

Paleo Solution - 375

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Robb: Hey, folks, six listeners can't be wrong. It's another edition of the Paleo Solution Podcast. Today's guest is Mark Bell. Mark has the infamous distinction of being picked as one of the 30 best gyms in America by Men's Health March 2008 and NorCal Strength and Conditioning would similarly pick which shows that there is absolutely no quality control or vetting in any of these things. Mark runs the Super Training Gym. He runs the PowerCast Podcast. Mark, you are an elite ranked powerlifter at more than one weight class. Am I correct in that?

Mark: Yeah. I got to use the word "was" because I'm retired from competitive powerlifting, from getting my ass up on the platform again. I competed from 181 pounds all the way up to super heavyweight and then worked my way back down over the years.

Robb: How tall are you?

Mark: I'm 6' if I'm lucky, on a tall day, when the gravity is not that big, about 6'.

Robb: You're a little taller than I am. I competed mainly at 181 and then made one foray to 198 but it was -- All I did was lift weights and have bowel movements. I had to give that one up. My frame was not really meant to carry that.

Mark: You have all sorts of stomach problems all the time, don't you? Or you used to anyway?

Robb: I used to and it's funny I kind of wonder sometimes if trying to stuff 6,000 calories a day down my pie hole for 15 or plus years might have set me up for some other problems but it was really a super bad case of giardia when I went to Mexico and I came back with all the gluten intolerance and dairy intolerance and all that stuff. It's always been kind of low level looking but after I had the trots for almost three months from that and finally figured out that I had a parasite living in me then it was a long time getting back on track after that.

Mark: Giardia sounds like the next step after diarrhea.

Robb: It is the final step. That's basically the final exit. It's like the headlock society of GI problems. Like you're pretty much going to die from it. It was amazing. Mark, what drew you to powerlifting initially? I had a youth football injury. I had a bruised spine and a whiplash which was pretty severe, could have been really

bad, and as part of the recommended rehab I had out of that from the neurosurgeon that worked with me, he turned me on to a couple of folks that you might know, Danny Thurman and some of this friends.

They got me on a neck rehab program and they found that I maybe had a little bit of aptitude in the squat and deadlift. My bench was always pretty laughable but found a little aptitude with that and a lot of enjoyment. But what drew you into powerlifting?

Mark: I started taking anabolic steroids when I was ten years old and I needed something to channel all that energy. All that extra testosterone needs somewhere to go so I started powerlifting.

Robb: Before MMA, so you didn't have that as an option.

Mark: Yeah, that's right. It's a natural progression into powerlifting. Playing football and stuff growing up and my brothers and I loving professional wrestling and stuff like that, we all wanted to try to figure out a way to get bigger. But my path, I guess, is a little bit similar to yours where it wasn't me that had the injuries and stuff. It was my brother Chris.

My brother Chris had some problems with his knees so he had a double knee surgery and we had surgery on his knees and he was coming back, he went to a chiropractor and the chiropractor happened to squat like 750 pounds. He said, "The only way that you're going to live pain free is to combat it with being strong and we're going to have to get you to doing some squats."

And so my brother started squatting with a broomstick and worked his way up to, while still being in high school, squatting like 675 pounds or something crazy like that. It basically became part of our life from there. I kind of have your typical kid being picked on story of I was throwing around a football one day. I was always playing by myself. I was throwing this football up in the air and pretend I'm catching the game winning touchdown as I was doing all the time.

My brother's friend, who we all knew, we knew the family and they were people that we didn't get along with great, and he was like, "Hey, Bell, throw me the football." So, I was like this is a lot better than playing by myself but this guy is an asshole. And so I do throw the ball to him and he catches it. He's in a tank top, by the way, with super tight acid washed jeans on.

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The tank top is tucked into the acid washed jeans very tightly. He has just a wicked mullet going on and a mustache that he probably had since he was about

13. He turns around and takes my favorite New York Jets football and pounced it into the woods. He was like five or six years older than me. And so I just felt like I couldn't do anything about it. Actually, he had some muscle on him and stuff. I think he was already working out at that time.

I just remember kind of feeling helpless. I felt like I couldn't do anything about that situation. I was like, "You know what, I need to figure out a way that that never happens to me again." You can cut to a rocky montage of me working out in the garage and training ever since that point pretty much.

Robb: That's awesome. When you started describing him I thought you were going to say that you threw the football to Patrick Swayze minus the mustache. I don't remember him ever rocking a mustache.

Mark: It's very similar to Patrick Swayze. It's more Patrick Swayze with like a perm with the Patrick Swayze with like the straight combed hair.

Robb: Right. Mark, I know prehab and rehab is just a big part of the whole system that you use. You guys are definitely well steeped in the Westside Barbell scene. I'm going to hit you up for some free advice here, at least. I had a back injury L4-L5 flexion injury in my early cross fit days. One day I did my first exposure to glute-ham sit-ups. I did 75 of them and ended up with abdo because I had a nice safe ramp on the exposure.

Mark: What was that like? That must have been awful.

Robb: Oh, it was horrible. It was absolutely horrible.

Mark: Like swell up and stuff all the time.

Robb: It swelled up. It was almost like the diastasis steel that women have when they have pregnancy where like the muscle fibers are just separating apart and everything.

Mark: I've heard of that. It's crazy.

Robb: Yeah. It was maybe 12 or 15 days later, we were pulling some deadlifts and I got right about my knee, right above the knee and I believe because my abs were still basically like a sweater than had been hit with shotgun blast and not really networked up the way they're supposed to be, I just failed. I had never failed under a lift like that. It either went up or didn't go up. I had never had any type of a flexion deal.

