

Paleo Solution - 368

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Robb: Hey, folks, Robb Wolf here, another edition of the Paleo Solution podcast. Today's guest is Ashleigh Gass. Ashleigh holds a master's degree in human and clinical nutrition. She is a certified sports nutritionist as well as a certified strength and conditioning specialist. She was recently picked up by Devil Dog Arms as an accomplished tactical shooter. We're going to talk about that a bit. In addition to maintaining an incredible level of physical performance, Ashleigh is developing one of the first Gymnastics Bodies Affiliate gyms in the world and that is located in what city in Florida?

Ashleigh: We're in Clearwater.

Robb: Clearwater, Florida. Okay. I was just out in Pensacola. So, it's still a good push away from you, but welcome to the show.

Ashleigh: Thanks, man. Thanks for having me. I've been fortunate enough to join a pretty sophisticated crowd of Gymnastic Bodies Affiliates. We've got several now, Sidney, Arizona, Canada, also in Florida, we've got DC and, of course, Awaken in Denver, which is like the American headquarters for Gymnastic Bodies or a gymnastics inspired strength training. So, there's a few of us around the world and, I think, we're very fortunate to have been given the opportunity by Sommer to develop our work under him. Thank you for that.

Robb: Absolutely. I've been a huge fan and advocate of the Gymnastics Bodies system for, man, I mean, ever since he came out on dragon door ages ago with like the planche and the front lever progressions. I've been following Coach Sommer and he's been an incredible personal friend, just a brilliant guy. Like folks really sometimes don't appreciate what a smart dude he is. He has a fascinating background in both linguistics and mathematics, code breaking, in addition to being like an uber high level gymnastics coach.

I love that guy and he's been a huge supporter of me. And clearly, a big fan of your work. Ashleigh, let's dig into your background a little bit. Where were you born? Where are you from? What inspired you to move in this direction of health, wellness and fitness and trying to bring that out to the masses?

Ashleigh: Well, I was born in Vancouver, British Columbia in Canada. Coming off of a Leer Jet from Nelson, I was almost three months early. I guess, I was kind of in a hurry to get out into the world. So, my mom had a very easy labor, very easy birth and there I was. I grew up in Victoria in Vancouver Island. My folks threw my brother and I into sports from an early age and we grew up running around, playing in

the dirt, doing gymnastics, playing tag in the front yard. We just kind of did everything. We were raised as athletes.

Robb: Nice. So, I mean, lots and lots of folks end up with an initial steeping and athletics. But what really struck you that this was kind of your career path?

Ashleigh: Well, I just had such a huge affinity for athletics and sports and I was good at anything physical so it was a combination of just loving -- I love the human physique, I loved muscles, I loved watching male and female athletes that were ripped and just had beautiful physiques. I drew them growing up not very well but I certainly did my best. So, I just was fascinated with human movement and athletics and just happened to be good at most of it myself and I think that--

I was a gymnast for the first nine years of my life and that, I think, for folk's recent kids, I think it's pretty important to get your kids involved in gymnastics or martial arts or body weight oriented sports because it gives, it seems to give kids such an advantage just from a kinesthetic awareness and we certainly had that. So, it was just a combination of I loved being an athlete and I really looked up to athletes. Athletes were my, they're my idols growing up. It was all I, it was mostly all I considered doing as a profession so I just kept working in that direction through school, et cetera.

Robb: That's smart. I had a long diversion down chemistry and thoughts about medical school but, in fact, the gym was probably the best place for me to root. So, you had that figured out early on and the results had been spectacular. But you did have a pretty significant back injury. Could you talk about that a little bit? Like what happened? What was the outcome? And then how have you bounced back from that subsequently?

Ashleigh: Good question. So, I don't know how much this -- It's a bit of a genetic anomaly.

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I don't know how much this played into the injury but L5-S1 on the right side, they're what's called, basically, they're sacralized. So, L5 didn't properly detach, I guess is the word you use, from S1. And so there's always been a difference in structure and mobility unilaterally. And I was 18, 19 years old when we started weight training in high school. It was myself and six guys and we met our PE teacher at 6 o'clock in the morning, three days a week, and we just started lifting weights, bench press, squat, kind of your standard young guy stuff.

I continued down that path for a long time but I started having back problems. I started having back pain as early as 22, 23, 24. I just turned 38, so that was a while ago. You kind of go down the standard medical route of having MRI to find out what's going on and then that's what they found out about the sacralization.

Our solution at that time, my solution at that time was to sit on a tennis ball, try to work piriformis out, loosen as much as I could around the area and then every now and then you get a chiropractic adjustment or get some ART but just keep going and going and going.

