THE EMERGING REALITY OF THE TACTICAL STRENGTH COACH

BARKER | WOMACK | LABHART | HOFFMAN | MILLER | TELEGADAS | KINNINGER

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THE EMERGING REALITY OF THE TACTICAL STRENGTH COACH

A Note from TeamBuildr

When I first entered the S&C space 10 years ago, collegiate strength and conditioning defined what it meant to be a strength coach. The story started with Boyd Epley and was carried on by t1he likes of Ron McKeefery and his book “CEO Strength Coach.”

Since then I’ve seen the industry provide new opportunities such as becoming a high school strength coach in charge of the health and wellbeing of athletes as well as non-athletes. I have also seen more opportunities in the private sector as general population adults seek to train more like athletes and appreciate the knowledge of a legit, seasoned strength coach as opposed to the “weekend cert” trainer.

However, the tactical setting is proving to be one of the most exciting “growth sectors” for performance coaches (an apparently modern take on the term “strength coach”). Tactical is being driven by the US Armed Forces, the most well-funded and best trained fighting force in the world. Not far behind is the appetite of our first responders such Police Departments, tactical response teams (SWAT), Firefighters, EMS and more.

The best part of the tactical industry embracing the proven principles of human performance that were primarily founded by the collegiate sector is that I can tell they are taking a comprehensive approach. Yes, our warfighters and operators need to perform when in action. But we also need to consider their mental and emotional health, assist in building strong life habits and ensure they are set up for success when their call of duty has been answered for the last time.

This ebook is a small contribution to the tactical space in order to share the experiences and expertise of those who have made a positive impact on warfighters and operators. They continue to blaze the trail for those who desire to follow. There is no greater call than to support those who serve.

- Hewitt Tomlin, CEO, TeamBuildr

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

RK Barker

When the term “Tactical Strength and Conditioning” is said, many people picture coaches working with Special Operations personnel in a professional weight room or exercise lab, pushing these Operators as hard as possible every time they set foot in the facility. The reality is far different. The term “Tactical” is more broad and applicable than most realize. What many don’t think of are the conventional Soldiers and Marines in need of coaches and education on training methods and wellness; Air Force pilots being more educated on and prepared for the physical and mental demands of extended missions; The Smoke Jumpers, Hot Shots, and other Firefighters preparing for yet another physically demanding fire season or the next call which could range from a health and wellness check to a multi-alarm fire; The SWAT officers and beat cops that need to be able to answer the call of duty at a moment’s notice, sprinting from their cars in pursuit of a suspect, breaking down a door, or the life and death decisions that have to be made while carrying out these physically demanding tasks.

The demands of the Tactical population are broad, their paycheck isn’t tied to physical performance or physique requirements, but their ability to do the job and save lives is crucially tied to their health and ability to physically perform. This means they need coaching and education in a way that most athletes do not. The recognition of this need has led to a massive effort to bring professional coaching and education on health, wellness, and performance into the various tactical settings. The US Army’s Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) program may be the largest human performance hiring project in history as the Army works to place a team of human performance professionals in every Brigade Combat Team and also in the Reserve and National Guard Components. The USMC’s Force Fit initiative aims to educate Marines on how to intelligently and effectively plan and execute workouts. Various Police and Fire Departments are beginning to hire coaches to not only improve the health and wellness of their first responders but also to reduce otherwise preventable musculoskeletal injuries and improve performance as they recruit from an increasingly sedentary and untrained population.

Many members of the tactical community seek out training and coaching of their own volition to move into a more specialized part of their profession, to prepare for the physical rigors of their job, or to improve their own wellness and achieve individual goals. This further broadens the offerings tactical athletes are looking for and benefit from, meaning there is near limitless opportunity in this significantly underserved field.

There are many pros to moving into the tactical space, especially if you’re moving from the collegiate setting - many of the tactical positions come with better pay, benefits, and hours than those found in “traditional” strength and conditioning settings. There are also many things coaches moving into tactical find difficult to navigate; deep rooted traditions, lack of education on what’s required to improve performance, the varied training ages and histories of individual members, lack of equipment and dedicated time to training, not to mention no clearly defined sea-

sons or sport/positional demands. The tactical population is often likened to working with "gen pop" clients, but with significantly more stress and physical demands that underlie the successful execution of their job duties. This inherently raises the stakes of what you, the coach, is able to successfully do with the tactical athletes you're looking to work with. All this opportunity means there's a maze of titles, bureaucratic processes, and differing requirements to navigate. Each branch of the military and each unique first responder population and department come with their own characteristics and demands. If you've never worked with those populations there's a whole world to expose yourself to and learn about.

- How do you approach these populations?
- What do you need to know about them?
- What types of training are effective for groups of varied abilities with broad demands and little training resources?
- Is moving into tactical the right move for your career?
- Which population are you a good fit for?
- How do you start working with that population based on what they're looking for and how formal their human performance efforts are?

Those are the questions this ebook will answer and equip you to handle as you determine whether not to take the plunge into the tactical space!

SECTION 2: CAREER PATHS WITHIN TACTICAL

Fire Services

Austin Womack

The tactical strength and conditioning space is a very interesting one, and because many of the job opportunities in tactical are newly created roles the positions are often uniquely broad and rapidly evolving. They also require a much larger range of professional skills that expand beyond simply designing a training program and then coaching it through execution. My role as an exercise physiologist with the Austin Fire Department is a perfect example. My role includes responsibilities such as leading our cadet PT program at our fire academy, conducting fitness assessments for incumbent firefighters at our wellness center, and visiting stations all over the city to educate and coach crews on all things fitness and wellness. Let me explain further.

Leading our cadet PT program is where me and the 3 other exercise physiologists on our staff typically spend our mornings (6a.m. - noon). Our fire academy classes start out with 48 cadets and we have either 1 or 2 classes present on campus throughout the year. We also run the cadet PT program for our EMS cadet classes (in Austin, FD and EMS are two separate departments) which run in 8 week blocks and have anywhere from 15-30 cadets. Our cadet PT program is led entirely by our civilian staff and assisted by our training cadre and academy leadership. We are responsible for designing, organizing, and executing all PT sessions in the cadets 28-week-long academy, and since we do not have an athletic trainer or physical therapist on staff, we are also responsible for modifying all programs for injured cadets.

We spend most of our afternoons at our wellness center where we work alongside our staff of registered nurses and physicians to conduct medical assessments. We typically run the aerobic fitness assessments (VO2Max tests) in addition to assisting the staff responsible for conducting EKG tests, vision tests, hearing tests, spirometry tests, and more. One really interesting aspect of our role is the fact that we assist all three public safety departments at our wellness center. Even though I'm employed by AFD, we also train EMS cadets and see EMS and APD personnel at our wellness center for things like hiring exams and promotional exams.

When we're not training cadets, or helping conduct exams at our wellness center, our team is traveling throughout the city to our 51 fire stations to educate our crews on topics such as shoulder/lower back injury mitigation strategies, and resiliency strategies revolving around sleep, nutrition, and stress management.

Like I mentioned at the very beginning, my role and many others like mine, are extremely broad with a wide range of responsibilities. If you're interested in pursuing an opportunity in tactical S&C it is critically important to understand and expect this reality. Some coaches only want to program X's and O's and coach, and I don't think that's a bad thing, just know that the tactical field often requires more than that. Just in the past couple of months my role has included things like assisting our training battalion chief and training captain on creating heat acclimation/injury mitigation policy, communicating with our safety battalion chiefs on department

wide dehydration prevention policy, collaboration with our physicians, nurses, and people from other fire department on research and development of cardiovascular health assessments, meeting with our staff psychologist and peer support leadership on our role in improving mental health in our department, and honestly the list could go on and on.

