

Paleo Solution - 275

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Robb Wolf:

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Howdy folks. Robb Wolf here, another edition of the PaleoSolution podcast, I'm very happy to have our good friend coach Christopher Sommer, founder of the GymnasticBodies training system, trainer of champions and one of the most popular guest that we've ever had on the show.

Coach, how are you doing?

Christopher Sommer: I'm doing well, Robb. How are you today, buddy?

Robb Wolf:

Good, good. We've had a remarkable amount of precipitation in Reno which is kind of odd o we've actually be hunkered in the house a little bit but it's going to get up into the 80s today so we're getting ready to lay down our base tan and get out and start working at the Lazy Lobo Ranch.

Christopher Sommer: That's right I heard about that new place of yours.

Robb Wolf: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think Nicki is trying to kill me by working me to death and then she get a young good looking husband. So that's what I'm up to right now.

Christopher Sommer: Just don't give my wife any ideas.

Robb Wolf: Perfect. Okay. I'll keep that under wraps. So coach what's new with you? GymnasticBodies has just been growing by leaps and bounds. I see you folks everywhere just seeing some really amazing progress from folks. What's new in the GymnasticBodies world?

Christopher Sommer: Well, gosh, we keep doubling every time I turn around. We right now have 16 affiliates around the world, trained at a fairly high level. We're strong international presence. I've spent part of the year going around and checking and see all the things are doing there. Online is cranking. We're coming up on 100,000 likes on Facebook now. A lot of great free information we're putting out. Forms are cranking. New product's in the way. Our stretch program we released earlier this year had just been monstrously popular, focuses on three different courses-front split, middle split and thoracic bridge and of course everything that's built in, what front splits going to over hamstring, calves, gastrocnemius, soleus, tibialis work. I'm just kind of work them through piece by piece. And what's interesting is that it was not a course that we're going to release simply because I had mistakenly thought that everyone already knew how to stretch and boy was I wrong.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs].

Christopher Sommer: [Laughs]. They didn't have the slightest clue how to stretch. So those have just been super popular.

Robb Wolf: That's fantastic. Coach, I want to ask a little bit your affiliation process. Typically folks need to go through a significant chunk of the online portion of the GymnasticBodies curriculum then go through the coaching certification process and then what else is involved with becoming an affiliate?

Christopher Sommer: We found that I had to come down off the mountain a little bit. I was still thinking too much like a national team coach and we had people in the pipeline for becoming a GB affiliate who'd been in there for 18-24 months and couldn't qualify and so I realized I was being unreasonable. Good people working hard, busting butt but just couldn't get it done. So we actually created a tier system for our affiliates.

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So now to become a GB affiliate, there're three steps in the process. They're required to attend two GymnasticBodies seminars and then if they've done well at those. Right attitude, they're training well. They understand. They would fit in well. Then they can be invited to a work study in my GB master affiliate in Denver, Colorado. That's about a week long. If that goes well then they can become a GB affiliate. So those are the process that our 16 went through most of them and then tier above that is more along the lines of what you mentioned, Robb, where master affiliate is required that they are certified in different levels of our foundation program. So we have three of those in the pipeline right now. So those basically that's as close as I can come to giving someone meet their running their training as our master affiliates.

Robb Wolf:

Fantastic. It's fascinating because after you--we have been playing with a more bodyweights gymnastic oriented progressing called balanced body, a very popular class at NorCal. After you came and did your GymnasticBodies seminar, we really stepped that process up and it is easily--other than our lift program which has a little bit of dumbbell work and some very limited barbell work like they're about 50:50 the most popular programs that we offer at NorCal. Why do think this GymnasticBodies oriented training is so popular to folks like why is there such the hook is sunk so deep with that?

Christopher Sommer: Yes. If we take away all the benefits from it--the strength, the mobility, the body awareness, if we strip all that and we just go down to the core, it's a dull play. It's an opportunity to get out and have some fun and use your body, move around and do it in a safe productive way. A lot of times especially people who come from a background of a regular gym where they're sitting down and lifting or they're laying on their back and benching, not that there's anything wrong with that occasionally but day in and day out, you go from sitting in chair at work to laying on back when you're training. It's just not enough. The body doesn't thrive. So they start hitting bodyweight and then you guys were exposed to this is how we scale it. These are the correct progressions that we're going to take you through. So now it's not only a fun experience but it's a productive experience so they keep coming back, enjoy themselves without getting banked up in the process.

