb Wolf: Which interestingly both in your gym and my gym at NorCal that's a remarkable percentage of our clientele.

Dave Werner: yeah.

Robb Wolf: You know, within this and I've talked about this stuff before, love the sport of fitness, love the crossfit games. I think it's an amazing addition to this whole strength and conditioning story but folks kind of get glammed by that a little bit and they forget that the people that are really in desperate need of help and the vast majority of the folks that are likely to populate a gym are at a very different end of the spectrum.

Dave Werner: Yeah. My only beef about the – I have no beef about the games there. The games and the athletes that perform in the games are amazing. The tests are super legitimate tests of really kind of pushing the boundaries of human performance. I think it's fabulous. And the athletes that do that stuff are amazing. But the athletes that do that stuff are amazing, right? They are really well developed, very athletic people. They often come with some kind of history of some --

Robb Wolf: Pretty deep development.

Dave Werner: Pretty deep. It took them a long time to get to this point and that's not a knock of either the system or those athletes. It's just a statement of how

you get to be that kind of athlete. It takes a long time and you have to have been doing a variety of smart training to get there.

And again I think all that stuff is pretty awesome. All the games stuff and those athletes are pretty awesome. But to your point about the folks that walk in the door of our gyms, they're not at that level. They're not close to that level. They can't even see that level from where they're standing. They're so far away in terms of their ability to feel and control their body, generate force, sustain work output, manage discomfort and you know, the feelings of I was going to say panic. May be that's a little bit too strong a word but you can be in the middle of a really tough work set and your body is not really coming close to keeping up with your oxygen needs for instance. And there are some mental and emotional sensations there that take getting used to.

Robb Wolf: I would call that panic.

Dave Werner: [Laughs] It can have elements of panic in it yeah. But you have to learn how to manage this and again it takes time and there's a process where folks first have to learn how to generate some force then they have to learn how to direct that force with some precision so they can accomplish the work they're trying to accomplish. They have to learn then to be able to sustain this force development you know, keep it going for a while. And then manage their output, manage what's happening in their body, how it feels as you keep going. You know, a classic example in the crossfit world would be the workout Fight Gone Bad where you get a few minutes into that and you've been putting out some real sustained force and part of the magic of that workout is you're switching gears every minute.

So most folks can with a little bit of practice can tough things out for one minute and then you shift to a different exercise so that the load and the sensation change a little and allow you to kind of mentally reset. Meanwhile your overall metabolism is still just cranking out work. So it sneaks up on folks, it sneaks out in some sneaky way to get in a great deal of work, which everybody who's ever done it knows because it feels like you get run over by a truck. And that's why we all like it.

But the point is those kind of tests take some – you have to develop people to get to the point where that's a reasonable or effective thing to be doing. And like I said earlier we have found over the years a lot of value in just paying more and more attention to how it is we're developing people's strength. Bring them along and we've found that our upper bodies and lower bodies but especially the upper bodies and

shoulders need more complexity that a handful of basic movements is a good start. It's better than nothing certainly but in the end it's not good enough.

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And you know, what I mean by that is that folks start to run into some chronic glitches, may be some tendonitis or a kind of a chronic problem will come up in the shoulders or neck, upper back, elbow, wrist. You know, these kind of chronic issues come up and the standard set of movements and some stretching is not really enough to in many cases it's not enough to handle that. We need more complexity. Shoulders are super complicated beasts that are capable of an enormous range of force and direction, right? And the other way to say that is they're not very stable.

Robb Wolf:

Right.

Dave Werner:

They're not inherently stable. They have all this remarkable articulation and what we need to do is develop the ability to at a minimum the ability for a person's shoulders to support their body weight in a variety of different positions. That's one of my kind of baseline measurements. Can your shoulders support your body weight? It doesn't much matter if you're older or if you're younger or if you're male or female or if you're a big person or a small person. Those are your shoulders and your body and those shoulders need to be able to support you. Some of it is really pretty basic like a plank. Being able to hold a really active plank is a good start for a lot of folks. If you can't do that then trying to move on and develop a push-up for instance is going to have – you're going to have problems. You know and we see this often. Folks are in the middle of a pushup and their shoulder blades have visibly shifted around on them and you know, I think the right way to think about that is their shoulder blades have failed. They have failed under a load, they have shifted under a load in a way that wasn't intentional and that's a setup for at the very least failing to make progress and very often it's a set up for running into some type of chronic problem somewhere in that kinetic chain. So you know, other examples of straight-arm or just your shoulders being able to support your body weight. Hang in an active position for at the very least 30 seconds and more like a minute dip support again in an active position so you're –you know, I just kind of scrunched up on the rings. You're pushing your body up and holding it there with the muscles on and again your shoulder blades are positioned deliberately where you want them and they're held there with the strength to do that and the stamina to do it for a little while.