My point is that my job is so much more than designing training programs and coaching people. While the art and science of coaching and training are very important for what I do, if I didn't have skills in identifying structural and organizational wide problems, proposing creative, upstream solutions to high level leadership, and negotiating and communicating with high level leadership, I wouldn't be very successful in my role.

One more point I want to make is that a lot of these new roles don't always have straightforward titles like "strength and conditioning coach." In fact, the official title on my job posting was "Fitness/Safety Specialists III." What the heck is that? My role isn't the only one like that; I've seen many roles where the title focuses more on "wellness" or "exercise" than it does strength or coaching or anything like that. So keep that in mind when you're searching for opportunities.

So how did I get into the tactical S&C field? Well, my journey was not the most common. I spent the first 7 years of my coaching career bouncing around the private sector and professional baseball. In 2019 I got extremely burnt out on the industry and decided to move to Oregon to fight wildfires as a wildland firefighter. So, my introduction to tactical was actually as a tactical athlete myself. When I left Oregon and moved to Austin, TX I then enlisted in the US Army National Guard as an officer candidate. At this point in my life I wasn't sure if I was ever going to pursue another opportunity in strength and conditioning. Coaching was my passion, and I missed it, but I wasn't about to move for another job where I worked 60+ hours a week for 40k a year and no benefits.

I have to admit, I got lucky. AFD posted a job out of nowhere and I just happened to see it and apply for it. I seriously doubt they had anyone else apply who had experience with a professional sports team, experience as a firefighter, and who was active in the military. All my previous experiences ended up working out perfectly to prepare me for this role, and I know I'm pretty unique in that sense. Having experience as a tactical athlete helps me tremendously as I deeply understand things like the chain of command, customs and courtesies, rank structures, formations, etc. Of course, these things can be learned, but if you're interested in pursuing an opportunity in tactical and you don't have first hand experience with these types of things then you must do some research and understand this important aspect of the tactical world. Or, you know, just do what I did and join the Army part-time! I'm only like 5% kidding, I think it would be a smart move for many, many coaches.

To summarize quickly, a coaching job in tactical is much, much more than coaching. It requires deeper levels of problem solving and communicating with leadership. It often comes with a very wide range of responsibilities. And the job titles don't always align with typical S&C jobs.

Law Enforcement

Jake Labhart

One of the needed areas to develop and implement human performance within the tactical community is law enforcement (LE). In the tactical community as a whole, the "train like you fight" mentality has set teams, units, departments up for success when it comes to operational, or live situations. That said, it has also been damaging in some regards when looking through the lens of human performance. LE is a piece of the tactical community that works long hours, has challenging schedules, continuous stress, and serves in a setting where each day could be "game day".

Who is Law Enforcement:

LE is commonly associated with "police officers" but that could vary from the local LE, which would be your Police Department (city), or Sheriff Department (county/parish), to State LE, or Federal LE (FBI, CIA, DEA, CBP, USSS, ATF, etc). Titles commonly heard when associating to a law enforcement officer (LEO) would be: officer, patrolman, deputy, sheriff, detective, agent, chief, deputy chief, captain, lieutenant, sergeant, corporal, trooper, or SWAT. This can even gain complexity when looking at different roles within the rank structure, which we will cover next. In addition, there are outside organizations that impact the LE community from both an operations standpoint, but also as a support. There are organizations that support the Chief of Police, the department as a whole, or many states have tactical officer associations (as well as national) that will support the Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) teams in the state with funding and training. Similarly to the military, LE also has local, state, and federal funding for government contracting, which human performance could be considered, to bring human performance to the LE community.

Within LE there are many roles and responsibilities. You have your traditional patrol officer, who can do everything from respond to an emergency all the way to enforcing traffic violations. LE has command structures that are similar to the military, however with different rank titles and structures, as well as not always translating between city/county, or between local/federal organizations. You also have specialized roles that officers can take once they have enough experience, if they are interested, such as detectives in special units, or serving on the SWAT unit. Due to the diversity in roles, this makes human performance challenging at times, because you could be supporting and building towards many different goals and objectives. Therefore when looking at time management, it is really important to know and understand the research available for this population, as well as understanding the different roles so that you can be efficient in your time to serve this community.

Where Do They Train:

LE is a population where the "where" is constantly changing. As a human performance specialist you could be working at the department gym, programming remotely at an off-site/commercial gym, a home gym, a hotel gym, bodyweight workouts on the range, individual programs, team programs, or department programs. Obviously that's a lot, but it's truly a case by case approach. Many departments have some sort of work out facility for their officers, or have a membership to a local facility. That said, unfortunately that is not always the case and the ability to be cre-

ative in your programming is crucial. The time with which officers work out can also change based on their shift work, and then when you bring in personal life challenges, it adds another factor. As the human performance specialist, you must be able to really take the time and effort to understand the desired goal, the job tasks that the LEO must complete daily, as well as what they are dealing with outside of work. All of these factors must be taken into account, but then multiplied by however many officers you are training. So time management of "where the officer will be training" can be maximized by looking at "most common equipment" for the officers within a certain department and really looking at what they have available.

On Site vs. Remote:
LE is a community that is very difficult to program for due to many variables, but in my experience they recognize the need for human performance. In probably the last 5 years, there has been a big push for human performance at a higher level within the LE community, however, not all departments are ready to have an on-site team/individual. One of the avenues that has presented opportunities, due to the pandemic as well as the community readiness, is the ability to program remotely. This is always tricky, as a coach we want to be in the gym and hands on with our athletes, be able to give cues to correct form, and grow that relationship and buy in with the athlete. However, this isn't always an option, and sometimes your presence is better being available to the LEO, even remote, than not at all.

If you get this opportunity and are able to program remote, there are some big focus points. First would be to make sure that you clearly understand what their job tasks are, understand who you are working with, and what goal you are trying to attain. Although this may seem simple, I have seen time and again a coach come from the collegiate/professional sport world and think they know how to program, and they do, but just not for the LE community. The LE has different levels of stress, work hours, sleep availability, and fitness backgrounds. Second, you need to look at implementing some sort of objective assessment to look at where your officers are at, so you have a baseline and can track progress, and more importantly, stress. If you see your officers falling in performance, you need to have the awareness that something in your programming, or their lives, is not working and needs to be modified. Lastly, I try to use the acronym KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid). As much as I may love the clean and jerk as an exercise to increase power in my athletes, it is an extremely technical lift. Therefore, if I can't see all of my officers on a daily basis and am not able to give them cues, don't get fancy, just keep it simple and find other means to generate power within their job. As a whole, when you are working remote, keep it simple but effective, know the community you are working with, get a baseline, and be efficient with your time and theirs.

Logistics:
We have talked about the various job responsibilities, the on-site vs remote, as well as the specialty of the LE profession. The last piece that is important to understand is the different variables affecting the LE community, from a coaching lens. Officers work various shifts, if you think about it, there's an officer on shift 24/7/365 no matter where you live. This impacts you as a coach because you may have athletes working out on abnormal schedules. In addition to when they may be working out, how long they have to work out may also be affecting. If an officer is on a night

shift, they have to sleep during the day, as well as have personal time, so they may feel limited in availability and an effective 30 min workout may need to suffice. In addition, this goes back to the “where” in that maybe the best program is a time under tension bodyweight program they can efficiently knock out at their home. Scheduling will be a big factor when looking at law enforcement.

SECTION 3: SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES FROM THE TEAM SETTING

Cody Miller

The United States military contains an extremely diverse population of occupations, cultures, and operational tempos. Because of this, it's somewhat inaccurate to make generalizations about the military or tactical strength and conditioning as a whole, but that's exactly what I will be attempting to do. Bear in mind that the comparisons to collegiate strength and conditioning will apply to some units within the military to a greater or lesser degree.