I just never let pain stop -- It would slow me down but I would never stop what I was doing despite being told, "Well, you have to stop lifting. You have to stop." I mean, that's kind of what we're all told. "There's something more. Just stop doing it." At that time, no one -- We had some good ART chiropractors, like active release technique chiropractors. But their depth of knowledge to train, to go, "You know what, this girl is super strong. She's a great athlete. She's playing varsity soccer. She's weight training all the time. But she's not doing spinal mobility work. She's not training core properly despite having phenomenal abs."

I've always had pretty good abs. Just the dimension -- Christopher Sommer wasn't around at that time. He was coaching Olympic gymnast. If someone like Sommer had gotten his hands on me 15 years ago, the back injury probably wouldn't have happened. But that was the evolution of it. It started as a bit of chronic problem. MRI images showed advanced degenerative changes way early in my life.

And what did we do? We just kept going and made slight changes and fast forward probably to around age 31, 32 is when I would get far along enough the pain spectrum that I would be debilitated for a few days but I'd hang out on the lacrosse ball, foam roll. You know the deal. You do what you do until you feel better and you can move again and then you gradually resume all your training activities. I got to say it worked reasonably well for 15, 16 years and then it did start to break down.

There was bulging. There was a little bit of herniation but nothing that affected lower extremities. And then the day finally came where I think I was -- I just turned 36, I think, and I was with clients in the morning. I had a couple weeks of discomfort to the sacrum and just wasn't able to resolve it. And I wasn't lifting. I was just working and it blew. I've listened to your story many times. The first time your back blew you used to make fun of folks going through physical therapy and they walk in--

Robb: Oh god, I was horrible. Yeah.

Ashleigh: You'd kind of look at them and you go, "Man, you guys are a bunch of wimps." But when it happens big, you're literally crawling around tears flowing. And that was me for about half a day. I had a good friend who's a DO around here. He came just -- I was just face first on my floor and he let himself into my condo and gave me a couple of good injections and within an hour I was up and walking around and thinking that I had escaped another bout.

That night, I had just the freakiest night of my life just neurologically. The glutes started shutting down, my hamstrings started shutting down. Just my whole left leg went through convulsions and numbness and then I woke up in the morning and half my foot was numb, the calf started to not work and it was really, really freaky. But I played it off to something that would pass.

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I'm stubborn to the point of stubborn to death probably and within 24 hours I have lost sensation and function of my foot. The calf started to go. And by the end of 48-hour period, my colleagues -- Dr. Dale Buchberger is a long, long term friend of mine and he is considered the coach shoulder guy in the country, but he's also exceptionally smart with all injuries and he's known me for a number of years.

So, I called him and he goes, "Well, you got to get yourself on the prednisone pack real quick to slow down the inflammatory processes going on right now, just to try to calm things down." I went that direction. That only lasted for about 24 hours. Prednisone is brutal and it's very upsetting to the stomach. So, that was kind of the -- That was how it started. Just a week had passed and the foot was still numb. I had lost almost three inches off my calf and going, "Shit. This might actually be kind of serious."

I continued to do the basic fundamentals of training, glute bridging. When in doubt, in my opinion, when in doubt and when in pain or when in dysfunction, you still got to try to train what works, basic stuff, glute bridges, bird dogs, kind of the Stu McGill side of the coin a little bit just to keep some activation patterns going. Because what are you going to do? Sit on the couch?

I kept walking. I kept moving. I had an MRI done and that was when we really knew things were serious because on the MRI, it was very obvious that there was a seven millimeter disk blowout with a likely fragment around the S1 nerve route, which actually ironically is the same injury -- You've heard Peter Attia's story, Robb?

Robb: Yes. Yeah.

Ashleigh: Okay. Same injury.

Robb: Right.

Ashleigh: Okay. So, when Dr. Buchberger saw the MRI, he phoned me right away and he said, "Ash, you need a neurosurgeon consult immediately." I experienced -- I don't really experience fear a lot with anything but that was -- I had five minutes

of legitimate "uh-oh I'm in trouble" kind of fear. Like, "Man, okay, so you mean I'm walking around and my foot is numb, my leg is numb, I'm walking like I have a bit of a broken ankle. All right."

I got on the plane to Miami the next week to see the Miami Dolphin's neurosurgeon, had a consult with him, and then met with a guy locally in Clearwater, Dr. Chris Mickler, who ended up doing the neurosurgery. I wasn't in pain. So, neurosurgeons, when you go into back surgery and you have your classic sharp sciatic pain where you can barely function you hurt so much, neurosurgeons are very optimistic with the outcome.

They know you're going to wake up and you're not going to be in pain anymore. With me and with folks that just have total neurological dysfunction and sensory deprivation, they're like, "Well, you're not in pain, so I actually -- We don't know how this is going to work out. I mean, we can remove the disk fragments around the S1 nerve. We can clean up the damage. However, whether you're going to get the Achilles reflex back again or whether you're going to be able to sprint again, we don't know." Because nerve regeneration is a millimeter a day, and you do the math from L4 L5 all the way down to the heel, that's a lot of days and slow growth.