Robb Wolf:

Fantastic. Coach, you mentioned the stretching program. I'm working on my training update currently as time has wore on, I'm noticing that mobility and flexibility work is the thing I should start and possibly with my training at home. I've been putting more and more time and emphasis into that largely trying to undo what happens from my kind of

kyphotic flexed hip position while doing jujitsu. One of the main things that I've been working on and I threw this out to you before I let the podcast roll, one of the best diagnostics that I have for where my body is, is the back limber or the back bridge. I immediately know where my hips are, my hip mobility, thoracic mobility, if the thoracic mobility is going south and I noticed that immediately. I'm kind of throwing out in the training update that the most best diagnostic of youth is possibly the back bridge or the back limber. What do you think about that?

Christopher Sommer: Well you know that's an excellent point. I'll say that it was with all our national champions, it was mainstay in my program. Now of course me being me, we had to take it to the highest possible level. So the bridge alone wasn't enough and the limber alone wasn't enough because a lot of limber work is done with momentum and so my athletes had to do it with just pure strength. So for example we would line whatever, however many athletes that were up, these would be from intermediate level athletes up to the elite, line them up in a straight line and I'd count of every rep. So if we were doing back limber, start with arms by the ears and then they didn't fall backwards onto their hands, they slowly lowered back onto their hands and of course if they didn't lower slowly then we didn't count that rep and they were given the opportunity to repeat it.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs].

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Christopher Sommer: [Laughs]. And then after they slowly lowered down and touch hands on the ground then depending on their level some would do more traditional where they were jumping with their legs up but little at a time we train them so we wanted them to get to the point to where instead of jumping of their legs, no use of the legs whatsoever just pulling using their back muscles to pull the legs up off the ground to the handstand. We considered that and then we did the same thing forward with the front limbers. Because the reason being is that athletically it's that flexion and extension of the spine either snapping from being extended backward and then snapping forward or already being contracted forward and snapping backward. That's where athletic movement is initiated. So if you're weak in those positions then athletically you can't perform to your best. So this was a mandatory basic that all my athletes had to do. They did 10 reps of each every training day. I think it showed my guys were untouchable in the US and Allan was just crushing people and a lot of that was because we had just trained the back to be very pliable.

Robb Wolf: Coach, I've noticed that when I look around YouTube and I see videos from some pretty well respected, pretty high level both athletes and coaches even my relatively untrained eye, I see a lot of people relying on lumbar or mid thoracic mobility in lieu of adequate thoracic, upper thoracic and shoulder mobility. What's going with that?

Christopher Sommer: Alright. I hope everyone's ready because I'm about to go into my rant.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]. I hit a trigger. I hit a trigger early in the show. [Laughs].

Christopher Sommer: So gymnastics wise, there is just a bridge there is no such thing is a thoracic bridge but so many people had down bridges incorrectly with that major lumbar emphasis just like you said where there's this huge overarch in the lower back which is not designed for huge degrees of flexion. The lower back is not designed for that. Thoracic spine is designed for that. So were seeing these people with this huge curvature in the lower back considering no shoulder flexion at all, they're considering that a bridge. Well I can consider that a birth defect when I was seeing it.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs].

Christopher Sommer: I was like what, what are those people doing? But people didn't understand. So we had to designate what we do a thoracic bridge even though to my mind it's just a bridge. Is there a gymnastics bridge and a regular bridge? I said no, there is a correct bridge and there's a piece of crap that you're doing that is not productive, you need to move on. But they didn't get that. I'm sorry I'm being direct to be a national team coach here. But there needs to be flexion in that thoracic spine and that's one of the series we have for our stretch courses and it just crushes people and of course we don't go right into thoracic work. They have to start with shoulder flexion, some shoulder extension work first. We're going to start loosening up those vertebrae. Now part of it is because of all the desk control and then part of it is because they've done so much lifting where they're training to mobilize the spine to maximize their leverage for their lifts which isn't bad and in and of itself. It just becomes a problem when that's all you do and you have vertebrae for a reason. They're supposed to move and they're trying to treat it as though it's one solid piece of bone, use it or lose it. So a lot of adults--

Robb Wolf: So I am--

Christopher Sommer: Go ahead sir.