I worked as a physical therapy aid for years and I made fun of the people that had back injuries because they would sweat and like the amount of pain that they were suggesting that they experience -- I had had and seen compound fractures that hurt less than what they were showing. The karma came back around because I couldn't stand up for the better part of a week. I had this lateral shift to the right. My SI joint was all tweaked.

I've made progress over the years but I found that any type of unilateral loading, squatting or regular deadlifting, I can straight leg deadlift okay, I can front squat okay because I'm really in that nice extended position, but that weighted hip bridges are kind of my go-to for heavier lower body loading at this point, like regular back squats, regular deadlifts aren't all that good of a go. I do a lot of reverse hypers, back extensions, oblique work.

Am I just screwed? Is that just the state of affairs? Or do I need to go down the Super Training and have you doing assessment on me and figure out what we could do? What are your thoughts around all that?

Mark: It would be great to have you at Super Training so I can take it through a bunch of different things. But I think you have to figure out what the goal is and then why. Do you want to deadlift four plates just because it's cool and just because you want to pick it up and feel good? Or is there some other type of goal there, if you want to get on a platform and compete?

It really depends on what we're talking about. If we're talking about building the kind of strength necessary for a powerlifting meet or something, then things have to be taken to the extreme and there's going to be risk of injury. I know you do a lot of jujitsu and even with you guys being careful with each other there's going to be -- You're going to tweak stuff here and there especially as you go up the ranks and especially as you start to compete more intensely and stuff.

There's really absolutely no way to avoid heavy loading if you're going to power lift. However, if you don't really care that much and you're just looking to increase some muscle mass and get stronger you certainly don't have to deadlift until you're blue in the face to accomplish that.

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And so utilizing other exercises. I mean, you hit the nail in the head. You said you do the heavy glute bridges and stuff like that. Things where your spine isn't going to have a lot of loading, those are the most favorable. And some things load the spine differently. A farmer's carry is a lot safer to do than something like a deadlift. A regular deadlift with a regular barbell automatically shifts that bar out

in front of you and you can get just some compromising positions. It's hard to maintain proper form and technique throughout the entire range in motion.

What I ultimately say is that a little bit goes a long way. It could get you to the point where you can do some deadlifting once a week or several times a month, two to three times a month and that would be sufficient. And even with weights that aren't real significant, I think, you can get a lot out of using a little and there's so many different ways to actually lift the weight that we could work on pauses and certain positions which you can kind of argue that the pauses coming out certain positions could help you with your jujitsu because it could help you defend against certain movements because static positions and coming out of some of those static positions are going to be really crucial to the movement of MMA or the movement of jujitsu, stuff like that.

Really it's a matter of what do we really need this for, to figure out what we need this for. What do we need these deadlifts for? And then we make a game plan from there. The main thing is just being able to control spinal loading. You start to squat often, you start to deadlift often and really just start to mix in a nice recipe for disaster.

There's so many other forms of strength that we could be playing with. We could pushing a sled or pulling a sled or doing -- Farmer's carries are great movement, yoke walks. There's a lot of different ways that we can load the spine or even not load the spine using something like a belt squat. Belt squat could really be fantastic.

And then also you have just lap work, just working your laps and working your back is going to help your entire back from the neck down. Things like reverse hyperextensions are great. You got 45 degree back raises. So, as I preach all the time, focus on what you can do and try not to focus on what you can't do.

Robb: Perfect. That's phenomenal. It's still hard to come to terms with sometimes because it was almost an identity associated with being able to roll into the gym and with no warm up, throw three plates on, go ass to ankles with that. But I also did stuff like that from the age to 13 until about 35 and that's a pretty good run. It's interesting because the unilateral loading, like you said the farmer's walks and everything, I just had a modified wheelbarrow made where I can just load plates on the wheelbarrow and it's super stout and I can wheel that around. That stuff feels really good.

And in jujitsu, I'd never have issues with strength. I still get beat on technicality. I've got my cardio up to a spot where I typically don't gasp but it's never a -- very, very rarely a strength issue unless somebody is 40 or 50 pounds heavier than I am and I just get out-muscled in that regard. That helps a ton. And a lot of this is

just kind of that psychological factor of, man, I feel like I should be squatting and deadlifting.

Mark: Are you able to squat and deadlift right now?

Robb: Yeah. But very light on the back squat, quite light on the deadlifting. Interestingly, if I do straight leg deadlifts or RDLs I have really comparatively low problem with that. But a regular back squat, I will tend to get kind of a lateral SI joint shift after that and then I start getting some crankiness in the disk and if I can get ahead of it I can usually shut it down but if I don't get ahead of it, say like I have to travel that day or I go to jits that day and I get it a little bit tweaked, then it could be a week and a half or a two week deal of being pretty compromised.

Mark: You get a kick out of this. There's something that's called strength aerobics which is basically just lifting very slowly. I would be interested to see what that would do for you using sets of anywhere between, I guess, eight to about 12 reps and using a good six-second count on the way down. Probably be more effective in your squats than it would be in the deadlift.

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In the deadlift, it's really punishing and you have to go insanely light. But strength aerobics can be super beneficial to help repair tissue. There's a lot of evidence pointed to it. For some reason, it's something that's just been kind of swept into the rug, people don't pay much attention to it but it's been around from the time of like the 60s or so and people have utilized it for years.