You know, a minute, a couple of minutes. And then of course moving on with a wrestling background or I know you do jujitsu, there's often times when you plant a hand put a good poster, a fair amount of your body weight on that shoulder, and pivot, move, sit out, scramble, you know, change your body position. And a lot of folks when you slow that scenario down and you're doing some movement, you're all sitting in class for instance how folks post their body weight on one shoulder and then sit through. Going slowly enough to watch what happens, you'll find that very often they cannot keep their shoulder in an active engagement. So that shoulder has then failed in really a pretty simple movement pattern, a very analogous in a sense to when you're sitting on a floor and you place one hand on the floor, and start to you know, prep yourself to get your feet under you and stand up, shift your body weight on to that shoulder, press up a little bit. That simple test or a movement pattern stymies a lot of folks.

Again if you slow it down enough to look at it, they cannot maintain an active shoulder engagement. So you know, going into that my way of talking about a strength and conditioning program then for regular folks looking to get in shape has to take the stuff into account. I need to help folks build stable shoulders.

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And then to your point about the games in the games athletes, yeah we want to be doing heavy weighted dips and doing it under duress when you've cranked out a bunch of other work. But for many people there's a number of steps to get to that point. But first they need a stable shoulders, then they need the dip on a set of fixed handles then they need to be able to do the dips on the rings. Then we can start adding weight. Just going step by step through some progressions and in the end get to a point where you know, we are moving toward the kind of movements that those games athletes are doing or toward those movements and towards those loads.

Robb Wolf:

Right, right. Dave you guys have developed a none to one program kind of trying to put some focus on this. Like tell folks about that. It's really interesting and it's a –you know, before we jump into that I've got to throw myself under the bus yet again both you and Michael Ruthford through these kind of progression ideas out to me initially and this is a great reminder about what observational bias or self-bias or whatnot can bring to a topic. Michael Ruthford shot me this max effort black box kind of template asked me what my thoughts were you know, doing more dedicated strength work and some correction within that, the metabolic conditioning parameters. I was kind of like oh I don't really see a need for that.

And then Dave showed me this idea of kind of almost a fitness oriented belting system that you know, when you reach a certain aptitude in both strength work, skill work and capacity that you would then kind of progress along. The boundaries are not you know, diamond sharp. There are some very gray areas just like in Brazilian jujitsu you know what's a blue belt versus a purple belt. There's some nuance to it and it's not clear cut and age and physicality and stuff like that will kind of play into that. But I shot both of these ideas down initially because at the time I was reasonably young, had a good strength background, had a good decent movement background and so I really downplayed the significance of these things and now we use essentially these very technologies in our gym and I kind of live and die by it.

So just throw myself under the bus there but then you've taken the skill standards another step further in a way by taking the none to one concept and putting some really directed focus on specific things say like a pull-up or a handstand.

Dave Werner:

So the skill levels in the beginning come from asking the question what should a human body be able to do. And if we're looking at a particular sport then it's fairly easy to define what fairly straightforward at least to define what qualities does a person need, does a body need to be able to perform the sport well. But in the field of general fitness, you have to step back a little bit and ask like what is in a larger set of movements or kind of base skills that other things are built on. A great example would be squatting. You need to be able to squat your body weight and some extra weight up and down through a full range of motion. Everything from just squatting down on your haunches to have lunch or have a conversation like so much of the world can do but we find that exceptionally difficult here in the United States.

You know, to putting a fair amount of weight on a barbell or a stone or some kind of a loaded implement, may be a sack of grain if we're going to use an agrarian analogy there. But you know, put some load on us and squat up and down. Now we're creating more force to that big range of motion. So you start thinking this way and ask what should a human body be able to do. Hang, brachiate, you know swing from our shoulders. It seems that our shoulders are built for this. They certainly seem to do better when we train them to do this and so on.

So you come up with a list of things, pull-ups, and dips and sometimes we will adapt the goal to a particular tool. I'd throw things like a bench press into that. It's a little bit of an artificial movement in the sense that you

have this nice horizontal surface delay on that still gives you room to move your elbows so you can get through that full range of motion with your arms. But it's a useful movement in that we can put a big load on the upper body.

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I find it to be part of a progression toward more what I think of is more interesting movements like a dip, which to me has you know, you're in the water and you need to get into a boat. So you grab the gunnel and with a dip type movement press your body up. That seems to be a pretty common human movement pattern. So for that's where the kind of the base thinking of the athletic skill levels come from. What should a human be able to do?

What happens though is people are good at different things. Some folks find that dip type motion to be very straightforward for whatever reason of growing up or the way their body is shaped. They find it pretty straightforward and easy to pull up some dips. Other folks aren't really built for that. They might be built like a tank and they're really good at say grabbing a barbell and lifting heavy stuff up, picking heavy things off the ground but they're not so good at moving their body weight around.

