


WASH



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TRAINING FOR SUCCESS WITH TRAVIS MASH

INTERVIEW WITH MARIEL TAGG

TRAVIS MASH BROKE ED COAN'S ALL-TIME WORLD RECORD IN 2004 WHEN HE TOTALED 2410. A FEW MONTHS LATER IN 2005, HE BROKE IT AGAIN WITH 2414. NOW HE COACHES KIDS UP TO BE OLYMPIC PROSPECTS IN WEIGHTLIFTING. HE RECENTLY TOOK TIME WITH POWER MAGAZINE TO TELL US WHAT HE DOES DIFFERENTLY, HOW HE PRODUCES SO MUCH TALENT, AND HOW HE SUCCESSFULLY JUMPED BACK AND FORTH FROM POWERLIFTING AND WEIGHTLIFTING.

MASH: The next two years are the big march towards the Olympics, and we have two kids that are already what people would consider Olympic hopefuls. We have two others that we still hope to get there. We're just creating a lot of international athletes, which is pretty cool since we're in a small town so we're excited about that. And this weekend ended up being a pretty big weekend for us. We got our 18th Team USA member qualified in over the last 3 years, so that was pretty big. And then Morgan, my 14-year-old phenom, he broke an American record that's stood for over 10 years. Every time we go into competition, we set goals. And this was the first time every single team member exceeded my expectations so it was good.



MARIEL: Tell me more about these athletes and what you're doing to help them get to where they need to be.

MASH: About 3.5 years ago when I left MuscleDriver USA, we didn't have a pro weightlifting team and I wanted to do it myself. So the whole mission behind what we do is to give athletes who have the goal of making it to the Olympics, try to give them every tool that they possible need to get there. The other part of the mission is to develop a program for at-risk kids and work with troubled youth in the community. We're definitely well on our way to developing athletes for America, but we need to work more toward working with at-risk kids. It's a non-profit effort and funding can be a tough thing, so we need to work on funding that program and doing more but that's the way it is for everyone.

MARIEL: These athletes specifically, can you talk about how you're building such incredible youth talent?

MASH: I know we've produced the most USA athletes, but we produce them

in the youth and junior and senior ranks. The youth is where it's at. If you don't have a good youth program, eventually your program dies. Your athletes age out.

MARIEL: Do you only focus on youth?

MASH: No, I have Nathan Damron and Jordan. Nathan gets most of the press because he's so strong but Jordan right now is slightly above him. So those two are just incredible and they're both freshly out of the junior category. Those two are unreal and then we have two women who we believe as good if not better, they just got started a little bit later.

MARIEL: How do you train your youth differently than you train your seniors?

MASH: In youth, we focus on general physical preparedness so we do a lot more of what might look like CrossFit. We do a lot of gymnastics work and other things. I bought a basketball hoop and they play every day. So we do a lot more of that kind of stuff. But what's really unique is the culture. They are so close-knit. It's like they're family. Their parents all hang out. And then we've got a couple of satellite

athletes in Missouri and around the country, and somehow, because of the internet, it's as if they're under our roof. When we go to competitions it's like they've been there the whole time. It's a really cool thing to watch and I wish I could give a formula for others coaches to develop such a culture, but I really got lucky by getting the athletes that I got. They are so awesome and they really develop the culture.

MARIEL: Let's talk about your athletic background, your education and how made the transition from powerlifting to weightlifting.

MASH: I got my B.S. at Appalachian State back in 1995, so it all started there. I only got a minor in exercise science but that's where it started. And the reason I only got a minor was because I started too late. I thought I wanted to go to law school, then I fell in love with lifting weights so I only got a chance to do a little bit. But I did powerlifting right after college for one year and I went to the IPF Junior Worlds and got a silver medal. Then I moved to Colorado Springs because I



wanted to do Olympic weightlifting. So, I drove across the country and worked with Wes Barnett, a two-time Olympian. He was my first coach. Then, about a year later, they invited me to the Olympic training center and I got to work with an Olympic bronze medalist. What cut my weightlifting career short was my father got sick in North Carolina. He got terminal cancer so I made the decision to come back and be with him. It was a really rough time in my life. So, I moved home. Back then there wasn't CrossFit so you didn't have a gym on every corner where you could do Olympic weightlifting. That's when I switched back to powerlifting and became a three-time world champion at powerlifting. Then the craze of CrossFit brought weightlifting back to the forefront and I had the opportunity to attack that again. And I hope my powerlifting brothers don't hate me, but my true love is weightlifting.

MARIEL: So you jumped from powerlifting to weightlifting. Where do these two sports meet for you and how do you use one to train the other?

MASH: The whole time I was starting to do strength and conditioning with athletes, I learned how to attack weak-

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nesses through powerlifting. And obviously I know how to get people strong because powerlifting really teaches you that. Sometimes, in some programs, that can be lacking. There's so much technique in weightlifting, but you can have the best technique in the world and we're still going to beat you because we're stronger. Powerlifting gives me the ability to get my athletes stronger.

You can go to any weightlifting gym in America. We're going to be way stronger, on average, than they are. And I don't think any coach in America would even try to argue with that.