Give that a try. Do a six-second count on the way down and maybe just about a three on the way up. Use some really light weights and try three sets of about eight reps and then the level of intensity that I would associate with it given the fact that you have some preexisting injuries would be only be like, on a scale of one to ten, you would be looking between a five and a seven, would be about as far as you'd want to take that. You'd want the execution of all those lifts to be perfect. You want every rep to be perfect and for you to have neutral spine on every single one of them.

The other suggestion would be to do partial range of motion deadlifting. Get doing rack pull or having the weights elevated a little bit off the ground. That bottom position of a deadlift is just a real bitch. There's no other way of putting it. It just kind of sucks. If you can get yourself -- Again, you're probably not looking to go to like a meet and really hit some huge deadlifts so why not use some partials and stuff?

And then, lastly, the other thing you can do is just think about where you've been, what you've been doing lately. Over the period of time you can just ramp the intensity up just a tiny bit, I think. We all have a tendency to be in such a rush with everything. And so if you're not really doing that much, you're not really pushing on the gas pedal all that hard, then you just want to just briefly push on the gas pedal a little bit harder and you want to get in and out of some of this stuff as if it's a fight.

You don't want to spend 45 minutes on the squat. You want to spend, once you're warm, you want to spend about eight minutes on the squat and then get the fuck away from that thing as quick as you can because exercises are fantastic because they're barbell exercises but they're also detrimental because they're barbell exercises and they can be overdone. Get in, get out, stick and move.

Robb: Okay. I like it. My usual work outs are -- I've been doing a two-day week split. I do some upper body and some lower body on the same day. I usually do a vertical press, vertical pull, hip dominant one day, horizontal press, horizontal pull, quad kind of dominant thing on the second day, usually some higher intensity on each one from day to day. But usually the whole session from warm up to wrap up is about 20, 25 minutes. I usually get through it pretty quick.

Mark: Yeah. And you're looking pretty jacked lately, by the way.

Robb: It's kind of funny. Less has been more for me. It's pretty interesting in just really trying to chase that consistency. It's interesting though you mentioned the strength aerobics. I had a pretty strong early influence from Fred Hatfield and his compensatory acceleration. And so I've always been in that mode of just trying to accelerate the bar or even if I'm doing gymnastics movements, I usually do it in a way where the loading is such that I've got a really good acceleration element to it.

But it is interesting I noticed that when I'm called upon to do slower movements even in jujitsu and stuff like that, I get kind of shaky. I think I've maybe wired up my nervous system to just always be like all on or all off. So, this strength aerobic stuff would be pretty interesting because I've never done training like that.

Mark: Yeah. Think about how many people have you talked to that had been injured from walking.

Robb: Not too many. Not too many.

Mark: Yeah. And then take that just a step further and just walk really slow. Older folks, they walk really slow for a reason. I'm sure they don't want to walk that slow but they're in a lot of pain. The slower movement is going to be a more careful

movement. It's going to be a movement where you can actually be connected. You could be a lot more connected to the bar. Your mind can be connected to the bar a lot better.

If I said, Robb, that you're coming to Super Training and it's time that you just fucking step shit up and we're going right to 405, no bell, I just want to see just smashing. We're going to put on your favorite music and we're going to get you hyped up and we'll have everybody yelling and screaming and we're just going to get after it. Well, that would be a great opportunity for an injury.

And also, what are you thinking about when you do that lift? You're not really thinking about much of anything probably other than just like being aggressive, like you're probably trying to talk yourself into it, you hype yourself up, and you're not really thinking so much about the form and technique.

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Whereas if you have just 95 pounds in the bar and you're doing six seconds on the way down and three on the way up, every single rep is taking nearly ten seconds, you can think, okay, as I go down I'm going to force my knees out and as I go towards the ground more I'm not going to allow my chest to fall towards the floor. I'm going to try to pick my chest up, keep my chin up. You get to talk to yourself as you're doing the lift.

And even better, if you have a coach or you have somebody that trains with you or even just a training partner, you can get a lot more coaching cues done that way. On top of that, the hypertrophy games that you get from it are awesome. But in my opinion, to be strong, I think that it's important to lift both ways. I think it's important to lift fast and lift slow and it's also important that you're getting a lot of time under tension under the bar and that you're also doing lifts that only last six to eight seconds which should just be single rep maxes.

Robb: Got you. Mark, when you describe this, it's kind of reminiscent of what I've seen and read about with occlusion training. Have you played around with that much?

Mark: Yeah. Occlusion training is brutal but I would say this feels about the same especially when you're doing your repetitions. A friend of mine, James Smith, is the one that made me aware of this type of training because I've had multiple injuries to my pecs and to my elbow and this and that over the years and so he's the one that kind of turned me onto it. But the burn that you get is just unbelievable.

The way the he would set stuff up for me, I would look at what was written on the paper. By the way, the percentage associated with this type of lifting, if

you're going to do sets of ten, I would say 30%, 40% from the time you try it, it might even be, not might even feel kind of heavy. But he had written out like kind of deadlifts, 185 pounds, and it was 18 reps. And I was like 185 pounds, I wonder why he prescribed that?

I know I'm coming off from injury but that's just really, really light. I guess, I'll give it a try and see what happens. And it was like six seconds on the way down and six seconds on the way up, or something crazy like that, and I was dying. It'll tap into your lungs big time too. You'll be breathing like crazy from it. Definitely recommend it. Give it a shot.

I'm not saying that that's the way to train all the time because people get confused. If I'd say one thing and they're like, they'll harp on the one deal, kind of like yourself when you came out with the Paleo Solution. Everyone thought it zero carb diet, you're promoting that, even cross fitters and stuff don't eat anything carbohydrates. And it's like I never found the information where Robb really said not to eat any carbohydrates with the suggestions that you were making.