Robb: Right, right.

Ashleigh: So, that was just -- That was kind of the entry point. I really like Chris Mickler because he was super optimistic, young guy, very positive, and he just said, "It's Wednesday. What are you doing on Friday morning?" I said, "Well, I've booked a neurosurgery, is what I'm doing." So, I went in and he cleaned things up, plopped the disk fragments off of the S1 nerve route. I woke up feeling how I felt when I went in. It was numb and nothing had changed. I wasn't in pain coming in and I wasn't in pain coming out.

I just started to re-train things right away. I started to re-train calf function. When you lose that function you can't plantar flex from any position. You can fight and fight but your body won't do it. However, I use like assisted calf raises. I held on to barbells. I just trained everything knowing and trusting that my body would figure it out and that one day that neurological function would come back because Mickler was clear. He said, "Ash, there was no damage or significant atrophy to the S1 nerve root which feeds the legs."

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So, that, I just went -- I ran off of that and long story short I had a show, a figure show. At that time I was competing so there was a show in Tampa, a little over three months after neurosurgery, after that date, and I just thought, "Well, if can actually walk in high heels again, which you'll lose that ability real fast when you

can't planar flex, but I just kind of promised myself I'm going to try to compete in the show granted I can maneuver myself on stage in high heels and not fall over.

So, I did. I ended up competing and placing second overall at that show. My entry, I was able to continue to train everything upper body. I was able to do most core work. I hadn't come across Sommer at that time. I was able to do a lot of unilateral leg training. That's kind of the beauty of spine injuries in my experience is that we're told not to lift and not to lift anything over five pounds.

I found that personally, and for many of my clients recovering from different injuries, that it's pretty misleading. And, in fact, there's this whole world of unilateral leg training that can be done. One is single leg work, single leg hamstring works, single leg glute hamstring works. And I just really focused on what I could do. I ignored the stuff that I was told I couldn't do. And I really moved on, competed in the show.

And about two weeks after that, I came across your interview with Coach Sommer. And, of course, when he -- Remember, he referred to back injuries in Allen who had had three months away from his care and wound up just tweaking his back a little bit? Yeah, that interview, thank you for doing that because without that interview I don't think I would have ever -- I would have found Sommer's material but it was at that point back injury's got my attention because going through school and I really believed from what I'm seeing that this holds true today is in kinesiology programs and physical therapy programs and back rehab programs, the depth of knowledge on training the spine and especially rehabbing the spine is really limited to pretty much like glute bridges, neutral spine planks, neutral spine this, neutral spine that.

When I heard Coach Sommer talk about it, I just thought I really need to study this because despite 15 years of taking every continuing Ed course I could take on rehab, we were stuck in neutral spine.

Robb: Right. And not all of your life can be done in neutral spine. Not forever and not for always.

Ashleigh: Exactly. So, came across Sommer's material and took a look at it, bought the Foundations program right away. And Foundations program is the combination of foundation one through four where you start to learn the basic progression of all seven elements, front lever, side lever, manna, single leg, squat, rope climb. Admittedly, and I've talked to Sommer about this, we laugh about it now, I really carry picked the material for a while because -- You're familiar with Foundations right?

Robb: Yeah, yeah.

Ashleigh: So, you know when you look at, for me anyway, when I looked at front lever level one, bent knee hollow body hold, I was like, "Really? Like that's--?"

Robb: Right, right.

Ashleigh: And then you look at bent knee hollow body rocks and I'm like, "Okay, this guys is like rocking around on the floor." I don't need to do that.

Robb: Right, right. The funny thing about the Gymnastics Bodies course is it's a little bit like a bad drinking game on an empty stomach. Like you go into it kind of cocksure and you think you're just going to blast right through it and then it's like you've managed to get that sixth or seventh shot of tequila down the pie hole empty stomach and then you're like, "Oh, I've gone far, far into the bad place." And so it is funny. It starts off almost laughably simple, at least in appearance, and then you're like, "Wow, okay, I'm like a bug against the windshield with this."

Ashleigh: Yeah. You're like, "Here I am rocking on the floor with my knees bent and I've done 25 reps. I feel like I'm going to puke." And then you go to do the first mobility drills, table holds and table rocks and they're going, my shoulder extension is brutal. I feel like I'm getting annihilated here. And, yeah. You know the deal.

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Robb: That's so interesting. I mean, Coach Sommer's approach to -- and I don't even know if I will call that back rehab or prehab or just his system. It involves some stuff that just freaks people out like the Jefferson curl. I've got to say that I think that that has been like absolutely -- Two things for me that I've really ferreted out. Somewhere along the line I ceased training my obliques in an effective fashion.