Robb Wolf: So I am seeing some issues there. [Laughs].

Christopher Sommer: Well absolutely, absolutely. We're finding that--well part of it too is the public is getting more sophisticated now where this message is no different than what I've been saying for what isn't 15 years now, Robb?

Robb Wolf: At least, yeah.

Christopher Sommer: Yeah. It's no different. It's a little bit of now they've been around the block. They've kicked the tires. They taken their body out for a run and they're experienced enough to start noticing deficits. Things that are starting to impact their quality of life and their level of athletic performance and they're sophisticated enough now that they can start narrowing it down and they understand that you know my thoracic spine my mid and upper back doesn't move. It doesn't move and there's not all the lifting in the world that's going to correct that. I'd going to get in there and I'm going to train like it's meant to be trained. It's only an issue that I run into with adults. With the younger athletes and teenagers, this issue doesn't exist.

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Robb Wolf: Which is I guess I little bit of my leaning towards the back limber, a properly perfumed back bridge, it's something that we see in children and it's almost an afterthought well of course kids can do that and if we see an adult able to do this, it's almost miraculous. We still see some adults pull off some splits. You've got like Chuck Norris and different people who will do some splits and what not but you don't see many folks 40s, 50s, 60s and beyond doing a really nice back bridge. Occasionally you'll see somebody in yoga circles or maybe some circus type circle that can do a good back bridge and really have that that nice lumbar spine to tip of the skull proper mobility and not over emphasizing extension anywhere along that line but it's pretty rare. It seems like maintaining that one movement if folks were to really put a lot of emphasis on that like the hip flexors need to be balanced, hamstrings need to be proper integration and length and everything. The shoulders and thoracic area need to be well mobilized like it's closed to a one-stop shop like if you were to do all the attribute building to make sure that your back bridge was really good then you're getting a heck a lot out of that.

Christopher Sommer: I completely agree. Most important stretch for an adult is going to be their forward flexion it's going to be their pike work whether it's weighted or un-weighted. For adults, they're going to have to do weighted work. We use Jefferson curl for that.

Robb Wolf: Uh-huh.

Christopher Sommer: We have therapist around the world now who are getting incredible results. I will also say that people who have just graduated from physical therapy school and yada, yada, yada, people who don't have a strong athletic background, they freak out. They freak out. We've had so many so many conversations and they're, coach what are you doing? What are you doing? You don't know this is safe. Well, we start them super, super slow and we build them out to full bodyweight. We want to see a minimum of half bodyweight. It may take a year to a year and a half but there're people traditional rehab on their backs and going nowhere. They start doing arch work, hollow work Jefferson curl work, building up and do their thoracic work for their limbers and now we're using the back the way it's designed to be used. It's natural range of motion and you know son of a gun, the doggone thing starts feeling better.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs] Shocker.

Christopher Sommer: Big shocker, right?

Robb Wolf: It's interesting because clearly flexion injuries under load are a real issue but if we've never taken the body through a range of movement under some type of progressive load then it's going to be a surprise when we do hit that spot.

Christopher Sommer: It's going to be very slowly. Some people who will find a Jefferson curl that no weight at all, just moving their torso is all the load they can tolerate in the beginning and especially an adult, inactive, improperly trained, improperly physically prepared, a lot of desk work. You got to make a living and they go out and they play around a little bit on the weekends and then now suddenly they want to start using their body. It took time to break it and it's going to take time to fix it and you're going to be looking at a year, probably a year to feel really good about it. Now the reason I mentioned that forward flexion that's #1 but this backward extension, this thoracic stretching that's the second most important stretch. All your shoulder work, your hips, your splits, your knees that's all after that the forward flexion and your bridge work are #1 and #2. In fact you can almost consider them equally important and then everything else of secondary importance.