And then also people took it out of context too and they forget the fact that you were very sick and you were trying to figure out a cure for yourself. A lot of times people take some of the information that we give and they'll twist it into their own thing.

Robb: Right, right. I mean, the black or white all or nothing thing is super easy and trying to figure out shades of gray is kind of an art and science. I mean, this is where you guys are masters at this micro to mezzo cycle periodization. Can you talk a little bit about how you slice and dice that? I know it's so incredibly individual and that's part of the reason why what you guys do is so unique. It's not a cookie cutter one size fits all deal. You've got a big basket of tools and you're very adept at using those at the appropriate time. But how do you as a coach know when to shift somebody from one strength or metabolic characteristic to another? I mean, do you have a game plan or are you doing that intuitively as time goes along?

Mark: Yeah, I'd say it's pretty intuitive. What works for our team normally works for a lot of the people that we deal with. I know people like to try to say that things are like real customized but I don't really believe that that much. I think we are all different and one person is going to respond a little differently to something than the next but, I think, in the beginning, we all have to try similar things such as doing three sets of ten and such as using machines and stuff to develop some coordination before we just jump into a full on powerlifting or Olympic lifting program. I think it makes some sense to deal with some resistance in some different ways.

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In general, what I'm usually doing, because of the type of athletes that I work with, is I'm normally just trying to hold people back. I'm normally trying to give them an assessment of, okay, you hit it, you just hit a PR, you just got that ten-pound PR -- I was just talking earlier about sticking and moving. I don't think there's a great reason to go for a 30-pound PR today even though it does look like it's there. I think we get the hell out of here and we count that as a victory. And we celebrate that and we work on the next stuff to work on rather than just trying to go heavier and fail.

Trying to promote success over and over again and seeing people do the lift the right way. If I said, "Hey, I want you to do 225 for five sets of five," somebody might be like, "225? Fuck, that's pretty light. Can I do more?" And I'd say, "Well, has there ever been a time where you did 25 reps, five sets of five, did all 25 reps? Have you ever done that before where all 25 reps were perfect? If not, then shut the hell up and go do it."

And you know full well I like, the reference back to jujitsu, I've done some jujitsu in my time and it's been so long. I don't have the repetitions in me because I didn't do enough of them back then to remember how to do some of the locks and stuff and how to do some of the holds. It would be restarting for me all over again. And if you showed me how to do some moves and stuff, you would show me slowly and we'd do it over again and again and again and again until it starts to get ingrained into your system.

Strength training is 100% the same and, for some reason, it's always been viewed differently. People always say training. "I'm going in and I'm training." Well, training should be synonymous with the word practice because that's what we're really trying to do. You're trying to practice. But they're not. Training has become an event which it shouldn't be.

Training should be training. It should be training for and towards something. It's not an event, which is way different. I myself am totally 100% guilty of that. Just watch some of the videos of me doing some of those big benches and I got some epic music playing, it's fucking blasting, my teammates are yelling and screaming, I'm yelling and screaming, I'm getting chalk all over the place and I'm super fired up.

With lifting, your exercise probably shouldn't be that way. Your lifting and your exercise should probably be more routine just so that you're not blowing everything out all in one day. As I'm saying, it shouldn't really be an event. It should be more treated as practice.

Robb: It took me so long to figure that out and that's where Danny Thurman and Rich Wood, they would see me training and they had a prescription for me. A week or so will go by and they're like, "You were not even remotely following the program." Because I would have my music cranked up and I'm head butting the bar and had blood dripping down my nose and they're like, "No, no."

But it was crazy to me how almost inconsequential the training load was in the off season. It was not a huge amount of volume initially and then the volume would ramp up but the intensity was still pretty low and we would start getting six weeks, eight weeks out from a meet then all the repetitions would drop, the total set number would increase and then we would dial everything up.

This was old kind of linear periodization but it took me a long way doing that. It was shocking to me how much less I did but yet how much more I got out of the training program versus if I just left my guts in the gym every single training session like I went nowhere. I went backwards, if anything.

Mark: There's so many different ways to lift weight. Look at somebody like Kai Greene, a top bodybuilder, Phil Heath. If we workout with Phil Heath, we'd find that on many of the exercises in the gym, he uses the same weight as some females probably use that are strong. And you'd be like, "Huh?" This is Phil Heath, like seven-time Mr. Olympia champion, and he's like 250 and he's just a big giant ball of muscle. He's just enormous.

But there's so many different ways to lift the weight and there's so many different ways to get stimulus from those weights. You could use 60% and you can blast through some dynamic effort work where you're trying to go as fast as possible.

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Or you can even implement other thing such as bands or chains or pause squats or you can pause in multiple spots during the lift. You can use a slow eccentric. I mean, the list of variation that you can do goes on and on. And so, I think, that people kind of lose sight of what's important and what's the most important thing is that you get in a lot of quality work and it's hard to get quality work in that 90% and above. Even above 80% can be difficult.

You want to try to find percentages that are heavy enough to promote change and they're heavy enough to help you make progress but they're not so heavy that you can't recover from them. I think in an ideal situation, I think pretty much anyone who is listening to this right now would probably train with upwards of

10%, maybe 15%, less than they normally do. They probably will feel pretty recovered and pretty refreshed from all their workouts.

As long as they don't have a meet within the next few weeks, I guarantee you that they would get stronger. The only issue that you can sometimes run into is when the weight starts to become a little bit too light, they become foreign to you, and when you go to pick up something heavy, you go, "Oh fuck." So, you need a little bit of polish. You need a little bit of that.