And part of that, I think, is just getting lazy and busy and you just kind of whittle the program down to the bare minimum, which you kind of have to do. But somewhere along the line I neglected my obliques. And then also that neutral spine thing again. I do a lot of Brazilian jujitsu and there's just -- There isn't neutral spine in Brazilian jujitsu. It's not going to exist. I might as well give up if I can't find a situation in which I'm experiencing low back flexion. And potentially a little bit under load, not that I want to use my back as a force generator but, I mean, it's just going to happen.

And if I don't bring my body to that spot under a controlled circumstance, how on earth am I going to deal with it in a randomized situation like jujitsu? What are your thoughts around all that? I mean, people freak out. Like there was like a 200 comment thread one day. I don't know if it was you doing the Jefferson curl

or somebody else but, I mean, people were freaked out over this. It was like Sommer was eating kittens on a barbecue stick or something.

Ashleigh: I know. I think I've seen, I've been a part of those threads and I posted a video of a Jefferson curl four days ago of me --

Robb: Right.

Ashleigh: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And people seem to freak out a little bit less but it certainly throws up the red flag. And, yeah, it's real interesting. And just to sort of go back a little bit, because we have a bit of a common thread, you said you'd stopped training obliques for a while, and admittedly and embarrassingly so had I through about, I don't know, probably three years in the figure world because--

Robb: Because it thickens up your waist, yeah.

Ashleigh: Exactly. And I look back and I go, "Man, what a dumb ass for buying into that." But I did buy into it because I was going off of the advice of women that had been competing for several years and had these super little itty bitty waist lines and I thought, well, maybe doing too much planking work is causing some problems so I stopped obliques for about three years too, at least from a plank perspective. I stretch out every now and then but what a dumbass mistake that was.

Robb: Right.

Ashleigh: Yeah. Jefferson curl is really an interesting one. And there's, I believe that there's multiple mechanisms at play and I really need to have a chat with a neurosurgeon friend of mine, Yani Beldibia, up in Tampa who actually read my last MRI findings. And all I can say, I think just a couple mechanisms that actually, it kind of played here, but for myself, Jefferson curls have served as really good posterior chain stretch but they're also -- I use them as a bit of diagnostic tool now to see how I'm doing through cervical and thoracic spine protraction because I have a tendency to get super jacked and really tight through the rhomboids, the shoulder blades, through the cervical spine.

And if I'm not moving smoothly into a Jefferson curl, it's almost always because I've just let stuff above the lumbar spine get so tight that flexion just doesn't feel good and I have to use Jefferson curls as a means of mobilizing myself. Ironically, first thing in the morning, and it's the first thing in the morning -- Remember the whole quote "between nine and noon time" that the -- And I don't want to bash McGill because he does phenomenal work but it is -- He speaks very often about how folks with those back injuries need to avoid flexion early in the mornings up to about noon to just allow everything to move properly without forcing it.

But I found that I actually have to train flexion early in the morning in order to just smooth out any glitches. Jefferson curls have several mechanisms. One of them is just stretching out all the posterior stuff that gets ignored during the day and there seems to be something to just making sure the spine can handle a little bit under load or not, and can handle extension. So, I think, that comes down to some, just set joint mobilization and some of the, just getting some of the ligaments, I guess, just non-decrepit.

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Robb: Right, right. Some of the work that I've done has been some McKenzie method work which was definitely helpful and it's interesting how they go about ferreting out a back issue and the way that they use extension to deal with certain elements to that. One of the recommendations that was made was this thing called a flexion extension sandwich.

So, like I would basically figure out some sort of movement like the Jefferson curl either loaded or unloaded, get a certain number of reps on that, and then I would chase it with some sort of an extension movement either a standing extension, kind of like going into a back bridge type of beginning movement, and/or like a prone on the floor extension. Or if I've got a back extension device doing that. Have you played around much with that, with that flexion extension sandwich stuff?

Ashleigh: Absolutely. Yeah, that's really smart you've done that. I've kind of developed a little bit of something, you may have seen it on video, post called... In the gymnastics world, I'm calling it stacking. So, I'm stacking elements. And flexion extension has been one of them. So, I'll often do -- Are you familiar, Robb, with the green back strap?

Robb: Yes. Yeah, yeah. I think I've seen you go through that, yeah.

Ashleigh: Yeah. So, that's just one way or, I guess, one tool to use to pair flexion and extension within a repetition.

Robb: Right. Ashleigh, describe that for folks. I wish that we had a video going here. Maybe we can track some of that down and put it in the show notes but describe that. You're using typically some stall bars and then the strap and then how do you apply that?

Ashleigh: Yeah. Good question. So, stall bars. Most people are going to be familiar what stall bars are. The back strap is hooked. The back strap is available on the Gymnastics Bodies website under the tab GEAR. So, the strap is connected to the stall bar. Your feet are going to be on, say, the bottom stall bar and the strap just

goes around your hip bones. It's actually in the early stage of side lever development, all the low back work.