Personnel

The United States military is huge. With over two million employees (both active duty and reservists, not including fire/police) it is one of the largest employers in the country. Because of this, the strength and conditioning professional is typically grossly outnumbered by Operators that fall under their care. Add in the fact that PT (physical training) is usually the responsibility of the soldiers themselves, and this leaves the strength coach as primarily a consultant. There are certainly opportunities for a strength coach to be in direct charge of a unit's PT, but these opportunities are rare. The majority of a strength coach's services are accessed on a voluntary basis unless mandated by the commanding officer. To make an impact on the soldiers they are assigned to, a strength coach must create buy-in and trust. Without that, they'll be left twiddling their thumbs. Obviously, this is in stark contrast to collegiate strength and conditioning where most sessions are mandatory and the strength coach has a large degree of control over the physical preparation of the team.

The individual can also differ greatly from unit to unit. Individuals range from newly enlisted eighteen-year-olds to "lifers" in their sixties. Occupations within the military are as diverse as the civilian world. The bulk of soldiers make up the infantry, but cooks, mechanics, and other non-combat jobs exist as well. Now hopefully you can see how difficult it can be to define a singular "tactical" strength and conditioning program. American football may be the most heterogeneous team sport in the collegiate setting, but the spectrum of different contexts within the military puts any collegiate sport to shame. Most of the suggestions that follow will be geared toward the infantry since they are the most common.

Programming

I find that a basic needs analysis works best for the tactical world. Getting too specific with the possible scenarios a soldier might face will be wrong. From the analysis of three common infantry tasks listed to the right, you can see that the soldier really needs to do one thing. Everything.

TASK	PHYSIOLOGICAL	ROLE OF QUALITY	METHOD & MEANS
LOADED FOOT MARCH	STRENGTH	LIMITING FACTOR	INTENSIVE CHIN-UP, SQUAT, HINGE, LUNGE
	AEROBIC FITNESS	DETERMINANT OF PERFORMANCE	EXTENSIVE RUCK, RUN, CARRY, ROW BIKE
MOVING UNDER DIRECT FIRE	ANAEROBIC FITNESS	LIMITING FACTOR	HIIT RUN, ROW, BIKE, METCON
	SPEED/POWER	DETERMINANT OF PERFORMANCE	INTENSIVE SPRINT AND JUMP
CASUALTY DRAG/CARRY	STRENGTH/ POWER	LIMITING FACTOR	POWER ORIENTED LIFTING, SPRINT, JUMP, THROW
	ANAEROBIC/ AEROBIC FITNESS	DETERMINANT OF PERFORMANCE	INTENSIVE/EXTENSIVE CARRY, RUN, METCON

In collegiate sports, there are finite rules. Field and court sizes are regulated, match length is regulated, and the rules of play are regulated. The games are also played at a frequency that makes it easy to collect a vast data set. Because of this, it's easy to establish averages and worst-case scenarios to base training off of. Last time I checked, war has no rules (Geneva convention, yeah, I know).

One of the problems with collecting data on specific combat operations is that many of the most important battles are separated by decades with generational changes in tactics, technology, and technical skill. Comparing averages from the Vietnam War to the Iraq War will at best leave you scratching your head and at worst take you down the wrong path. Also, data on some of the most currently active units is classified and therefore unavailable. Much of how you program will be by using known unknowns.

Known unknowns can also be thought of as "risk" while unknown unknowns are thought of as "uncertainty". These are two ideas that will help guide training. Risk is a harmful outcome that we can identify as a possibility while uncertainty involves harmful outcomes that we aren't even aware of. Uncertain outcomes are those that are difficult or impossible to predict. More on this later.

To be effective in any performance position, you have to know the amount of risk, uncertainty, and predictability. The map that I find most useful for decision making is Dave Snowden's Cynefin Framework.

This framework attempts to ascertain how predictable outcomes are in any domain. Basically, how much certainty or risk/uncertainty defines your day to day? If you have a session planned, how certain are you that the session will actually happen? How certain are you that everyone will be there? Will the company commander decide to take the guys to play paintball instead of train (literally just happened to me)? The strategy of training implementation will vary depending on simple logistical questions like these.

One of the defining characteristics of the military is that it's chaotic. Having sessions canceled last minute, having soldiers "tasked out" at the eleventh hour, or having more soldiers show up than you planned for is typical. Physical training is important, but it isn't as important as preparing to win battles and wars. Because of this, PT is one of the first things to be sacrificed even though it's defined as "protected time".

Because you will probably be spending most of your time in the chaotic space, we rely on the sequence of act-sense-respond. This type of programming could probably best be described, in the contemporary space, as emergent planning/periodization (or read up on Mladen Jovanovic's Agile Periodization). The first action is action itself. Because there is little to no predictability in the system, there is little need for analysis of what has come before (hence the simple needs analysis). Following that action, you have to create meaning of the immediate outcome. Once you've done this, then you respond with bottom-up strategies, autoregulation, and first-principled rules.

But this begs the question, how should we first act? Here are the five characteristics that should usually define a soldier's training.

- 1: Polarized
- 2: Concurrent
- 3: Minimally Effectively Dosed
- 4: Emergent
- 5: Empowering

Polarized Training

A soldier needs to be competent in the entire spectrum of qualities and abilities possible (according to our super-sophisticated needs analysis). Arguably the largest consideration is that many of the tasks that a soldier might have to carry out have no discernable limit. This implies that the soldier needs to be as metabolically efficient as possible in order to sustain efforts indefinitely. Also consider the fact that these tasks are often heavily loaded. When you combine these, the best approach, in my opinion, is to attack both ends of the spectrum.

When lifting, lift heavy. When sprinting, sprint fast. When doing extensive conditioning, do so for a long time. It basically boils down to keeping the intensive stuff intensive and the extensive stuff extensive. This also gives you an idea of how to progress. Intensify the heavy, powerful, fast stuff and accumulate quality conditioning work. You'll have some work in the middle (hypertrophy training, lactic training, etc.), but most of the emphasis and time spent should be on the tails of the training spectrum. Below is the mental map of usual emphasis.

PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TERTIARY
AEROBIC CONDITIONING	HIIT	LACTATE TOLERANCE TRAINING
STRENGTH	HYPERTROPHY	MUSCULAR ENDURANCE

This strategy has a complimentary nature to it. Aerobic work below 80% MHR provides many beneficial adaptations, but more importantly, it carries very little cost. The issue with more intense conditioning options is that they usually draw from the same well as resistance training, namely, local muscle glycogen. In the same way, by keeping the core lifts around 1 to 6 reps, you avoid copious amounts of fatigue which may affect the subsequent training days.

The whole point of polarizing the training methods is to reap a benefit while avoiding substantial cost. This isn't very different from the collegiate setting as this ap-

proach has proliferated through strength and conditioning departments thanks to Charlie Francis' High-Low method. There's nothing wrong with spending time in the middle of the training spectrum, just like there's nothing wrong with eating cake and cookies. You can't live on cake and cookies, though.

Concurrent Training

If you are unfamiliar with the term "concurrent", it refers to sessions of training which have elements of different qualities housed within the same session. For example, a session that includes sprinting, jumping, strength training, hypertrophy training, and conditioning all in the same day would be considered concurrent. Compare this with more unidirectional strategies which may only have one or two of those elements in the same session, AKA sprints and strength training in one session.

The reason I am a proponent of concurrent training is not because I am a Westside-or-die kind of person (RIP Louie), but rather because it serves a practical purpose. Because of the high uncertainty involved in the day-to-day operations in the life of a soldier, spreading out the different modes of training through the week makes it more robust. By having some element of redundancy through the week, it makes the organization of training more durable to change. Consider the two different days of training below.