MARIEL: How do you incorporate powerlifting into your programs?

MASH: With weightlifting, the squatting and deadlifting are a part of most people's programs because you've got to be good at pulling the bar. You've got to be strong at squatting it. Plus, leg strength is going to help you pull, squat, and jerk. Your legs are going to be what really propels the bar upwards. A lot of it is very similar. Then, with some females, I use the bench press to help them stabilize overhead. A lot of girls are hypermobile and not very stable overhead. For example, Hunter Elam, she was hypermobile and so we had her start benching and that really helped stabilize



her overhead stuff. Not to mention, powerlifters are more commonly known to attack weaknesses. For example, if your posterior chain is weak, you're going to attack it. In our gym, we have the reverse hyper. We have the Westside Barbell athletic training platform, which some people call the belt squat. We use Strongman apparatuses to strengthen the core. We do a lot of one-arm, two-arm carries. We just have a more holistic approach than most weight-

lifters. I also think we're going to use a lot more accessory movements than most gyms. We're going to use the belt squat almost every single day. It really lights up the glutes. Basically the belt squat turns every exercise that you do on it into a glute movement. And we found, when we tested our athletes, that they all had strong hamstrings and strong lower backs with a lot of capacity, but what we also found in common was that their ability to fire their



walk it out, hold it for 15-20 seconds, rack it, go to 102% and squat it. Because here's what happens: your body remembers the most recent weight that's been on it. So it thinks you're doing 105% because that's what you just had on your back. That's the simplest way to put it. But basically it prepares your nervous system, which tells the body to recruit all the fibers and send in reinforcements because this guy is about to go heavier than he's capable of. But then you're not! You go back down to where you're trying to set a PR and your body is still firing for the bigger weight. Powerlifters use it big time with bands. There's a lot of research coming out right now from NYU with bands, but the biggest way I know how to use bands in squats is to do what Louie Simmons would say and do the dynamic work but then I would keep going. I would work up to where I was almost going to miss with blue bands. Then that means this: the blue bands add maybe 200lbs at the tip top. So you could end up going to 110% at the top, but then you squat to the bottom and it deloads it down to 85%. Then you take the blue bands off and keep working up and the body remembers that weight. I could normally set a PR after using blue bands, so we use that a lot.

big muscular glutes was lacking. It blew me away. So what we determined was that during hip extension, which is when the glutes really come into play, when that happens when they're snatching or clean and jerking, the bar is already moving so quickly that there isn't a big load when they're extending so there was never a big load on the glutes. So now we load them by using the athletic training platform and it really makes the finish of the lift, which

is the most important part, much more powerful.

MARIEL: Tell me about your neural activation technique.

MASH: Oh, it's just post-activation potentiation. It's nothing I came up with. I just use it more than most people. For example, say I want to set a squat PR. I'll warm up. I'll warm up to 95%. And then I'll do a walk out with 105%. So I'll walk out more than I'm capable of maxing. I'll

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MARIEL: What made you want to coach?

MASH: I just loved the barbell from the moment I touched it when I was 11 years old. It's done so much for me. I come from a broken home and I grew up in the mountains of North Carolina, which are beautiful, but they're just really tough. The barbell helped me get out of there and helped me go play football at Appalachian State and it's taken me around the world so I want to give back. I really love working with youth, juniors and young adults because I can take the barbell and teach them goal setting, perseverance, hard work, overcoming adversity — I can teach them all of life's lessons simply by working out. It's more important to me

that when that athlete leaves me, whether he's an Olympian or didn't do anything hardly at all, that they're better humans. I send them out into the world to do better — they're better fathers, they're better husbands, and they make an impact. That's also part of our non-profit: making better people. A lot of my guys go on to be good humans, make an impact and be successful. That means what I'm doing is working.

MARIEL: Tell me a little more about your non-profit, where people can donate and why they would want to.

MASH: mashelite.com/donate I'm simply helping young men and women achieve their dreams while trying to make them better humans, and also working

with the at-risk community. Yes, I want to help these guys place someday in the Olympics, but I want to make an impact on the community that we live in and have my athletes help with that and see that giving back is much more important than a gold medal. And I tell them that. No matter what they do. If they don't do anything with it, then all of it's for not. There's no purpose. I remember when I won the world championship and I didn't do what I needed to do and I don't want that to happen to them.

MARIEL: At what point did you realize that would be more important to you than just getting gold medals and helping people get gold medals? I feel like that mentality comes with experience as an athlete. The goal changes at some point.

MASH: Here's what happened. I started just because I loved lifting weights and I loved helping people reach their dreams. But when I broke the world record the first time, by Monday of the next week I was diagnosed with clinical depression. I didn't deal with it, I just started training again and the depression went away and I broke the record again and literally by the next Monday the depression was right back. It got to an all-time low between 2005-2007. It was an awful time in my life where I was trying to figure this out. If I'm winning all these medals and becoming the best in the world, I thought I should be on cloud nine. But there was no purpose to my life. So, between 2005-2007 I came to know Christ. I met my wife and I started finding more of a purpose than just winning. From 2007 on, I've lived for a purpose that's much bigger than just winning and life is so much better. **PM**