So you know, everybody has stuff that they're better at and stuff that they're worse at. Being humans we tend to try to avoid the stuff we're not as good at. And I think part of this is our whole culture too where specialization is rewarded. The way you get noticed, the way you get ahead, the way we build our careers, the way we get our ideas noticed is to play to our strengths. To be able to identify our strengths and I think this is both intellectual as well as physical. We you know, if you're conducting life successfully, you've done it by identifying your strengths and then developing those strengths as much as you're able to and therefore distinguish yourself from the crowd.

Well that's fine but if you know, what I'm talking about is stepping back a little bit and building a foundation. May be an analogy here would be like you know, get through high school with whatever you think of a high school education. We get that high school education before I go on and get my degree in physics. You know, like I'm going to have a certain amount of general background capability before I dive into my specialty and really go down that rabbit hole of develop myself in the narrower, narrower focus. To me this is what the gist of general fitness is and the problem is folks generally don't want, don't know what their weaknesses are, don't want to know what their weaknesses are. Once you do know what your weakness is you really don't want to work on it. It's no fun. It's no fun to suck at something.

Robb Wolf:

Right.

Dave Werner:

It's no fun to realize like I'm the worst person in the room at this. And then in the end developing your weaknesses is not the way to really stand out in a crowd. It's not the way to you know, fully develop ourselves as a human. So there's I think a built-in resistance to what I'm trying to do. So the value then of the skill levels is putting this stuff into context to provide some goals. We do seem to thrive I think when we have goals like humans seem to respond really well for the most part to having some goals. If somebody can take the time to work out you know, what's a call it a minimal effective skillset for general fitness, and that's what I've tried to do. That's what I think the athletic skill levels are. Certainly level 1 is what I would call a minimal effective skillset to be a healthy adult. Not an athlete, certainly not a competitor but you're not broken, and you can with reasonable confidence play with your kids, take up paddle boarding, go for a hike. You know, build yourself a shed in the backyard, whatever it is people get up to.

You're not broken, you don't have screwed up shoulders. You have a certain baseline of capacity. In no way does this mean you're a specialist or an expert or anything else. It's just in my mind like we've gotten some kind of high school competencies out of the way. But I think we need to do that up to a point. And I would say the same thing for level 2. Level 2 is by the time somebody gets through level 2 they're again not a specialist, not really impressive in any one thing, in any crowd of specialists. But you do have a pretty well rounded athletic foundation. You can move reasonably well. You can move your body weight pretty well. You've got pull-ups and dips and some basic body weight stuff or well within your wheelhouse at this point and you've started to dabble with some more complicated stuff like a muscle up.

And again we're not going to impress any gymnast or any power lifter or any specialist at all. But you've got a good skillset. But again to get for most people that get to that point, they have to have noticed and addressed at least a couple of weaknesses. I can't really think of anybody who doesn't have something, some area that it just doesn't come as easily and they have to work at it. So back to your question about none to one, what happens is if we're working along in a general program that's cycling through a bunch of different variables, then on those days when say for instance L sit work comes up, you've just grown internally and kind of get through that day and then just blank it out after that and move on.

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And you know, hope it doesn't come up too often.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Dave Werner: Because that was your weakness and you didn't want to do it and you know, you showed up and went through the motions that day. But it's hard to make progress in that way. It's hard to make progress on your weakness without putting a little bit of extra love on that at least for a little while, at least until you get up to again a benchmark, a goal. So with this in mind, we started developing what we call a none to one you know, a classic problem for a lot of people is being able to do a pull-up. And I think that chin-up is for beginners it's the most accessible way to get that you know, pull your body weight through that range of motion. You're going to do that.

For most people they'll find that easier to do the first few times in a chin-up supinated grip. So we ran a none to one chin-up program and it was 12 weeks of homework essentially to be done three to four times in a week. For each week, we have assigned a particular workout that brought people through several milestones along the way and if they follow the plan it – what was guaranteed it's not guaranteed that everybody is going to be able to get a chin-up in 12 weeks of course. But what is guaranteed is if you do the homework for a certain week and then at the end of the week, you can do that homework with not ease but with reasonable confidence then you're ready to move to the the next week of homework and so on. If you go through the plan that way, you will get to a chin-up. We're just putting some extra love on it unless something is wrong with your hand, shoulder, wrist, something like that if something is wrong with you this may not work. But if you're essentially you know, a whole human being or at least your shoulders, you'll be able to get to the chin-up by running through the homework.

What happens is for some folks they'll have to circle back into a particular week twice or three times or they may have to put a little extra love into a certain area of development to make sure that they make that progress. If you're not able to do the homework quite as often as we had prescribed then may be the whole thing takes a little bit longer than 12 weeks anyway. But it's just a planned systematic way of looking at what kind of extra work does it take to get this one particular goal? Again the idea here is that folks can kind of --

Robb Wolf: Put some real dedicated focus on that topic and.