To me, that only takes the last two, three weeks or so of doing small amounts of overload work, walking out with a rack, with a heavy weight, doing some rack deadlifts or some heavy shrugs or using something like a slingshot and bench. Some form of overload work can really help as well. In general, I think we're all lifting, most of us are lifting too often. Most of us are lifting too heavy. And I think that we could be a lot stronger if we were to spread fatigue out more and kind of not be so impatient with our lifting.

Robb: Sure. That totally makes sense. On that recovery side, do you use HRV or anything like that to help monitor folks? What's your process with that?

Mark: I've never used a heart rate variability thing but I would love to get into some of that. I know a lot of people have had a lot of success with that. Recovery wise, I just basically try not to lift like an idiot. I think that's where everything starts. I think people have a hard time understanding the origin of where things come from and so in today's day and age where things are moving so fast and we're on our way to the gym and we're like, "Oh, fuck, I forgot. I need the 400 milligrams of caffeine to get through a training session."

And so you stop off at a gas station and down some Red Vine, get all fired up and go hit your workout. Well, if you're really training and you're really trying to make progress, your pre-workout starts the night before. And in some situations, your pre-workout starts sometimes weeks in advance. When I used to see some of the stuff that I would program for myself or occasionally have another coach step in and program something for me, when I saw those weights written out on paper or when I had an idea of what it was I was going to do, that's where the pre-workout started.

That's where conversation started with myself like, "We're going to go on there and we're going to fucking do this. This shit's going to be hard. I see what's written out and this is intimidating as fuck. But I'm going to go in the gym and I'm going to make this happen." And, I think, when you talk to yourself that way, at least it works that way for me, when I have some good positive self talk the night before like, "Hey, you're not going to hit the snooze button. You're not going to go back to bed. You're not just going to snuggle up with the wifey and maybe try

to get a piece. You're going to wake the fuck up when you're supposed to and you're going to get your ass to start working."

To me, that's always helped. That positive self talk and reinforcement has always helped kind of launch me into these grueling workout sessions that we sometimes put ourselves through.

Robb: No, no, that sounds brilliant. There's definitely some interesting kind of feed forward element to little bites of success. So, just even setting yourself up for, okay, I'm going to get out of bed at this time, I'm going to do this, my warm up is going to go this way. And so each one of those things a the little bite of success and you get that little dopamine hit from it, everything starts moving along so that kind of pre-planning is powerful.

Mark: How do you get yourself to do some stuff? Like writing is a pain in the ass. You've written some awesome books at this point.

Robb: It's funny. I definitely figured out that earlier in the day is where my creativity lies.

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I know that's different for people but if I really have a legit project like the last book, I was out of the house sometimes at 5:30 and in the office at 6:00 and then I would write from 6:00 until maybe 9:00, sometimes 10:00 a.m., but two and a half to four hours of legit writing is it. That's all I've got and I feel kind of like a pussy because I know people do legitimate eight and ten-hour days.

But I could answer email after that. I could do some other low level things. But that really good writing for me happens early and so I just had to be disciplined. I had to get into bed early, get up, get a cup of coffee, eat some protein and then just kind of get that stuff knocked out. I just discovered that if I pounded until the afternoon, the writing was terrible. It was five times slower. It really wasn't worth doing.

The real key for me was finding the time of the day where I was the most productive and nothing else mattered. Like short of the house burning down like I was going to get in there, get the writing done. It's funny the writing platform I use, it's called Scrivener, it has this little window where you can set a daily word goal. And it starts off red and then it goes yellow and then it turns green.

It's funny like there were so many times where I just wanted to quit but I was like, "Fuck, man, I'm only 500 words away." I would write, write, write, write, write, and then I would get that ding and then I would write maybe 500 more

words because I was super excited about that. It's kind of funny like those things sound cheesy but I, guess, the two big things is I found my most productive time and then I had some little tools like they have in Scrivener where I would set a daily word goal and just knock that thing out.

And I really do like writing. When I'm able to sit down and get into it, I thoroughly enjoy it. It's a lot more enjoyable than cruising around social media but I still have to whore myself to a certain degree. I've got to shake hands and kiss babies and do all that stuff. I still do it.

Mark: You're mentioning just a two to four hour window or so of success for yourself with writing and that plays right back into just what we're talking about in the original question that I had which is about recovery. You're allowing yourself to recover by only writing a certain amount, you're allowing your brain or your body to recover from -- That kind of stuff is actually super stressful.

Even getting interviewed and stuff, you don't realize how, or interviewing somebody, a lot of the podcast stuff that we do, it's really fun and it's unbelievable to have the opportunities to do these things. But holy shit, you do a couple of them a day and--

Robb: You're knackered afterwards.

Mark: Yeah. You're super tired to go to one of these trade shows and not be on your feet for a few hours and talk to some fans and some people that have admired your work and stuff and you're dead. With recovery, with us, I mean, we use any and everything we possibly can when it comes to actual stuff that we're using in the gym. I mean, we'll use a lot of the methods from Kelly Starrett, MobilityWOD.com, a lot of different stretching and warm up type stuff.

For myself, it's usually -- I'm trying to be efficient with what I'm doing. I'm a big fan of utilizing some other exercises to get a little bit warm for the movement itself because if I'm to do something, if I'm to do some drills in the gym and I'm going to do some high knee work and just walking, just taking a step and bringing that knee up above the hip and then getting up on the back toe, just doing almost like a little skip type thing, if I do movements like that and do some hip mobility stuff, before I even get into my work out, maybe I'd throw on the hip circle and do some exercise with that, maybe I squat onto a bench a few times, do some arm circles, just some real general calisthenics, my brain and my body starts to really get focused into that workout.