UNIDIRECTIONAL			CONCURRENT		
1A	BACK SQUAT	4 X 8	1	SPRINT	3 X 1 @ 30M
1B	FROG STRETCH	4 X 60"	2A	SPLIT SQUAT JUMP	3 X 4 EA
2A	BB HIP THRUST	3 X 8	2B	PLYO PUSH-UP	3 X 4
2B	COUCH STRETCH	3 X 60'	3A	BACK SQUAT	4 X 5
3A	DB LUNGE	3 X 10 EA	3B	WEIGHTED CHIN-UP	4 X 5
3B	LEG RAISE	3 X 12	4A	SL RDL	2 X 15 EA
4A	SPANISH SQUAT	3 X 15	4B	LM PRESS	2 X 15 EA
4B	LEG WALL SLIDE	3 X 10	5	BIKE	30' @~70% MHR

The unidirectional day is focused all on resistance training of the lower body. This is a good representation of a bodybuilding session, and sadly this looks almost identical to how most soldiers tend to train since their go-to source for training information is T-Nation (not kidding). This doesn't have to be the only format for unidirectional training. Any time you see a training program with a conditioning "day" or an upper body "day" in which no other mode of training is used, that would be considered unidirectional.

While a unidirectional approach may be necessary as an individual approaches their ceiling to elicit further adaptation, it is a much more fragile way to structure training in a chaotic realm. For example, if a soldier misses one of the 5 days of training, what do you do? What if they miss 3 of the 5 days? Situations like this will have you scrambling to rearrange days which may not even matter if they miss

those days of training, too. The eventuality is that they miss whole elements of the training process for weeks at a time. Managing these individuals becomes too cumbersome for one individual. Because all of these individuals can't logistically be managed, there are large spikes in training load. Because there are large spikes in training load, we increase the risk of injury. Now you see the problem.

Depending on the unit you're with, it's highly unlikely that everyone will be there for all 5 sessions in a given week. There's a better chance that your 8-year-old nephew bowls a 300. It's in the realm of possibility, but I'm betting my life's savings against your nephew. This is where concurrent training flies in at the last second to save the day. Concurrent training isn't anything special. However, what it does offer is protection from risk and uncertainty. If a soldier misses a day or two of training, it doesn't really matter. The show goes on. In these cases, there is no need to juggle training days because all the elements of the training process are sprinkled in each day. This isn't to say that ALL of the training sessions should be concurrent. You can have days that have a much heavier emphasis in one direction. Most units tend to do this already (long rucks/load carriage days), so being able to make 2-3 of the training days concurrent is a step in the right direction.

Minimum Effective Dose

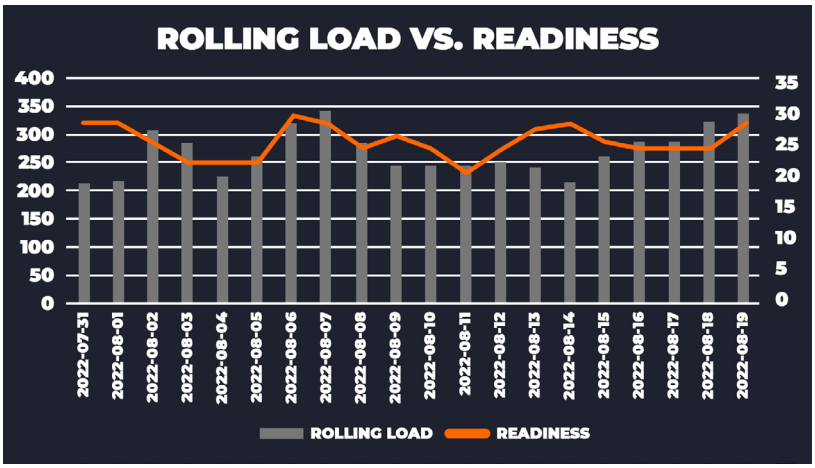
Minimum effective dose is a term coined by sprint coach, Derek Hansen. It describes the least amount of training you would have to do to see a positive response in performance. The magnitude of this dose will be specific to the individual although we can make generalizations of what constitutes a "high" or "low" dose for a whole group. The idea is to do the bare minimum to get the job done and then call it a day. It's kind of like a slacker at a dead-end job. They do just enough not to get fired. Oddly enough, this is a good analogy for minimum effective dose.

Minimum effective dose is antithetical to the "optimal" dose of training. But optimal is what you want, right? Because the training days are so few anyway, it would make sense to make good use of those days, do more, and overreach a little bit, yes? In my opinion, the answer is no. It all comes back to risk and uncertainty. The risk of overreaching or optimizing is that circumstances can change rapidly in the military. Much of military behavior is reactive, not proactive, so you'll have major changes pop up that you've got to deal with. There will be last minute brigade/division runs, 24 hour staff duty, insane and mundane taskings, impromptu PT with the brigade/battalion commander, extensive field training exercises, airborne operations, deployment, etc.

Because of this, the soldier must always maintain a high level of readiness. Any optimizing or overreaching will create a circumstance in which they may not have the capacity to endure the demands of the job. This is a problem. If a unit gets word they are being deployed in 18 hours into a pretty hairy situation, the soldier can't say, "Sorry, I thrashed my legs a couple hours ago, think I can skip this one?"

This is different from college athletics. If you screw up in college, the team loses. If you screw up in tactical and a soldier can't perform their duty, people die. It's high stakes. Dealing with the gravity of this situation is important. Being able to admin ister the correct dose is important. To find the correct dose, you have to balance

selected measures of fatigue and fitness. Below you can see an example of my training load and subjective questionnaire. There really isn't anything special about the data, but that's partially the point. No spikes and no valleys. Small changes over time produce the fewest oscillations in performance. That's what we want.



I don't think you have to be overly particular about what metrics you're tracking. As long as what you're measuring is a good proxy or representation for what you are intending on measuring, you're in good shape. RSI, e1RM, submax beep test, CMJ, training load, questionnaires, etc., are all good. I try to frame the objective like this. Measure something that you're doing and measure it's doing to you. This can also be thought of as inputs vs. outputs or performance vs. readiness. This is one way to establish an objective dose-response relationship.

If we're being realistic, you will probably have little access to technology or the means of collecting data on soldiers. Add in the fact that the Department of Defense can get squirmy about what data you're collecting on their soldiers and your options become few. The one thing the collegiate and professional sector have going for them is their prolific acceptance and use of technology. The good news is that you don't need fancy graphs or extensive analysis to make good decisions and find the minimal effective dose of training. If you follow a few simple rules, you'll be close enough to the right dose of training.

1- Err on the conservative side with initial exercise prescription.
2- Limit large increases in training volume, load, etc. (10% rule).
3- Keep soreness under control. No more than 3/5 on a Likert scale.
4- If soreness exceeds a 3/5, repeat the prescription the next exposure or reduce volume/load by up to 25% the next exposure.

If you can do these 4 things, you'll end up managing workloads and administering a minimal dose of training that will simultaneously enhance performance and allow readiness to be maintained at a high level.

Emergent Training

More fluid bottom-up styles of training planning have been all the rage lately and for good reason. Coaches have fallen out of love with traditional top-down periodization schemes (finally) in favor of more fluid, emergent solutions. This will be very important in the tactical setting because of, yes you guessed it, chaos and uncertainty (don't roll your eyes at me, please). For all the reasons mentioned before, having a more fluid approach will create less work for you while simultaneously being more effective.

TOP DOWN	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
1. SPRINT	3 X 1 @ 30M	3 X 1 @ 35M	3 X 1 @ 40M	3 X 1 @ 45M
2A. SPLIT SQUAT JUMP	3 X 4 EA	3 X 4 EA	3 X 2 EA	3 X 2 EA
2B. PLYO PUSH-UP	3 X 4	3 X 4	3 X 2	3 X 2
3A. BACK SQUAT	4 X 5	5 X 5	5 X 3	6 X 3
3B. WEIGHTED CHIN-UP	4 X 5	5 X 5	5 X 3	6 X 3
4A. SL RDL	2 X 15 EA	2 X 15 EA	2 X 10 EA	2 X 10 EA
4B. LM PRESS	2 X 15 EA	2 X 15 EA	2 X 10 EA	2 X 10 EA

Something like the above graph would be a very effective block of resistance training in the collegiate world. Believing that this program will actually play out like you want in a tactical setting is akin to believing in Santa Claus. I'm sorry if this is the first time you're hearing this, but the guy isn't real.