What that looks like is you'd start, say, upright and fold vertebrae at a time. So, flexion in certain parts of Gymnastics Bodies is really emphasized to take it slow speed, one vertebrae at a time. So, you get yourself into flexion including cervical spine. So, you're almost standing up height. From there, you would curl starting from the sacrum and curl all the way up into extension including the cervical spine and then fold back down again, starting tucking the chin into the chest folding back down into flexion, and so on and so forth.

So that you've done what essentially ends up being, and folks will know in the gym as an incline back extension or a back extension on what would be an incline machine rather than a horizontally oriented machine, of which there's nothing wrong with that. It's just when you're using a back strap you do end up in that incline position to do it.

Robb: And you're able to get that front-end range of movement whereas like a 45-degree back extension or something like that, like you just hit the floor, so that's kind of the benefit there.

Ashleigh: Yeah.

Robb: What type of sets, reps and frequency do you hit with that stuff?

Ashleigh: With the movement like an arch up?

Robb: Yeah, yeah.

Ashleigh: I personally, when I'm doing -- Again, it's in the side lever family. So, I'll work anywhere. There's a sequence called spine series that starts with flexion extension and then goes -- So, say, you do ten arch ups or I personally get no benefit at ten so I'll run between 15 and 20 reps of arch ups and then I'll stay in an upright position and twist left to right slow speed, say I'll do 20 twists, and I'll do something called -- I call it a suspended side over arch that then translates into oblique work.

So, I'll shift sideways and then I'm arching down and up in an oblique oriented fashion. I call that spine, or Coach calls that spine series. Typically, that's done three days a week, several sets a day three days a week, and then you get to the point where you start to add some weight as you get stronger and work that way. But these sets and reps on spine work typically higher volume as opposed to lower volume heavier weight.

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Robb: Yeah, totally makes sense. Well, it's, man, again, encouraging people to just noodle on some of this stuff. I know that the Jefferson curl and some of its derivatives can really freak people out. Keep in mind you can load that thing with a pencil in the beginning. It's very much a mobility and, like you said, a fantastic diagnostic tool. If you were incapable -- Some people get pretty good at maintaining that neutral spine position but then they can't do anything but a hip hinge.

And then if ever in their life they're called upon to do something other than a hip hinge that involves actually some sacral lumbar flexion, there could be some real problems there. So, I've been such a huge fan of that whole sequence. But again, it's almost ridiculous the huge variety of progression. And I will not call it scaling but progression that's available. Like you could start off with just empty hands and just work that mobility element. Sometimes I'll do that and then I'll go to one single 20-pound weight and then 220-pound weight and that's kind of the -- about 40 pounds loaded is about where I'm functioning on that right now. I feel really good.

Ashleigh: And you find that transferring over to jujitsu very well?

Robb: Yeah. Because as I've been consistent with that and have been really good on my mobility breaks during the day, and incorporating more dedicated oblique work, like my low back pain is just gone. It just doesn't happen anymore. Even when I have to sit for extended periods of time. Like I just had to do a pretty nasty round of back to back travel. Normally, sitting on the plane, like I'll try to diaphragmatically breathe and do different things. It's just like it's peeing in the wind for me usually.

Whereas this time, like I get off the plane and do a little mobility and I would do a little left-right stuff to kind of adjust my SI joint and everything and then I was totally good to go. And as soon as I got home I did some first unloaded Jefferson curls sandwich with some extension and then I worked up into some loaded stuff and that was really all that I did and I felt amazing. This is one of the things that maybe you could provide some insight on.

Some of this core and trunk work is time consuming. It's not that sexy. It's not beach muscles. Part of your deal is physique competitor and your physique is to some degree your brand. How do you prioritize all that stuff between the jacked elements of pressing and pulling and these big macro movements versus needing to fit in some prehab and rehab?

Ashleigh: Honestly, it's, I think I started to -- Way back, I think it was about a year and a half ago now, I went to the first level one seminar in Texas, first Gymnastics Bodies, the first level that I had been to. It was really embarrassing because

there were about 50 of us in a crossfit gym and all of us were crucified on the most basic of work, elbow twisting side planks. It's a side level progression level two. And Coach crushed us at ten reps on the left, ten reps on the right, ten reps on the left, ten reps -- I mean, it's embarrassing. Everybody was done.

That's kind of the weekend I realized how much work I had to do and it also made me realize how much payoff potential there was because I went into that seminar and my neck would bother me from time and time. I was starting to wake up tight in my thoracic spine and just going, "What's going on? Why is all this happening?" After that weekend, most of that had resolved.

So, I just forced myself to apply the mobility work to my strength work and super studied the progressions and I just started to incorporate it into my lifting to the degree that I woke up one day and I go to the gym and I realized I can actually train sets of 12 pull ups and I've never been able to do this volume in my life. And it's got nothing to do with anything other than healthier shoulders, healthier connective tissue and time.