Again, that's where I can take the time to have some good positive self talk. Like today, here's the intent of the day, here's the goal, here's what I want to do. Don't forget to have fun. Don't forget to help other people. Don't forget to be

courteous in time because all those things come back to you. But you have some time in that little time frame to think of those things because it's very slow and it's very deliberate on what you're doing.

And then you can also, if you're doing like toe touches or something like that, you can pause for a second and go, "Holy shit, what the fuck is that in my right hamstring? What's happening back there? What the hell did I do last night?" And so you can address that though. You can be like, "Okay, something is just weird with my right leg. I don't know what happened but I need to address that now and I'm going to foam roll or whatever the hell it is that you want to do to address the situation."

[0:40:11]

Rather than getting underneath the squat bar and be like, "Oh, man, holy shit, is it going to be a long day? I'm supposed to do eight sets of this shit today?" All negative reinforcement. Then you get grumpy. I don't know about you or some of the people listening to this podcast but, holy shit, if I'm in pain I get grumpy. I get real pissy and bitchy to be around. It's not pleasant.

In the warm up is where you can assess how your body is feeling for the day. And then recovery wise, I do hot tub, I do cold therapy. I have a pool and a hot tub at my house. Sometimes I'll go back and forth between the two. I like the hot tub a lot more than getting in the cold pool. I probably do that a lot more often. I also have a product called a freeze sleeve which is just a really easy product to put on. It's like your elbow sleeve. You keep it in your freezer and you just slide it on and it's cold.

I'm the proponent of cold therapy. I know there's been conflicting information that's bounced around but I've always gotten some use out of it. I've always felt pretty good with it so I utilize that. I'll get massages occasionally. I found that the massages though weren't really -- It doesn't seem like they were doing a ton for me. I think I would probably get more benefit from having somebody manually try to like stretch me more than I would have a lot of success with regular massage.

But I also get active release therapy and I go to a chiropractor and I just try to take care of myself. Recovery is going to come in the form of -- It's going to be 24/7. Somebody saw my recovery, I think a lot of times people automatically think about a foam roller or a Compex unit that you put on your body or something like that but it can come in so many different forms. It could come in your hydration, your sleep.

The things that you're going to do for yourself are always going to be way superior to anything that you're going to do to yourself. Going for a walk or riding a bike or just all these things, they're going to benefit you way, way more than going to the cryo chamber or any of those things.

Robb: I totally agree. Mark, you've been interesting in the -- Nutrition has historically not been a super high priority within the powerlifting world. And you've really sunk your teeth into the Paleo low carb even ketogenic diet stuff which has been controversial. I've seen some folks really go after you on this stuff. What's been your process with that?

Mark: I like a good fight, for sure.

Robb: And you do an admirable job too, yeah.

Mark: Yeah, I like to yell back at people sometimes. It's just fun. First of all, I don't know if I've told you this before but I got to start out by thanking you because you were the start of all this. I did a ketogenic style diet when I was a teenager. That was the first time I ever did it back in 1994, somewhere in that range. And then I read Bodyopus, Metabolic Diet by Dr. Mario Di Pasquale, Anabolic Diet, and been on and off ketogenic style diets for a very long time.

But as a powerlifter and as an adult, I got up to 337 pounds. I was a big, big boy, chubby chuberton. As I've started to consider how I was going to lose weight I knew that I wanted to do like a keto style diet but at the same time I was enjoying a lot of really sweet food and stuff when I was that big. I was enjoying smashing a lot of weights but I also realized, "Shit, man, this isn't healthy."

Your name started to get kicked around. I heard a lot about the Paleo solution and I was like, "You know what, maybe I should check this out." Because if I just go from what I'm doing right now to just not eating any carbs, that's going to be like, I don't know, just mentally it sounds too hard, sounds like something I can't do. The best diet is the one you can follow, right?

I looked into your book and I was like, "Shit, okay. I can have some of this. I can have some of that. There's at least a little bit of carb on the menu." So I started doing that. I think I lost -- I want to say I lost about 40 pounds. That really helped me momentum wise. And since that time I haven't gotten back up over 300 pounds. And so thank you. I appreciate that. The information you put out had a really awesome impact on my life.

[0:45:02]

Robb: That's awesome. Best result, reward I ever get is knowing that my work had some positive influence on people. That's awesome.

Mark: And then as far as me kind of diving into the diet stuff more, just as I got deeper into my career, I recognize how important it really is now. How important your diet is for performance is insanely debatable. I know many, many athletes that disregard really anything nutritionally and they run the gamut of being multiple time world champions and they run the gamut of not looking like they work out at all.

That part is very confusing. When it comes to performance, I don't really think someone can say, "Hey, if you eat this amount of carb, it's going to cause this result. If you eat this amount of fat, it's going to do this." In terms of your health and in terms of your markers for health and in terms of looking like you work out and fixing some of your aesthetics, it's very clear what the diet can do for you. It's very clear that diet can help against certain diseases and it's very clear that the diet can just make you feel better overall, help you think better and so on.

I've dove into it deeper and deeper because what I think is the problem, what I think is where a lot of us -- I mean, we're failing, by the way. Just so everyone can understand, this fitness industry, we're losing this battle, we're losing this fight and there's too many people that are too fat and have too many diseases and we're losing people every day. I like to try to promote the fact that when I'm talking about these ketogenic style diets, low carb diets -- I'm in the middle of writing a book called The War on Carbs, when I'm promoting some of this stuff and I'm talking about some of this stuff, what I'm really truly trying to say is I'm fighting a war on addiction.