BOTTOM DOWN	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
1. SPRINT	3 X 1 @ 30M	3 X 1 @ 30M	3 X 1 @ 30M	3 X 1 @ 30M
2A. SPLIT SQUAT JUMP	3 X 4 EA	3 X 4 EA	3 X 4 EA	3 X 4 EA
2B. PLYO PUSH-UP	3 X 4	3 X 4	3 X 4	3 X 4
3A. BACK SQUAT	4 X 5	4 X 5	4 X 5	4 X 5
3B. WEIGHTED CHIN-UP	4 X 5	4 X 5	4 X 5	4 X 5
4A. SL RDL	2 X 15 EA	2 X 15 EA	2 X 15 EA	2 X 15 EA
4B. LM PRESS	2 X 15 EA	2 X 15 EA	2 X 15 EA	2 X 15 EA

Instead of writing out weeks of training with meticulously planned progressions on pretty excel cards that probably won't happen, write one week of good training and repeat it. Some things will be progressed and some things will simply be maintained because of missed sessions. It's impossible to say what will be maintained and what will be progressed, you'll just have to be able to adjust on the fly. Start with good training then run it, run it, run it.

PROGRESSIONS				
INCREASE REPS	INCREASE SETS	INCREASE LOAD	INCREASE ROM	INCREASE TIME

Empowering the Individual

In the collegiate setting, managing the training of those you are directly responsible for is not an easy task, but it's possible. In most tactical settings, it's impossible to manage the number of individuals under your care. Instead of choosing the centralized approach with the coach as the manager of everyone's training, decentralize the process by educating and empowering each individual to effectively manage themselves.

The typical coach's role within the collegiate realm is one of a training prescriber. The coach's responsibility is to prescribe certain exercises as well as load, duration, etc. The initial program is created by the strength coach and any adjustments of that program are under the discretion of that same coach.

The role of the tactical strength and conditioning coach is probably most effective as a training guide. Educate, give guidance and suggestions, and aid individuals in trouble-shooting problems within their own training when they determine help is warranted. Creating an environment where the individual self-selects when they receive guidance allows the tactical athlete to retain their autonomy and only receive help when they need it, increasing the likelihood they will return when it is required again. At that point, you really will be a valued asset to those you serve. And if they don't listen to your advice (it's inevitable, expect it), don't get all butthurt and angry, just shrug it off and try and help the next person.

Final Thoughts

One thing that wasn't mentioned before but might actually be the most important element of being a coach within the tactical realm is you have to look the part. This is a tough pill to swallow for some coaches, but I'm just trying to be straight with you. If you have all the knowledge in the world, but you're weak and out of shape, you'll hate the job because no one will respect you. They will consult with you if they are ordered to, but you'll never gain their trust. Lift heavy stuff and get a little out of breath as often as you can. Being a physical stud goes a long way in these organizations.

In all honesty, you'll find more similarities than differences between the collegiate and tactical populations, so don't try to reinvent the wheel or think that everyone needs to spend 8 weeks doing bodyweight iso holds. Somewhere in the middle is probably where you need to spend your time. Good, simple, straight forward training. Track a few metrics, advocate for a tolerable dose of training, utilize bottom-up strategies, and educate them on useful heuristics to use in their own physical preparation. That's it. Godspeed, friend.

SECTION 4: TALES FROM THE TRENCHES: LESSONS FROM TACTICAL COACHES

Things I Wish I Knew Before Becoming A TSAC: Part I

Kosta Telegadas

I spent years thinking that I wanted to be a college strength and conditioning coach. After finishing up my graduate assistant position, I realized there were some areas that really frustrated me within the realm of college athletics. Personally, I hated the fact that a head coach could have final say on my program and could fire me if I was asked to do anything unethical or outside of best practices within the field. I found stories of very good coaches getting fired for doing the right thing and in turn the athletes suffered. Secondly, the hours were brutal without proper financial compensation. I found that the "old school" strength and coaching coaches took pride in making little to no money while working 70-90 hours a week. This leads to coaches getting frustrated and taking it out on interns, GA's, assistants, and more. I met several coaches at my first NSCA conference while I was in graduate school who told me to go to the tactical side as soon as I could. They all felt like the work that they did was significantly more appreciated, had a good ethical/moral standard, and the financial compensation/work life balance was better. Currently, I love my job within the TSAC community, however, as with anything, there are lessons I wished I had learned prior to beginning a TSAC Job.

Lesson 1: Culture is different in every area

In most strength and conditioning environments, the coach must be able to adapt quickly and be a "social chameleon" so to say. However, this is heightened to the next level within the tactical setting and can be exhausting if not managed correctly. The key is to build trust on every front and understand any subcultures at play. I would highly advise any young coaches to get to know the "lingo" within the population you work with. The population you coach could be much older than you so embracing the culture that the older personnel has set can be a big win early on for any young TSAC coach.

Another big thing to consider is that as a coach you are relatively new in the past 20 years within the span of the tactical community. Military, police, fire, and SWAT have all been performing their jobs for generations without the help of a strength and conditioning coach. So, with that being the case, why do they need you? Make sure to find ways to stand out in a positive manner and augment the mission at hand. Most of these communities are very tight knit brotherhoods that go beyond their building's doors. Understand who you are talking to, the chain of command and how you can assist them in the long run while building up a program to reduce the likelihood of injury and increasing overall job performance. Lastly, you as a coach, are an outsider and every day is a test early on. Take time to go through personnel, introduce yourself, and remember key things about all personnel within the community.

Lesson 2: Sales skills are key

In a good amount of TSAC jobs, the program is not mandatory. This can cause changes in programming, organization, and funding for the coach. On top of that,

the biggest variable we face as TSAC's is the operational tempo changing. This could hinder the tactical athlete from getting the needed training. In my current role, I have had athletes come in after hours, before I get to the facility, and even when I am away in meetings. Sales skills are what helped drive this culture change for our program. However, the first thing I had to ask myself was;

"How do I fit into the unit and help them do the job at hand better?"

The major issue at hand in my role was the operation tempo combined with the training schedule. Below is a real example of a common schedule our staff still sees.

Week 1 – 5 days a week available to train
Week 2 - 2 days a week available to train
Week 3 – 3 days a week available to train
Week 4 – 5 days a week available to train

After a month of running 5 day a week programs, we sat down to re-assess program weaknesses. With operations tempo at the top, we found a solution. Our staff created a 5 day per week program then took the most important parts of each training day and combined them into a 3 and 2 day a week program options based on the 5 day a week program. Each training cycle, our staff assess which supersets, EMOMs, AMRAPs, Giant sets, and conditioning blocks need to take priority and are selected carefully given the needs of athletes.

Lesson 3: Always in season

One thing that is a common challenge within the tactical community is the fact that they are always "in season". There is no traditional early, middle and late off-season training at hand. So, make sure to check several factors. The factors are listed below:

1. Overall Stress

The hours worked can really take a toll on certain athletes in the tactical set ting. Some may go as long 24-36 hours with little to no sleep. Make sure to utilize questionnaires if time permits. However, if time does not allow for that to be done, see how your athletes are during the warm up. If they are chat ting and laughing a bunch, chances are they are good to train somewhat hard. If the athletes are silent, have sagging eyelids and look exhausted; then be ready to modify the workout. I highly recommend rep ranges or intensity range such as the ones listed below:

a. Intensity range – 7-8 RPE or 70-80% 1RM (training or true max)
b. Volume range – 5-8 reps leave 1-2 "in the tank"
- These help account for uncontrollable factors such as fatigue accumulated on the job, schedule changes, etc.