Robb: Right.

Ashleigh: I think we all get to the point and, I guess, the western world of strength conditioning is fabulous at making folks strong but there's just -- We're not raised and we do not go to school and learn anything about mobility and so we're just deprived of it for so long. If you spend enough time on mobility work incorporated into your strength work you'll get to the point where you realize you're getting better and better and better and it's not because you've been lifting more. It's because you've learned mobility work. When that light bulb went off, like okay. I don't really need to weight lift as much as I have in the past.

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Robb: Right, right.

Ashleigh: And I'm not going to get any worse and I'm not going get fat. The only way I'm going to get fat is if I give up and--

Robb: If you get injured, you can't move basically.

Ashleigh: If you get injured, you can't move and live on oatmeal and bananas.

Robb: Right, right.

Ashleigh: (laughing) ...carbs.

Robb: Nice, nice. It's interesting. And, I think, that that's one of, again, not to -- This is not, in fact, a paid broadcast for Gymnastics Bodies but, I, again, just really love the program. But it is interesting that you rarely see strength and mobility work coupled in any type of fashion. That's kind of an interesting thing too because within standard strength and conditioning circles like mobility or any type of stretching is perceived to reduce rate of force development and stuff like that. And so we tend to separate these things out, which make it both time inefficient.

And I'm not really sure that really represents the world at large. When I'm doing, again, jujitsu or combatives, to the degree I need to express strength and mobility, they're not separated there. They're absolutely woven together. And it's not to say you can't unpack those and work them separately but it is fascinating to me that however he arrived at it, Coach Sommer integrated those strength and mobility pieces and he's iterated on that over years. It's operating at a pretty remarkably high level.

Ashleigh: Yeah. You're right. And just on that note, I'm just wondering your thoughts on this because I think we both went through that phase where the research was dominant or at least the appearance of the research was dominant, whether it is today or not I'm not sure, but you don't want to do too much stretching during training or you'll "shut down" the muscles and vastly decrease power output, et cetera.

But I have yet to see, I have to yet to feel it in myself ever, and I have yet to see it anyone that I've ever worked with. Having said that, it's not like we're doing an hour long stretch and then doing what I'm doing, sprint work right after. I mean, there's -- What have you seen in that regard?

Robb: This is super anecdotal N=1 stuff. But when I was power lifting in my youth I was also involved in kickboxing. I would do a set of squats or dead lifts and in between the set of squats or dead lifts I would get into and hold either a front or a side split. And I wasn't holding it for minutes on end. It was maybe 30 seconds or something like that. But I got up to squatting almost 600 pounds at 181 pounds body weight and I could just go from standing straight up and dropping to the front or side splits. And I could kick an apple off your head at like 600 miles an hour.

That was pretty good. And, interestingly, over the course of time, I just kind of like got out of doing that. I don't know, could I have squatted over 600 pounds without doing that? Maybe. I don't know. But I was quite injury free. I still felt pretty good. My hips would get a little cranky from that degree of loading. On that frame getting up raw, power lifter, 19 years old squatting and dead lifting close to 600 pounds, that's pretty legit numbers.

Yes. So, I mean, that's really been my experience. And then also, I guess, when I was doing capoeira we just tended to do a ton of handstand and bridge work and I've never in my life been able to press above body weight in a standing press except when I was doing the capoeira. So I'm like 170-ish pounds. My best standing press was like 186-188 pounds when I was doing capoeira. My shoulders were incredibly mobile and just the amount of time I was spending walking around on my hands and stuff. It ended up translating into this upper body pressing strength that I've never really been able to get out of dedicated weight training. It's kind of interesting.

Ashleigh: Yeah. Agree. Interesting. Yeah, absolutely, I see it. Yeah.

Robb: Ashleigh, talk to folks a little bit about your nutritional philosophy. You just maintain an incredible physique and I know that this is an integral part of your practice that you maintain, but talk a little bit about that. What are your influences and how do you unpack the nutrition monster?

[0:40:01]

Ashleigh: Yeah, good question. Remember when Dr. John Berardi launched Precision Nutrition 15 years ago?

Robb: Indeed, yes.

Ashleigh: The forum consisted of the six of us and we had weekly conference calls? I was one of those members. One of my colleagues in Canada, Mike Maxwell, he brought John, Dr. Berardi, to Victoria's Peak many, many, many years ago and Berardi was really my first big influence in the nutrition world because when I was going through school nutrition was just kind of -- It was everybody's guess. We didn't even have an RD program on the island at that time.

I loved and I still love his approach and I just, I really learned to time carbohydrate around the training window, which still applies today. I mean, we still, for the most part, teach folks today to enjoy, if you can tolerate it, if your blood work is decent, feed carbohydrate in a post workout window but earn your carbs. You have train first. And I followed the philosophy along with eat healthy proteins, eat healthy fats, take supplement like amino acids and creatine and some protein powder here and there. I mean, that was 15 years ago.