Robb Wolf: It makes sense. Coach, you are the first person that I ever heard using weights as a stretching modality. Where did you come across that and why are you using that? Why not just the usual PNF and passive relaxed stretch and things like that?

Christopher Sommer: A lot of people don't realize is that the fascia and the connective tissue are incredibly strong. It's much more--I think they're thinking that it's just this light fibrous thing when it's much more similar to leather, a big giant thick piece of leather. Now you get some material your working with its that thick and that stiff that it hasn't been utilized for a long time and they have no forward flexion so if we're going to do pancake work with them and we sit them with legs straddled, they can't bend over they can't move they have. They can't move. They have what an inch or two of range of motion.

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So that's where we'll do our weighted work so now tightness instead of working against them now works for them. So that muscle is fighting against holding that weight up for example now it fatigues and it's very own tightness helps pull it down that's where you'll see we do tons of stall bar work. But again adults are usually so tight and so weak that's stall bar work for initially is going to be--initial exposure is way too intense for them but using the weighted mobility allows us to sneak up on that. So gosh in our old facility, I think I had 13 sets of stall bars and that's for a lead athletes at Awaken, our master affiliate in Denver. Orange has 26 pairs of stall bars and they're all used constantly. They're all used constantly.

Robb Wolf: I think we installed 3 sets at NorCal and there's almost fist fight among the coaches to get their clients on them. So we're looking to trying to figure out where else where going to put some more.

Christopher Sommer: Yeah. That's why we had so many because if you only have a few it really and you're training a group. it causes a lot of traffic flow issues so you would like to have however larger group is going to be. If it's going to be 20 people, I'm going to want 10 sets so that I can go have on, half recovering that works easy.

Robb Wolf: Nice.

Christopher Sommer: Orange has main training room. One room has 15 sets of stall bar. The other room has 11 and so we can comfortably run a group of 30 in the tumbling room and handstand room that has the 15 sets because the stall bar works hard. Stall bar works hard and they're going to need that time to recover while the other half of the group is going.

Robb Wolf: Right, right. So what other modalities do you see amenable to this kind of loaded work? It seems like a ring progressions just kind of have that baked in the cake to some degree?

Christopher Sommer: We've been around the block a time or two now and other than playing, I really don't like to see beginners on the rings.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

Christopher Sommer: I really don't. Several reasons especially what we've noticed and last year like this street workout. The street calisthenics guys?

Robb Wolf: Uh-huh.

Christopher Sommer: They learned this the hard way. Because what happens is most adults are just working on getting strong, stronger the better, stronger the better which on the one hand is a good thing. Getting strong is a good thing but it doesn't make you a natural athlete because a natural athlete is strong as well as mobile and agile. He's explosive. So now we've selected only one characteristic that we're going to focus on. We're going to get strong which when we do it only that one component by itself now we get very, very tight and people who get very, very strong and don't stretch, the biceps become like piano wire.

So what happened last year is there were really strong street workout guys, five of them tore biceps last year. They're top guys, not like guys who were just--you got to understand the seriousness the impact of these, these weren't guys who are just going out and playing around these were their top, top guys like Adam Raw who were kind of legends in their community. But their training was imbalanced, they didn't have the necessary mobility work and so when they go and you take that super tight biceps which is crazy strong to move a lot of weight but now we put it under load while where stretching it and it just popped. Completely unnecessarily, complexly unnecessary.

That's one of the reasons I don't like to see people doing serious ring strength work right away until they've got their core work under control. We've had a chance to get in there and work on these mobility deficits because they're literally if you put them on and you start put them in back levers some other things a little more advanced before their mobility matches, they're literally strong enough to tear themselves apart.

Robb Wolf: Right, right. So where would folks see that in the GymnasticBodies program like if folks have been--if they haven't signed up for the program yet but they're kind of thinking I really want to see some ring work. How far into that do they get before they start seeing some basic things like archer pushups and archer flys and things along that line?

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Christopher Sommer: The way our courses are structured is they see mobility from day 1. We break everybody up into seven foundational elements and recover the entire body through those elements. When they do a work out, each set they perform they do a matching integrated mobility exercise with that immediately after that set. We do drive some of the stronger guys crazy. They'll come and they're like coach, I'm strong enough to go and do advanced work but I can't handle the mobility, what can I do? I say well you don't get to do anything until you fix your mobility.