Dave Werner:

Yeah just grit their teeth and decide all right I'm going to handle this week's spot. Right now we're running – so we ran a chin-up program a couple of months ago, ran this – we've been putting this out in the form of an email. We put this out to our Move Skill email list in our gym membership email list and folks sign up have several hundred folks sign up and we had quite a lot of folks, dozens of folks get their first chin-up.

And that was great. And we'll be putting that out again and again. Right now we're doing a freestanding handstand none to one program. This one is pretty cool because there's a lot of again shoulders are complex beasts and there's a lot of particular little elements. Again some people just can do it. You let them kick up a handful of times and they're going to be able to balance on their hands. There's a lot of folks, myself among them that there's nothing natural or automatic or easy about that skill. So for instance I've been able to hold my body weight on my hands and even do handstand pushups since I was a little kid wrestling. This is a –you know, a skill or a strength that I had a long time.

But the skill of controlling your midline stability and controlling an interaction with the ground through your hands and being able to actively move your shoulders around and keep things lined up and in the end have this freestanding handstand, a stable handstand, that's not easy for me and for a lot of folks. You have to work and practice and what we've found is and I'm sure this is not news to most of the listeners is like if you just kick up and get up on your hands and keep doing that, it's for most of us it's not going to lead to that skill.

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You're not going to get it that way unless you're one of those talented folks who you know, basically just has it. It's in your wheelhouse you can get it automatically. Again folks have strengths and you know, skills that come more naturally to them. Those folks typically don't need this kind of help but everybody else does. The handstand I think is a super valuable skill and again I get this from a number of sources I have a lot of respect for, Coach Sommers, Ido Portal. A number of folks have helped me realize. I know that in gymnastics coaching circles, little kids getting started and a lot of martial arts programs wrestling when I was a kid. Lots and lots of call it acrobatic flavored pursuits will put handstands as a real staple. Like in gymnastics this is one of the very first skills kids learn some basic tumbling and start to learn to be on their hands.

What we've found for adults who really aren't interested in martial arts or tumbling or acrobatics at all the handstand is still a super fundamental movement with an enormous carryover that helps like I said earlier it helps folks straighten out their upper back, their thoracic spine. It's a

wonderful antidote or part of the antidote to our sitting hunched over lifestyles. And it can be a lot of fun once we get past some roadblocks and there's roadblocks for sure.

So this – we're right in the middle now of a none to one handstand program.

Robb Wolf: Nice.

Dave Werner: And it's going well we've got several hundred folks going through that right now and we're getting some great feedback on that. Again, I've got plans to put out in the end probably at least a dozen of these none to one programs as kind of separate offerings in a PDF or ePub some kind of format like that. We're working on some layout stuff right now. I think I'm going to be rolling my first kind of packaged out, nicely laid out. We'll offer the none to one chin-up program, we'll offer that free and we're in the kind of final stages of work, developing the layout for that. We're in those final stages now. Don't have an exact timeline but I would think within three to four weeks, we'll be ready to roll on that and again we're going to offer that one free.

And then I think on future versions, we'll charge for you know, putting that stuff together. But the none to one you know, it's again it's just looking out particular spots that need to work and in a real planned methodical way working through those.

Robb Wolf: Nice. Well it's been a huge education for me watching Dave develop all these systemization again. A lot of this was largely lost on me as a coach. I saw my clients struggle with you know, that came into the gym that had say like a good, again endurance background, general athletic background but they have never really lifted weights, never really done gymnastics and the usual kind of randomized approach just really wasn't getting – as far down the road as quickly as what I thought that they could. They weren't really able to do the same things that I could do and then it's taken some eye opening from folks like Dave and Michael Ruthford and some other folks in the community that really helped improve me as a coach. This Move Skill program has just been a huge boon for a lot of folks. I really encourage everyone to check that out. We will have links to that in the show notes. We will get Dave back on here after the none to one programs kind of get rolled out and we'll talk more about the specifics on that. And Dave and I have a huge stack of ribs and a bunch of meat upstairs that we need to go eat so we're going to probably wrap this one up. Anything else you can think of Dave?

Dave Werner: Rib roast and caffeine and I just kind of lost my train of thought when you started talking about that and kind of drooling out on I got to my wipe my chin a little bit and...

Robb Wolf: So we have other things to do but thanks Dave for coming down to hang out and stock some bunnies and also eat a lot of food.

Dave Werner: It was great to see you and the family and the young one is coming up amazingly and it's always fun to check in with you guys so. And yeah thanks for having me on as well.

Robb Wolf: Stoked. Stoked. Well everybody take care and we'll talk to you all soon.

Dave Werner: Bye folks.

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