It's a war on addiction and it's a war on the surplus of junk food that surrounds us every single day. Those temptations are really, really hard to fend off and we get so used to it. When the fuck did macaroni and cheese become a meal? Why is that an acceptable thing to just give to a child? I don't think anybody thinks about it.

That's really where we're losing, is that people just aren't thinking. In my household with my children, we're at least always thinking about it. When we go out to dinner, my son last night, he had a Coke with his -- He had a pretzel, this awesome pretzel at this place down the street from my house. He knows that he just gets one. You get one soda. That's fine. You can drink. Whatever, you can have two or three. But just know what you're doing and understand what you're doing.

Back it up with some exercise. It's not going to kill you. My son rides his bike to and from school. Both of my children end up going on the walks with me and

stuff. Neither one of them were fascinated enough with sports to really get all that deep into any of that. They're not really into that but, I think, what we're really truly up against is we're up against addiction and the craving for sugar and the craving for carbohydrates is huge.

When you have something like pizza or something like a peanut butter cup or some of these things are just bursting with so much flavor that you get used to that and you get desensitized to the flavor of something like spinach or raw almonds. But raw almonds taste fucking awesome. But they don't taste awesome anymore because we've had Big Macs and chocolate shakes and everything else.

Robb: Right. I absolutely agree.

Mark: That's usually some of the stuff I'm trying to pitch to people and make people better understand.

Robb: Mark, what's the timeline on the book?

Mark: We actually had been cranking through it. I actually wrote another book called Jacked and Tan and Jacked and Tan is training and nutritional advice. That has been going on and off for the last two and a half, three years. And so I had to put a halt on that because that's a larger book. The War on Carbs will probably only be about 75 pages. I think that that book will be done by the end of this month. I don't know the rest of the process from there because I'm publishing it myself, doing everything really grassroots over here on my own.

Hopefully, we can get it out by November, December. That's what I'm hoping. A lot of times when you read some of these diet books, you're like -- Some of these books don't really want to be a diet book per se.

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They want more of the lifestyle. But a lot of times when I read through them, I'm like where's the fucking information? Where's the diet? So, we're going to address that and pretty much just give you the information flat out. There'll be some information there but I'm not going to flood you with a lot of science and stuff. That's not my thing. That's not where I'm strong. I'm going to flood you with my experiences rather than try to pull out some studies and stuff like that.

Robb: It's fantastic. It's funny, if you can just get people to just do something, usually, it goes pretty well. And the internet and social media are a double-edged sword because we can share so much information but then also everybody gets in and starts fact checking everything and there's a contrary position that every

position, every suggestion so that you can just have this analysis paralysis and not go or do anything.

It's a tough one which is part of the reason why in some of the stuff I've written it's like a legal disclaimer up front. I try to conceive every possible question, qualm and all the rest of it, but it ends up being a bastard to write something like that, versus just like, "Hey, just do this. Do it for 30 days. Get back to me. And if you like the results, keep going with it. If not, there's something else you could do."

Mark: Yeah. The War on Carbs actually starts off with a swearing in process. I have like a part in there where you're literally going to sign your name in there and I'm hoping that people get excited about that and I hope they take some pictures and throw it up on social media because I do want them to really make a strong commitment.

The war on carbs is no carbs. It's a ketogenic style diet through and through and there's no end in sight, there's no cheat meal, there's no reconstituting, there's no re-feed, there's no nothing. I realized that these things are going to happen, that you're going to break it at some point anyway and so, therefore, I don't say every seven days or every ten, whatever. I do have a period where once you start to lose weight and once you become more efficient and once your insulin resistance isn't too out of whack then I get to a point where you can have some carbohydrates here and there.

I really just want to try -- The more that you abstain from it, it seems that the better and the stronger. I've been helping a lot of people lately and the people that their cheat is something that's not even really a cheat, those are the people that are thriving, those are the people that are the best, and those are the people that I know that I can rely on that they're not going to end up being heavy again. They're going to be able to actually physically keep that weight off them. That's really the main thing, just having something that is really going to be sustainable, having something that people can follow for a period of time.

Robb: That's awesome. If you want a free review reader, fire it off to me. I have to check it out.

Mark: Absolutely, 100%. And then also, my brother and I are working on a movie. People are always asking my brother what's his next documentary and stuff like that and so he and I are working on a film called Land of Confusion which is, basically, everyone's confusion about nutrition and about health. And so we're going to, obviously, talk quite a bit about keto since we both do a ketogenic style diet.

But we're also going to try to -- We're in search of the truth. We're in search of even almost proving ourselves wrong. That would be the main goal. It's like are we off? Is this not right? Is there some better way? Is there something else that we're not doing or is there something that we're missing? And so that's what we're going to be trying to discover. We're going to come talk to people like yourself and other experts around the United States to try to figure out what's the most optimal.

Robb: That's awesome. Remind me the name of the movie again?

Mark: Land of Confusion.

Robb: Land of Confusion. Awesome. I had some emails back and forth about that and I'm super excited to see that one roll out. There's finally some good documentaries taking this ancestral eating, low carb, even the sustainability story, some of the Savory Institute stuff. There's some good films popping up on that which is well timed because, man, the vegans are kicking our asses I noticed.

Mark: Oh my god, I know. Did you happen to see study with the rats most recently, with them living 13% longer?

Robb: I think it was like 20% longer. It was interesting. They put them on what they kind of tongue in cheek called a Paleo type diet. They had a standard diet, a Paleo diet and then a ketogenic diet.