2. Intensity

In the college setting I loved percentages and autoregulation. However, once I really got into the tactical side of programming, I realized that may only be bene ficial for certain individuals. Utilizing an RPE scale of 1-10 might be a better option. Traditionally, once the athlete is educated on what a 7-10 RPE

feels like, the results come easier. Take time to push education while obtain ing buy in. This will add more credibility to your name & help autoregulate stress accumulated in the weight room.

a. Note: Having signs up around the weight room detailing this is a great way to help the athletes understand if the facility is accessible for 24 hours as well.

3. Rehab/Prehab

The primary goal of the majority of TSAC programs is and should be reduc ing the likelihood of injury wherever possible. For the tactical communities I have worked with I prefer to add in prehab work for the shoulders and hips to prevent common injuries. Some examples are below:

a. Upper body pressing prehab:
   - Cable Face Pulls 2x20
   - Crossover Symmetry Band I,Y,T's 2x12 each

     The overall goal is to increase upper back activation and stability so the athlete can push heavier loads without com pensation and decrease overall stress on the anterior side of the shoulders

b. Lower Body squatting prehab
   - Lateral monster walks 1x50 ft each
   - Forward/Backward monster walks 1x50ft each way

     Unfortunately, the modern day lifestyle shortens the hip flexors and lengthens the glutes. This results in the glute now firing incorrectly and increased low back activation within the squatting pattern. To reverse this effect, the glu tes need to be firing properly before we load the back with a barbell.

c. Lower Body Deadlifting prehab
   - Single leg glute bridge 1x20 each
   - 3-way plank 1x30 sec each

     Similar to issues that come with squatting, the firing pat tern can be thrown off from modern day lifestyle. Since the deadlift involves heavier posterior chain extension, it is best to restore the firing patterns via single leg glute bridges. To assist in decreasing the likelihood of back inju ries as well, the core must be fired up primarily in the rectus abdominis and internal/external obliques. The 3-way plank is one of many variations that is time friendly and still fires up the core prior to a heavy deadlift or hinge-based pattern.

d. Olympic lifting prehab
   - 4-part squat 2x5
   - Split Squat Iso hold 2x10 sec each

     Hip mobility and isometrics for tendon health are crucial to decreasing the likelihood of injury in Olympic lifts. The 4-part squats open the hips while opening up the shoul-

ders from a deep squat position. To increase tendon health the isometric split squats can prime the muscle for force absorption and deceleration needed in the "catch" phase of the lift.

Lesson 4: Make variation make sense

In the collegiate setting, we rotate exercises every 2-4 weeks while programming. This way the athlete obtains a good training stimulus in a controlled setting and can build movement literacy. There will be a decent amount of this in the tactical setting, however I have been put in situations that required daily and weekly variations to be used. While I do not like doing this, it is a great way to establish buy-in while still getting results early on in the program's development. Another positive byproduct of utilizing high amounts of variation is an increase in movement understanding and literacy. However, the key is making sure the progression makes sense in conjunction with the volume & intensity.

Examples of this are below:

HORIZONTAL PRESSING VARIATIONS, STIMULUS: HYPERTROPHY

WEEK	VARIATION	VOLUME	INTENSITY
1	WEIGHTED PUSH UPS	3 X MAX REPS	ADD LOAD AS NEEDED
2	INCLINE DB BENCH PRESS	3 X 8 (6 SEC ECCENTRIC)	ADD LOAD AS NEEDED
3	BARBELL BENCH PRESS		RPE 7-8
4	SINGLE ARM NEUTRAL GRIP DECLINE BENCH PRESS	3 X 6 EACH	RPE 7-8

LOWER BODY PRESSING VARIATIONS, STIMULUS: STRENGTH

WEEK	VARIATION	VOLUME	INTENSITY
1	GOBLET SQUAT	3 X 10-12	ADD LOAD AS NEEDED, HEAVY KB
2	BELT SQUAT	4 X 6-8	RPE 7-8
3	BACK SQUAT	5 X 4	RPE 7-8
4	WALKING LUNGES	3 X 50 FEET	NO MISSED REPS

The outcome of increasing the specific adaptation needed is what we are trying to do as coaches. This does not mean we solely squat, bench, and deadlift to increase strength or build numbers up. Getting creative with the programming can be beneficial, however, I recommend coaches watch out for DOMS and fatigue building up rapidly due to new variations constantly being used and little specificity being used. Make sure to undulate intensity week to week and if needed day to day to assist in counteracting this measure.

Lesson 5: Be Flexible

Whether it is starting up a TSAC program or entering an established one, you will always have to be flexible as a coach. Injuries come up out of nowhere, operational

tempo changes, budgets go up and down, etc. You will have to adapt quickly and how you handle some of those scenarios you are put in is how you will be judged amongst the tactical population. If you are the new coach in the door, establish trustworthiness from day one. This could be as simple as giving a concise introduction that hits all the major points or even going out of your way to do something simple that you are not required to do in your daily responsibilities.

A great example of this was in our last budgeting cycle. We had put in for some specific equipment for our facility and needed to make some cuts fast due to certain funding not being given. In an effort to be proactive, our staff had marked down our needs versus our wants in a color-coded fashion within the budget sheet so we were still able to operate as the program expanded. We were quickly able to give an adjusted budget sheet to our supervisor with little to no interruption on our hectic day.

Things I Wish I Knew Before Becoming A TSAC: Part II

Kosta Telegadas

As the tactical strength and conditioning field expands and improves it is imperative that S&C coaches share knowledge outside of programming to ensure the success of our contracts, industry, and tactical athletes. Expanding on my previous article “Things I Wish I Knew Before Becoming A TSAC: Part I”, I have 5 more lessons for coaches who are thinking of going to the tactical side of the field. These lessons are arguably more important than any program you will write.

Lesson 1: People First, Programs Second:
While this may seem like common sense to most coaches in the field, the pressure to obtain results for increased funding can creep up fast. With the high amount of stress and job specific duties that are placed on the tactical operators, being human, trustworthy, and reliable can be your best friend. Many times I have had athletes come in after a very tough training day still looking to get a workout in. At first, the level of resilience was shocking to me, and I had very little solutions. With athletes coming in fatigued, being able to modify the workout on the fly, provide regressions, and adjust load/volume is an imperative skill.

A Personal Story: I had a tactical athlete enter the performance center who was pretty beat up from a long 8-hour training day. Fatigue levels were high, low sleep obtained, and his CNS was fried. The athlete had only 35 minutes or so to complete the following workout:

EXERCISE	INTENSITY	EXERCISE	INTENSITY
1A. HANG CLEAN	5 X 2 (2 MIN REST - LOAD TO FORM)	1C. ROLLER LEG CURL	3 X 10
2A. DEEP SQUAT TO STAND	3 X 5	2C. LOADED TOE WALK	3 X DOWN & BACK
1B. BENCH PRESS	3 X 6-8 (72-78% 1RM)	3C. SIDE PLANK	3 X 20 SEC EA
2B. CHIN UPS	3 X 6-8	1D. SLED PUSH	300 FEET FOR TIME
3B. KNEELING T-SPINE	3 X 5 EA		

Now this workout would have taken roughly an hour for most people on a good day. Given the information the athlete gave me I saw a chance to make a good impression and modify accordingly. We reduced the warm up to the most important

key movements we were looking for and modified the workout to the following:

EXERCISE	INTENSITY
1A. EMOM	X 6 RDS - 8 KB SWINGS PER RD
1B. BENCH PRESS	3 X 6-8 (72-78% 1RM)
2B. CHIN UPS	3 X 6-8
3B. ROLLER LEG CURLS	3 X 10
4B. SIDE PLANKS	3 X 20 SEC EA
1C. ECHO BIKE	2 MIN MAX CALORIES

By removing the cleans, mobility drills, and creating a giant set of the most needed exercises we were able to drop the time of the session by 20 minutes. The main reason I chose KB swings and echo-bike as modifications was to ensure we reduced load, stress on the CNS, and still actively trained a similar stimulus for those specific muscle groups. As Buddy Morris says, “We are not strength coaches, rather we are stress and load managers”. There are a million ways to get to an end goal, however which way is the safest and most effective given the circumstances & stressors on a day-to-day basis. People first, programs second.