I've really never changed that philosophy. It's just I've refined it as the Paleo movement came out. It really never, it wasn't the grains in the first place. As I got into the competitive figure scene, of course, getting ready for your show, you have to refine and refine and refine that. But Berardi was the first influence with nutrition and I followed his philosophies for many, many years. And now, I guess,

I'm fortunate because I'm riding on 15-16 years of really good habits. I never went through a phase where I said eff it and just quit for six months.

I never, after shows, after competing, I would sort of take a week and chill a little bit. But I just never went off the rails so to speak. It was always an area of intense fascination and research for me. So, as I learned more and more and more about anti-nutrients and studied your work and studied Cordain's work then the world of autoimmunity and nutrition started to come to the forefront, I just was able to validate what guys like Berardi had been talking about from the get go and my philosophy now is very, very similar.

I still and probably always will time carbohydrate intake to the pre and/or post training window. I've been taking a couple of grams of fish oil every day for most of my adult life. I love amino acids. I love creatine. I love probiotics. I'm getting a bit more interested now in the world of ketosis and I love your book *Wired to Eat* and how you're starting to teach people to move in the direction of understanding their individual responses to carbohydrate and match that with what's currently going on in the gut.

So, that's the background I'm coming with. I keep it really simple, lots of good veggies. I don't like grains. I don't eat gluten. Lots of good proteins and amino acids. That kind of forms the foundation of my diet. And folks will laugh because around the range and traveling, I don't like sardines but I've kind of gotten known for them. And in your book, Robb. I don't know what page, I'm like, okay, maybe it's like page 300, you did talk about stocking your house full of cans of salmon and sardines and I'm like, "Yes. Robb does it too. I'm not the only one."

Robb: I've got a Costco box of sardines on my desk. But I got to tell you, some days, you're just going to be like, "Man, I don't want another damn can of sardine. I want something else." But, yeah, they're definitely handy in a pinch. That's awesome. I've got to give a huge props to John Berardi. There's been so many iterations and so much exploration around this stuff. But if you pay a little bit of attention to the immunogenic potential of food, like do people have some sort of immune response to a given food?

And then if you just think about carb tolerance and carb timing, and overlaid with a background of like nutrient density, that's kind of the whole story. I mean, you're really hard pressed to get anything more valuable out of like the totality of nutrition, which is kind of hilarious considering this podcast is going on for like eight years or whatever now and we managed to hash around this stuff and really that's what effective nutrition boils down to.

[0:45:15]

Ashleigh: Yeah, exactly. It's so simple yet I'm hard pressed to think of anything that people make more complicated.

Robb: Right, right. Oh my god. Yeah. Absolutely.

Ashleigh: Okay. "So, I've known you for five years." I'm just talking to imaginary clients. Like, "I've known you for five years. I've been working with you for three. And you have these crazy cycles of on again off again, on again-off again, I want to do this cleanse, we're going to do that cleanse, we're going to do this..." I get to a point with people and I just stop trying to help them make it work because it's just an emotional catastrophe.

Robb: Right, right.

Ashleigh: I don't have what it takes emotionally anymore to be a part of this. So, I don't know, man. Go, pray on it or whatever you need to do but just take some time and figure this out because I don't want to talk about it anymore.

Robb: Maybe what these people need is some range time to blow some energy off. Could you talk about that? Because I think that that is just such a fascinating adjunct to what you're already doing. I just have to also mention John Welbourn, the Power Athlete founder. He is a big fan of range time and is really quite good. And he has noticed just a remarkable carry over to people that aren't just good in the gym but are good athletically. It's almost a prerequisite to good tactical shooting. How did you get involved with that and kind of what's the draw for you?

Ashleigh: Yeah. Good question. I mean, coming from Canada--

Robb: And particularly being Canadian, yeah, yeah. That's a whole other thing to unpack.

Ashleigh: Let's see. I did get my concealed carry permit several years after being in the US because I just had this intuitive sense that that would be a good idea. I got that, got my first pistol which was a Smith and Wesson 40 cal which is a decent sized handgun, as you know. Didn't really do much with it for a couple of years. And then I became friends with Scott O'Hare who is a Clearwater police officer and it was laughable.

We went to an indoor range a couple of times and I didn't know what a magazine was. I didn't know how to load a round into one. I was just clueless about the whole situation despite -- I actually owned a firearm. I really hadn't done much with it. So, I spent some range time with Scott and got this at the indoor scene. And then I met Dan O'Shea, is my ex-boyfriend. He's a retired SEAL, up in Tampa.