We're pretty much a stick in the mud about it. It drives them crazy. Most people do what they want to do training wise, they don't do what they need to do and as a habit, we want to do the things that people want to clap and pat us on the back for, they're going to clap for us, they're going to make us look good. We're going to get a lot positive attention from it and we don't want to address the things that we're weak, that we're bad at, that make us look less than our best and for most adults, that's their mobility.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Christopher Sommer: That's their mobility. In a perfect world, our foundation goes through foundation 1, foundation 2, foundation 3, and foundation 4. Some was a stud, they could finish all four courses in two months. It has as never happen. Now if someone who is a level world class athlete or even just a national class athlete, they're going to cruise through it. They're not going to notice it as far as a gymnast. But most other people, they're coming in, they're not nearly as studly as the as they thought they were.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Christopher Sommer: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: Usually, even in our jujitsu scene and being 43 years old I can usually pull off a lot of interesting things that people kind of flabbergasted by and when I started motoring through any of the gymnastics progressions, I ended up a hitting brick wall pretty quickly. It's interesting now, it's the mobility that is definitely the limiter like that's why I really shifted gears

into the maintenance with thoracic and hip mobility so much because those things seemed to be so transitory like if I'm not staying up on top of them, they go away incredibly quickly.

Christopher Sommer: Yeah. I run into the same. So for a number of years, I was my own worst student, right? For a number of years, I was a full--

Robb Wolf: Hey, folks, we had a little internet breakdown there. Coach, you mentioned being your own worst enemy on your training for a period of time.

Christopher Sommer: Very good. So what happened guys is I was running two full-time jobs. I was a full-time national team coach and running GymnasticBodies at that time because GymnasticBodies has become a huge company and my own training took the backseat and for those few years of necessity, right? Those are the things that had to be done at that time. However, once that was taken care of and it was time--I had the time and the opportunity now one full-time job which I really, really like having one job now.

Robb Wolf: Amazing. Yeah.

Christopher Sommer: But I was not worried about building strength. I wasn't concerned about building strength. Strength is very straight forward. Strength is very easy to do but I was more concerned with regaining lost mobility and doing joint rehab and making sure the joints were prepared ahead of time before going back into the street work. That's far more important because I've been down that road. I think all of us have been down that road where we put the horse in front of the cart in front of the horse and just doesn't work well.

First, you build physical structure that can handle the kind of training you want to place upon it. We don't decide the kind of training that we're going to do a training that were going to do ahead of time and then kind of force the body to perform at level that it's not prepared to do. So a little more patience perhaps not as exciting, not as sexy. Well but notice it's the older war dog who already have the battle scars from doing it wrong in the first place were the patient once.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Christopher Sommer: Its always the young guns who think that they're superman that they're invulnerable that they're going to be in the next X-men movie that think the rules don't apply to them and we get them all the time and we tell

them the same thing, you should slow down a little bit and is that khakiness that goes with being young. Those rules just apply to other people, coach. I say okay somehow you're different than the thousands upon thousands that I've worked with, you go ahead, buddy. They blow themselves up and then they come back. Coach, you were right. I was like really. Well, that's really shocking.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs].

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Christopher Sommer: But for most people, yeah I know I'm a smart ass. I can't help it. For most people if they would just invest kind of and I'm not saying not to do their strength work. But if they would put their strength work on maintenance, just on maintenance and it's not a lifetime sentence and for three months make addressing their mobility and their joint prehab their primary focus in their workouts, I guarantee them at the end of that three months they're going to feel twice as good as they do right now and their strength would've maintained almost probably 80 to 90% where it is right now.

Robb Wolf: And for so many people--

Christopher Sommer: I don't see any downside.

Robb Wolf: Yeah, absolutely. And for so many people that maybe the only time that they do some somewhat planned periodized back of work on strength work or capacity work or whatever it is that is their soup du jour and I know for myself just trying to stay active in Brazilian jujitsu, injuries are just--it will sideline you for months potentially. I saw our chief of police here in Reno. He was ramping up to get his black belt and a very, very strong guy just a really good dude, very, very strong guy but about as stiff as an old desiccated piece of board and he ended up getting a biceps rupture off of trying to do a tripod sweep. He was out of the running for a good six months like he really couldn't do any training at all and ended up pushing that black belt acquisition back probably about 18 months.