Lesson 2: Be Open To Being Criticized As If You Are One of Them
Being a tactical strength and conditioning coach, you are typically embedded within the units you work with. This means you have interactions with some of the top personnel such as fire chiefs, commanders, generals, chief of police, etc. You may not truly be one of them, however you will be criticized both positively and negatively as if you are a full-fledged member. Having been in my role for two years now, I have seen both sides of this coin.

The worst thing you can do is be perceived as incompetent as most units set and hold a high standard for all that work with them. If you are unsure about something, ask questions or find someone who would likely know the answer. It is seldom that people do not want to see you succeed in your role so take advantage of it. I was very young (26 years old) when I started this role and didn’t ask sometimes when I should have asked many questions. This led me to starting off behind the 8 ball and having to work back up to get ahead. My best advice is communicating concerns often and asking as many good questions as you can. It will not go unnoticed.

Lesson 3: Both Qualitative Data and Quantitative Data Matter
Data needs to be tracked to justify funding for most TSAC programs across the board. Sometimes I think as coaches we can get caught up in the new sports science or data trends that come up without understanding our “why” for tracking said data. I highly recommend creating a list similar to the one below with examples on how to track the following for most TSAC professionals:

- Power Output
    - Velocity based training
    - Vertical Jump
    - Broad Jump

- Max Strength
    - 1-5 RM strength for major compound movements
- Anaerobic Test
    - Wingate test
- Aerobic Test
    - 2-3 mile run for time
    - Vo2 Max test
- Body Composition
    - InBody Scan
    - Dexa Scan
    - Skin Fold Calipers
- Screening for Pain and Range of Motion
    - FMS
    - TRX Maps
    - ROM with Goniometer
    - Pain Screening with specific body parts
        - Ex: Neck, Shoulder, Hips, Low Back, Ankle

Once our "why" and testing protocols are established, you should be able to interpret that data back to the athlete in relation to their profession. A great example would be if a firefighter had a great body composition, good aerobic/anaerobic scores, and no problems with movement or pain. However, if his 1-5RM scores and power outputs are low, then the program should be tailored to creating a more powerful and stronger firefighter while maintaining the other testing scores the best we can. Data is good to guide the direction of the program. Establish quantitative norms and use qualitative understanding to guide the program for the athlete. Now, within TSAC programs this amount of buy-in to a program can take 1-5 years to achieve. I highly recommend taking attendance and overall satisfaction of the program as the year 1 metrics with only 1-2 quantitative tests of what the athletes need at first glance.

Lesson 4: Build a Networking Sheet

At any power five school or collegiate institution, you can go on the athletics program website and find the head strength and conditioning coach or someone who can get you in touch with them. However, within the tactical setting this could be very difficult. You have to network to stay in touch with people. Personally, I have an excel sheet that has all individuals' contact information. I divided it up into several different categories. See the example below:

1. Name of coach
2. Location – if allowed
3. Group Coached (ex: Special Ops, Big Army, Pilots, Fire Fighters, Police, etc.) – if allowed
4. Personal Email
5. Professional Email
6. Cell phone number
7. Social media – if coach has it

The other importance of networking in the field of tactical strength and conditioning is to obtain ideas and new methods of obtaining results. This subsection of the

strength and conditioning field is very different from the rest and varies dramatically from unit to unit. One thing I have experienced in my current role is that every coach on contract is facing different issues and there is always something to be learned from each other.

I have found that most coaches within the tactical space are very open to sharing what they program or do to counteract issues they are having at their specific work sites. Follow up and check in to offer assistance from time to time as you progress in your journey within the TSAC community as well. Jobs come and go sometimes quickly due to the majority of the roles being contract work and funding varying from year to year so make sure to keep your list up to date and communications open constantly. You never know where one phone call or email can take you in the world.

Lesson 5: Tradition Matters

I remember back to when I was working at EXOS and went to the NSCA national conference in Washington DC in 2018. Ashley Jones gave an incredible presentation discussing culture and knowing when to fight battles and when to partake in traditions within the rugby teams he has coached. This was mainly around physical traditions and post-game rituals; however, it is very similar to what can be found in any subculture/culture. Especially within the tactical population.

In many tactical units and cultures, traditions are heavily valued, and arguably a needed part of the units' process. The majority of these traditions are somewhat based around physical parameters. Within the tactical space as coaches our goal is to not only build a healthier and stronger force, but change some of the habits of the individuals and units for longevity purposes. However, I would recommend picking your battles wisely as a coach. If there is one thing I have learned within this space; teamwork, work ethic and trust are the biggest predictors of success when it comes to the mission. Trust being the biggest of those three. If the unit loses faith in you as an individual you won't hold on to your job very long. Trust can easily be broken by trying to change too much too soon. So embrace the culture once arriving on site to begin the process of gaining trust.

Elements of trust can be established from your first day by participating in some of the traditions if allowed. A great, yet simple example is partaking in a grueling workout known as "The Murph".

> This workout consists of a 1 mile run, 100 pull-ups, 200 push-ups, 300 squats, and ends with another 1 mile run.

Now this would interfere with the macro cycle of programming if not accounted for so I recommend having de-load options the week leading up to this workout. Make sure to have modifications ready for those who need them as well. The majority of tactical athletes I know take pride in "embracing the suck" of this workout to honor those who sacrificed their lives for our country on Memorial Day. This being said; jump in, grab a 20 lbs weighted vest and get after it. If there are other traditions that you can be involved in, participate in them. It could be anything from a small drinking night out to a major ceremony within squadrons, field houses or units.

Trust gains buy in, buy in builds culture, culture turns the tactical athlete into a more efficient and lethal individual for the force.

Remember if needed be; sacrifice the micro to win the macro. Hopefully this article helps other coaches transition to TSAC efficiently and gives them a small blueprint to follow from part one of these two articles.

My Journey From College to Tactical: Part I

Zach Kinninger

Before I jump into the differences and similarities of each entity, I want to talk about why I made the switch. Back in early 2020 (pre-COVID), from an outside perspective, some would say I had "made it" in the college realm. I had reached my goal much earlier than I thought; working for a large university with successful teams or teams that were on the rise. The athletic department was building weight rooms that one could only dream of. Each redesign had every piece of equipment and fancy gadget that a young strength coach could wish for. Additionally, I was in charge of running an internship program and helping shape the young minds of strength and conditioning, which was something I always wanted to do. When I began my journey in strength and conditioning, the description above is what I thought would be a perfect dream. The reality of the situation was that I was working 10-12 hours a day, on top of a few weekends, for a salary where one paycheck went entirely to rent. Basically, I had very little spending money or time to enjoy a balanced lifestyle. To sum it up, I was just getting by and feeling really burntout.