Him and I are very close to this day. We were kind of goofing around again going to indoor ranges and he's like, "Ash, we got to find a place where you can draw from a holster." Because as you know, in an indoor range, your gun has to be on the bench in front of you. You can't have it on your person. You can't draw it from a holster. None of that. So, we found a range called Wyoming Antelope Club, which is just about 20 minutes from Clearwater, and went to the first action pistol night, which is outdoor stages, and I was terrified.

I was so nervous. There's these steel targets. We're in a group. We're very well controlled. Safety is very, very intense. I went through my first stage super slow and I just -- I really, really enjoyed it. I enjoyed the challenge of it and just -- You have to be focused in order to be precise and I like that aspect of it. I kept rolling with it. And I just decided I'm going to get as good at this as I can. And over the next few months, the guys started to talk a little bit about shooting rifles.

I didn't have a rifle. I went to rifle training night and borrowed a rifle for a while, like that. Then they started talking about shotguns. I didn't know what a shotgun was. So, I tried out a friend's pump shotgun, and like that. And then the guys are like, "Well, there's thing called 3-gun." So, I put it altogether and I've been shooting 3-gun for a little over a year. It's a really fun environment to be in because you tend to be surrounded by people that just have the same no bullshit attitude. Everybody's got your back.

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And there's some -- It's just you just kind of know when you're out there that not only does everyone have your back but you're generally not going to run into problems with personalities. Everyone is kind of squared away. So it just took time. And fast forward a year, I got to the point where I was able to resolve technical issues I was having so that when I'm out there now I know when I'm doing something wrong and I can generally fix it. So, it's fun. It's fun. I don't have fun doing crappy at something. I start to have fun when I'm getting better.

Robb: Right. Yeah. Well, don't do jujitsu then because there's a long dark tee-time of the soul where you're going to suck at that no matter what. I'm just kidding. You would probably love it. Do you do much in the way of dry fire practice, like day to day? What's the kind of repetition frequency that you do to try to get in those motor patterns? You do any type of just kind of digitalization where you close your eyes and you try to feel those motor patterns and whatnot?

Ashleigh: That's a good question. I'm studying Ben Stoeger's book right now on dry fire training to learn a bit more about it specifically. But what I do now is I find if I don't have -- If I don't handle the guns every day and if I don't reload with shotgun from my belt every day I just kind of lose the tactical sense a little bit.

Yeah, I do about half an hour a day of dry fire from a holster pistol and I'm also starting to work on drawing, doing a lot more from conceal.

And with shotgun, yeah, one of the keys to getting better at shotgun is actually -- Shotgun is fairly easy but it's loading it that you have to master because when you first start loading shotgun rounds, you're pulling from a belt or a pouch and you have to get the rounds properly, and the gun, and you have to get reasonably fast at it. So, the key there is just daily practice. So, absolutely. I do shotgun load. It's probably, yeah, I mean, all in all, it's about half an hour a day and I definitely work really hard to not skip too many days.

Usually two to three Saturdays a month there's a 3-gun match locally. It's the same group of us almost every weekend at these matches. It helps. It's turned into about three, two to three, three 3-gun matches a month and daily handling of -- I'm supposed to call them firearms. Of the firearms.

Robb: Right. Awesome. I love it, I love it. Just such a fan of you and your work. I know that it took a little bit of time to get this thing scheduled because I was absolutely smoked after the book launch and pretty much fiddle and rock making mewling noises in the floor of my office for about a week and I've finally gotten back together. But I've really been looking forward to chatting with you. Ashleigh, let folks know where they can track you down on the interwebs.

Ashleigh: Good question. So, our website is being rebuilt right now. It's called -- There's two ways to find me. There's sliceGST, so slice like a slice of pizza, GST, gymnastics strength training dot come, so slicegst.com will forward through to all the other websites that I have right now. Instagram is ashleighrgass, and Facebook is just Ashleigh Gass CSCS.

Robb: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and I can't wait to meet you in real life. I get out to Florida fairly frequently now. So, we'll have to get together and you need to take me through your tactical shooting gig and get me schooled up.

Ashleigh: Well, yeah. You bet. But another thing to think through is show up at Sommer's place in Arizona. He's all about training there. There's some interest there for those guys to do some shooting also. So, maybe we can make an Arizona trip.

Robb: That's a much quicker flight for me. So, let's do that. Yeah. I know his home gym is almost done or maybe it's done now. So, yeah, let's make that happen.

Ashleigh: Yeah. And, Robb, thanks for having me on. Your new book is fabulous. I appreciate all the information that you're sharing us. Nutrition is evolving so fast and I'm hoping that within the next five years there's just some congruency on what people are doing and how they're thinking through, what they're doing

with food and I think that you're continuing to be a big leader in that. So, thanks a lot and any updates that you're aware of and if you'll just pass them on. And thanks for all the work that you're doing.

Robb: I will do it. Well, Ashleigh, take care and I'll talk to you soon.

Ashleigh: Robb, thank you.

Robb: Okay, bye.

Ashleigh: Bye.

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