Christopher Sommer: What people don't realize is when they get hurt, it wasn't just that six months of being down and hurt but it's going to take that another six months after you're finally healthy to try to get back to your previous level of performance.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Christopher Sommer: It's going to be double. It's going to be double That's expensive.

Robb Wolf: Yes, yes.

Christopher Sommer: That's expensive and so much harder to get back in shape instead of just being a little patient. There isn't a high level athlete on the planet. Now we have to qualify this. We all know someone who is a natural athlete. They didn't have to train for it. They were just kind of they were born that way. They're explosive. They're fast. They're strong. They're super coordinated. They're powerful and they're definitely not the strongest guy in the weight room. I've never seen that be the case and to further support that we can also see that the stronger guys in the weight room or any maximal strength, the very strongest guys are rarely and in fact in my experience I've never seen it where they're the best athlete on the field of play and chosen sport.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Christopher Sommer: I've never seen it happen. Never ever unless it happen to be power lifting or another form of lifting but as far as athletic going out and performing a sport, I've never seen it.

Robb Wolf: John Welbourn has a great program out of his Power Athlete, kind of ecosystem that's called *Field Strong* and he makes that point too that weight room numbers are fantastic but the impressive people are the folks that what he calls field strong. It's interesting you know John being a 6' 5" and around 300 pounds, has a good martial arts background, did a lot of tumbling as a kid and has maintained that work in his strength and conditioning program even though he's catering towards people that tend to be more in the Clydesdale division, you know?

They're 200 plus pounds as the little guys that are following his work and it's pretty funny the amount of wining that he gets in this mobility and maintenance work that he throws in here. He will consistently make the point that if your back squatting a lot right now I'm not sure how much more benefit you're going to get from sticking another 50 or 100 pounds on your back squat but if you got some sort of huge asymmetry, anterior, posterior, right, left or something like that, thoracic instability or something. That's the thing that's going to take you down. It's not only going to limit performance but potentially you're going to get injured and again we're in that rehab story.

Christopher Sommer: Another way to consider it and it's the same thing it's just in simpler words is that the injury is always going to occur to the weakest link.

Robb Wolf: Uh-huh.

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Christopher Sommer: It's not going to happen to the primary mover. It's going to the joint. It's going to be the connective tissue or consider this very rarely does someone have an injury to the muscle belly, to the muscle itself. It's rare. Most injuries happen within the joint, happen to the connective tissue that's where the joints and the injuries occur, right? Where they got stiff, it wasn't their maximal strength. It was their mobility or the lack thereof, right? Or the lack of joint balance or joint strength that led to the injury.

Robb Wolf: Right, right. Coach, I meant to ask you this earlier and I forgot to do it when you were talking about Jefferson curls. What's a reasonable way for folks to take Jefferson curls? Like what's a reasonable progression starting with the dowel is reasonable today like three sets a 10 and then put a 2.5 pound plate on it, do that 3 sets of 10 three times a week. Like what's a reasonable progression that folks could start exploring the Jefferson curl?

Christopher Sommer: If we just want a super simple approach?

Robb Wolf: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Christopher Sommer: Remember, it's important also that our Jefferson curl work on other stuff. It doesn't exist in isolation, right? There're other components of the training and mobility that goes with it but accepting those parameters just Jefferson curl itself then I would start with just bodyweight. Now it's important that they understand what a Jefferson curl is, is that they're going to be upright. They're going to keep the hips pressed forward so that they stay underneath the shoulders and we're going to start them with staying upright, put that chin right on the chest and then trying to keep the hips pressed forward, curl downward one vertebrae at a time.