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In the Paleo type diet, which was lower glycemic load, higher protein, they had a 10% increase in overall lifespan. The keto group, it was a 20% overall increase in total lifespan. It's a really, really interesting stuff. I kind of tinker in and out of that ketogenic state. With jujitsu I find that about 75 to 120 grams of carbs keeps me moving along pretty good. I don't feel kind of adrenalized when I'm at that level.

Whereas if I drop down to legit keto levels of like 30 to 50 grams a day, I can get blown out doing five, six days a week of jujitsu. I started actually testing a little bit both blood glucose and the ketones and even at that level, like on a hard training, I'm in ketosis most of the day. So, kind of interesting.

Mark: Yeah. I can imagine that you're probably not even being bumped out all that often. Have you found that you get, like if you do get bumped out or your ketones are lower, have you found that it's like sometimes a full day or day and a half later rather than more immediate, because for me that's what I've noticed before whenever I do eat some carbs.

Robb: I'd been pretty consistent interestingly. I'm working in a pretty tight framework and then I kind of do the same stuff, like the training load is about the same, the food is about the same, sleep is about the same. I don't know if I would call all of that optimized but it's definitely at a spot where I think my body is adapted to that. And so I don't see a ton of deviation away from just this kind of baseline.

Mark: But even with your ketone production, where is that? Are you still in ketosis when you're--

Robb: Yeah, 0.7 to 1.2, usually 0.7 is about the lowest that it gets. But I don't check super frequently but that's been kind of the lowest that I've seen. That was even on a day again where I had maybe 150 grams of carbs but it was also a day that we did ten-minute rounds for two hours, one minute rest. It wasn't a blistering pace because you can't do a blistering pace with that but it was a lot of work and we had some big strong technical dudes that I roll with. I have to be on my game for sure. But the volume and the intensity of that, I think, kept me in that ketotic state. That's a whole fascinating topic too.

The guys over at Ketogains, they're postulating that over the course of time, if your body just gets better at using fatty acids directly then the ketone level might drop because you don't actually need that many ketones. It's really interesting stuff.

Mark: Yeah. And they say also too that the leaner you are the more muscle mass you have, the ketones could be being utilized all the time so you might not register that high.

Robb: Right, right.

Mark: What kind of carbs do you eat?

Robb: Oh, man. During the summer, I do a little more fruits. I've been doing figs and watermelon and stuff like that during the summer. As it heads into the winter I do more squash and potatoes which doesn't take a lot to hit that. And then also I get a lot of it kind of background from I'll eat a lot of coconut flakes. I'll eat macadamia nuts, cashews. And so it's really slow released carbs and I'm getting a significant whack of fat with that.

And so I'll do a little bit of quicker release stuff from potatoes, sweet potatoes, fruit, but then I would say probably 50% of the carbs are things like carrots, coconut, which coconut, you do a half cup of it and I want to say it's 22 grams of fat, eight grams of carbs, four of those grams are fiber, and so it ends up being a super high fiber, very moderate carb load.

Mark: Got you. Yeah. Have you heard of Ray Peat before?

Robb: I have, yeah. He's super smart and super crazy, both at the same time.

Mark: Yeah. He's got some really good information on fructose. Maybe just on YouTube but you can check it out. Talk about fructose can really do some wonders for your thyroid. I think that my experience so far with keto diet is that fructose seems to be like in some weird category on its own as a carbohydrate. I don't know if it would necessarily allow you to stay in ketosis if you had a lot of it. But just using some, eating some oranges and some apples and some berries and things like that seem to be pretty safe even while on a ketogenic style diet.

[1:00:01]

Robb: Yeah. Because that fructose kind of preferentially refills liver glycogen. But, I mean, if you're otherwise pretty low carb, that's a lot of fruit. Particularly for someone that's reasonably muscular, reasonably active, you're talking about a lot of fruit to fully top off the liver glycogen. I think that that gets a lot easier when we're talking about 72 ounce big gulps that are made up of high fructose corn syrup. That's a whole other reloading strategy.

Mark: Yeah, that's why fructose has a bad rep. It's consumed in so many different ways.

Robb: Right. Mark, I want to be respectful of your time but it's awesome reconnecting with you. Tell folks where they can track you down in the interwebs and follow what you're doing.

Mark: Yeah. Actually, I'm really excited because we have revamped our website and, actually, as of later tonight the new website gets launched and you can check it out at howmuchyabench.net. I have a slingshot which is a supportive upper device for bench press and push-ups and dips, helps you to bench heavy without any pain and also helps to put you in a better position in terms of technique with the bench press. I also have hip circles and knee sleeves and all kinds of other stuff on there. So, check that out, howmuchyabench.net.

And then also you can find me @marksmellybell on Instagram and Twitter. In addition to that, I've got my own podcast which is called Mark Bell's Powercast. You can check that out at iTunes. Just super excited to be on the show today and fired up to get you on my show. I've got a lot of questions to ask and, I think, our audience is going to really appreciate. Thanks, man. Appreciate it.

Robb: Awesome. And, Mark, thank you so much. You've been so incredibly kind and generous with your time and also just kind of supporting my work. I really, really thank you for that.

Mark: Absolutely. You got great work so it's easy to support when someone's doing well.

Robb: Thanks, man. I look forward to getting down to the facility and having you do a run through my L4-L5 disk deal and see what we can come up with.

Mark: I'll just throw in camel clutch and that will work.

Robb: Perfect. Iron Sheik is where it's at. I like it. Awesome, Mark. Take care.

Mark: Catch you later.

Robb: Okay. Bye.

[1:02:27] End of Audio