We want to work all that connective tissue, those ligaments in between each vertebrae. Now they can go as low as they're welcome to. The only place I don't want them hanging out in this range of motion as if they were tight enough at the bottom of their move, they couldn't go past horizontal. Meaning I wouldn't want them be standing there with locked knees and kind of 90-degree bend right there because that's a lot of shear on someone who's really tight so if someone finds that their range of motion, easy to avoid just bend the knee slightly right then.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

Christopher Sommer: Yeah, super simple fix. That'll just drop them for that little bit and it's a temporary solution just until they get past horizontal then that knees drop and they'll drop them past horizontal and they just kind of work right there and floss it. Because they've got to understand also is that this fascia, this connective tissue see they're going to picture that it's just, it's localized to the lower back only and it's not. It's not. It's this huge piece of fascia that basically runs from the neck all the way down to the bottom of their feet and it goes all the way out of the side of the shoulder and then works down.

It's a huge thick piece of fascia and it's so strong and it's so durable because this is what holds you together. You don't want it to be fragile. You don't want to be fragile at all. It's very powerful. There's a lot of nervous tissue in there as well. So we have to work it gradually. They have to understand that when we're doing any kind of mobility work that this is looked at in periods of months and so to that end, I don't know to on a regular basis. I don't know if I would do multiple sets of 10. I would probably do a single set of 10 each training day and then every once in a while, the block or maybe I do multiple sets.

Robb Wolf: Got you. Got you. Would you do the Jefferson curl before--let's say that somebody is really going to tackle their mobility work in a very dedicated fashion. They're going to look at that Jefferson curl and the back bridge is some of their primary focus. Would you do the Jefferson curl before or after their other strength maintained work, let's say they're doing three sets of 5 squat, three sets of 5 deadlift?

Christopher Sommer: They won't like my answer.

Robb Wolf: Just drop that strength work entirely. [Laughs].

Christopher Sommer: No. They don't have to drop their strength work but to my mind if they do Jefferson curl, I would put it first and then if they're finding that their back is so fatigued from doing that Jefferson curl work that they can't do their other work. To my mind the answer is obvious they're not physically prepared to be doing that other work.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

[0:40:00]

Christopher Sommer: So to my mind you know, they're going to say well coach negative, and we get this from lifters. Coach it's having a negative impact I say well that's because you found a weak link right now. So temporarily, you're going to have to cool your jets and you're going to have to address this.

So we had for example a really great student of ours Matt Duvine who works for special forces and that guys on the east coast. Matt is a beast. He is a beast. I think his back is as wide as two normal muscular guys.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Christopher Sommer: You know, cleaning jerks over 400 pounds. He had gone through a period of time where in fact he just finished it where he couldn't squat for a year, couldn't squat for a year and but this is before he got involved with us where he had done all the things he was told to do and he was a tough guy. You know, you're going to push through it, you're going to push through it. Men push through things. Men push through things. Rather than find a solution of what's causing this. It has nothing to do with being tough. We have to be tough and smart. But being tough alone and being able to take pain is good enough, we wouldn't have to train. We just go around and smash our head into the wall a bunch of times.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Christopher Sommer: Yeah it's not – we have to be smart. So Matt found, and I feel the same, we've taught this to Matt, is that the lower back's job, the core's job is that it's high endurance muscle. That its function in life. It's not designed to be primarily a high intensity single rep muscle. It's not its job. I mean think about it. It's ludicrous if you think about it that there's a caveman somewhere. He throw something on his shoulder and it's super heavy. He can take a few steps and he's got to sit down and take a break.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Christopher Sommer: This is not easy –he's not going to survive, it's not going to work. So we put Matt through our core system, core training where it's more higher rep work. So just for example our core workout for our master class guys starts with five sets of 20 arch-ups or back extensions right and that's just the beginning of getting – that's not the workout. That's like the very first thing out of like 15 exercises. He got down he spent a few months doing this stuff. He said coach, for the first time in a year I threw 300 pounds on the bar. I haven't squatted in a year. Pain free in the knees, pain free in the lower back and he said what freed me coach was that it was effortless.

Robb Wolf: Hmm.

Christopher Sommer: It was effortless. He said I didn't even notice. It was like I said it actually freaked me out. We're getting unfortunately what I would like to see is

we're getting a lot of people who had chronic injuries and of course these are the people who are motivated. They're in pain, performance levels have dropped and they're looking for a solution. Okay. These guys they're going to find it. It's on their mind all the time. And look at the improvements they have. Now let's look at the flipside of that. Not just with my athletes but if we can get more people who are healthy to start taking this seriously and address these imbalances before they become chronic, before they break, what's that going to for their level of athletic performance? It's just going to skyrocket it.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Christopher Sommer: Now unfortunately we learned the hard way right. IT's got to break so we have to get slapped in the face before we actually take it seriously.

Robb Wolf: Yup. I have had that a time or two and I loved Dan John's witticism. He who has himself as a coach has an idiot for a coach. Yeah.

Christopher Sommer: Right.

Robb Wolf: I've suffered from that quite a bit. [Laughs] So good, Coach it's been fantastic having you on the show. Where can folks track you down?

Christopher Sommer: Oh goodness. We've got a lot of stuff available forum. So GymnasticBodies.com is the primary website. Gigantic forum there coming up on 200,000 posts all gymnastics training specific. little shy of 18,000 active members there. We have a very active Facebook page, GymnasticBodies.com. Lots of great stuff we put up there every day. My personal page ChristopherSommer's a little more walk on the wild side. You get a glimpse inside the mad mind of a national team coach. You may or may not want to go under that page.

Robb Wolf: Right. [Laughs]

Christopher Sommer: Let's see. We have as far as training we get all different people. We get from our handstand challenge, we had 18,000 people participating in our New Year's handstand challenge where we give them a 60 second blurb or a workout to follow for the day to online classes where they follow our instructors along to our online courses ,which are really structured and individualized custom programming to seminars.

[0:45:08]

So there's a lot of information out there. I know that was a lot over. I didn't mean for it to turn into a big sales spiel that's not --

Robb Wolf: No, no, no that's what I wanted. I want folks to know it all.

Christopher Sommer: Yeah and it's not – I just want – there's people are comfortable interacting at different levels of intensity and so I just kind of giving them an idea that we have from the most casual where there are handstand challenge where it's you know, 30 to a 60 second video a day that they can follow along with all the way up to our seminars where they get hands on and I worked the holy hell out of them for two days.

Robb Wolf: Yes, you do. [Laughs]

Christopher Sommer: [Laughs] That's right. You survived that.

Robb Wolf: Yeah. I survived it. My calf raise experience I was walking kind of gingerly for about a week after that but I'll tell you what, that did. At least twice a week, I get 150 to 200 reps of calf raises in various positions and I will never ever be sore like that again. [Laughs]

Christopher Sommer: Well you know, we get blow back from that occasionally because there's a lot of calf work in our front split series because it's hamstringing, but a lot of people say well coach why are we doing calves? I say well you know it's for your geniuses who slept through biology, last time I checked you know, calf was part of the lower leg.

Robb Wolf: Right, right. Yeah I think some of the muscles go from the upper leg to the lower leg and the lower leg to the upper leg and kind of help the knee articulate and stuff yeah. Yeah.

Christopher Sommer: Exactly and they're like coach why are we working calves. I said well because you would like a pike position so we have to train all the muscles not just half of them.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs] Well if we just cut people off at the knees then they would have an amazing pike.

Christopher Sommer: They would have a great pike. They're running time would probably suffer but --

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Christopher Sommer: Running would suck but they would be ring specialists too so.

Robb Wolf: Yeah.

Christopher Sommer: They're not wrecking anyway so may be it's all good.

Robb Wolf: That's true. Well Coach it's always a blast having you on the show. I really appreciate your time. Very, very impressed with everything that you've done. I've been hanging on your coattails since way back at the dragon door days when you did your first couple of articles on gymnastics strength training. So it's just been amazing to see the overnight 15-year success of Gymnastics Bodies.

Christopher Sommer: [Laughs] Isn't it funny how that is?

Robb Wolf: Right.

Christopher Sommer: Over 15 year.

Robb Wolf: Yeah, yeah.

Christopher Sommer: Well thank you Robb. I always enjoy our conversations.

Robb Wolf: Well thanks. I'm looking forward to the next time you come on the show Coach. We'll talk to you soon.

Christopher Sommer: Alright, have a good one my friend.

Robb Wolf: Okay. You too. bye-bye.

Christopher Sommer: Bye.

[0:47:37] End of Audio