The long hours, little pay, and lack of a balanced lifestyle created the gas leak for me. The igniter for my change in path was that I realized there is no clear path working up the ladder in college. Unfortunately, in the college world, sport coaches make many calls; a reality that is understandable since they are the ones with W-L behind their names. Working from the lens of a sport coach, what stands out when you read a Strength Coach's resume? How many years they've worked with a specific sport. Therefore, in the strength and conditioning field, you almost need to specialize in the sport that you wanted to work with. What two sports are at the top? Football and basketball. At the time, our staff was organized, or tiered, by the most funded sport down to the least funded, i.e. football strength coaches took precedence, followed by men's and women's basketball. This is completely understandable, but for a young strength coach to move up in the current system, one would have to switch towards men's or women's basketball or switch schools entirely. If I wanted to stay at the current school I was working at, I would first need one of the strength coaches who had more experience to leave and hope I got hired with little experience working with basketball, and for me, I had no desire to work with those sports. Therefore, the reality of the situation was that I was stuck in a position of getting by with this so-called salary and the buildup of burnout.

So, what did I do...I went to Indeed and began looking. I made a few discoveries. The first was that I could move somewhere else in the country, make the same salary, and ACTUALLY be making money because the cost of living was so much cheaper. Only half a paycheck went to rent, instead of the whole thing, so I could pocket the other half or actually have spending money for the weekends. The sec-

ond discovery was I did not have a plan. I had no idea what teams I wanted to work with and the teams that I had been working with were not the teams I wanted to become a specialized strength coach in. I was not even sure if I wanted to stay in the college realm and I even had the thoughts of "Do I need to switch careers entirely?" I applied to some different college job offers and got a few interviews in a variety of sports. I obviously did not want to end up in the same situation that I was currently in three years later. After every interview, I would reflect and decide if that was the right situation (place to live, team to work with, good organization, opportunity to move up). After every college interview, my gut was saying not the right fit. I happened to stumble upon a military contractor position down in San Antonio, Texas, and thought that is something different and could be cool so why not. Worst case scenario: it sucks but it gives me a break from the college realm for a few years then I can go back, so I applied. Luckily, the phone interview went smoothly, and I had the chance to fly down and see what this side of strength and conditioning was all about. I was pretty fired up about this opportunity so I made sure to pack my suit so I looked my best. The plan was to fly in late on Wednesday, interview Thursday, and fly back. Obviously being a strength coach, I could not miss a training day so I packed some workout clothes as well to get a little hotel workout in before the interview Thursday.

Once I landed in San Antonio I reached out to my POC for this interview and asked what time we plan to start tomorrow. I figured it's military so they probably start early. I am waiting and waiting for this response until around 2030 (8:30pm) and I see a text that says "I will pick you up at 0500 you have a 3-mile ruck tomorrow with the candidates." I remember reading that and was completely caught off guard. I thought thank goodness I brought workout clothes. Then I thought "What is rucking?" So I Googled and read that it is 'walking with a heavy-duty pack'... okay not terrible. I told myself as long as it is not running three miles I should be good or are they running? I'm a strength coach so anything over five reps was considered cardio. I hadn't done anything cardio over three miles except for your occasional walk around campus and that still wasn't anything close to what I was about to do during my interview. To say I was nervous was a little bit of an understatement. So that morning I got picked up and was driven to base (of course the gate traffic was terrible).

We parked basically out in the middle of nowhere on base on this small dirt road. One by one, cars pulled up and it was a variety of different coaches - some swim, some run, and some S&C. I'm meeting and talking with everyone until a bus pulls up, and around 170+ candidates hopped off the bus to train. I then asked one of the coaches "Are you training all those candidates at once?" They respond "Yep, every day." My collegiate weight room was on the small side so we trained no more than 30-40 athletes per group. As the candidates lined up with their rucks on in 2-by-2 lines ready to begin, I got handed a ruck and put it on. That pack was breath-takingly heavy and I thought "F***". I asked, "What is this filled with?" the coach responds, "Just a couple of MB's, it will be easy I will walk with you." I later found out it was 80lbs. The candidates took off on what seemed to be an incredibly fast walk and I was doing my best to keep up. Immediately my anterior tibialis was on fire and luckily eventually went numb after the first mile. We had to go down the dirt road to a pole and turn around. It seemed like forever to get to the pole. I turned

and asked “How far is the turnaround?” and the coach responded “Half a mile so down and back is a mile.” Every half mile I seemed to drift further and further from the candidates until they were almost out of sight. Luckily, at that point the ruck was finished, and thought “Thank goodness I made it.” By this point, I was completely drenched in sweat and ready for lunch. I noticed the candidates were getting back on the bus. I asked what was next and someone said, “They have the pool next.”

Thank goodness I only observed these candidates’ pool training (I’m a below-average swimmer). The first thing these candidates did was perform a 25m underwater swim and swim back on a running interval timer. Which meant the faster you completed the exercise, the more rest you’d get, and the slower you were, the less amount of rest. I am a poor swimmer, so I was amazed at how calm some of these candidates were, especially later finding out most of them were 18-20ish years old. It was impressive to see from an outside perspective. After underwaters, they performed some mask and snorkel recoveries where the swim coach would throw the candidates’ mask and snorkel out a certain distance and the candidates would have to swim out, put the mask on at the bottom of the pool, and swim up using the snorkel, spin a few times treading and then swim to the coach directing. After the pool, I did the interview, so I never had to wear my fancy suit. My hip flexors had never been as sore as they were the following day from that ruck. All in all, the experience was amazing and from that point on, I knew that was the group of athletes/team I wanted to work with. Luckily, I was fortunate enough to get the job and I have been here ever since.

Differences

Now being in this position for two years, I am sure you want to know the difference between working in the college realm compared to a military setting.

First off, the candidates that you work with are not high-end athletes that you would be used to working with in college. Obviously, there are a few that definitely could have gone and played D1 ball, but a good portion are not that. Do not assume the best athletes are the biggest badasses. Successful military members come in all sizes and not everyone is going to be a 6’5” superhuman/terminator. Some if not most look like average Joes. Many candidates are normal individuals who have done or are in the process of doing extraordinary things.

A lot of your programming is not going to be flashy, fancy, and specialized. A good portion is focused on the basics/fundamentals of movement (squatting, hinging, lunging, hopping, skipping, and running). If you train a younger population, it will be similar to training a bunch of freshmen repeatedly. If you’re working with more seasoned individuals, the goals are keeping guys healthy/going and working around previous injuries.

There is a high chance you may be training a larger number than what you were used to in college. Instead of a group of 30 being the highest you might be training 30-100 candidates at a time with multiple strength and conditioning coaches. Pretty much all the military members that I have worked with have a passion for working out and pushing themselves to new limits. They will take in high amounts

of (training) volume and not complain about it; much like wrestlers. I cannot say- that was the truth when working with all my college athletes. For some, working out/training was more of a side gig that came with playing the sport. With that being said, I recommend you monitor your volume closely.

When it comes to the overall training goal for military members, that goal is much different from athletes. Athletes are specialized and mostly work toward a high-power output threshold/performance versus the military which could be more health driven or capacity-driven. This requires multiple methods of training (speed, agility, conditioning, mobility, distance running, and even swimming). Compared to college which may only require a few of the methods listed above that meet the demands of the sport.

Depending on where you work or what military personnel you're working with, you might only see the individuals for a couple of weeks before shipping them off to deployment or another course. So building relationships with the students/athletes is much more time constrained compared to college and working with the same athletes for four years.

Finally, from the work hours standpoint, your workdays are different. Military cours- es are based around an eight-hour work day plus a 30-60 minute lunch. That means candidates and personnel are restricted from working over 40 per week and weekends are a no in most cases. Generally, salaries are a little bit higher than the average college job. However, you will not be making the salary of a higher-end football or basketball strength coach.

Similarities

When comparing the entities, the bare bones of the job and/or focus are the same. You are given a block of time to work out/train candidates. In that period, you have to design an efficient and effective program. Equipment, number of candidates, and weather conditions could all affect what you have planned or would like to do. Just like in college, as a tactical strength coach, it is important to be creative and innovative with your approaches. You have to manage the amount of volume that is given. Similar to athletes, active duty members suffer many injuries and many have to do with overuse or too much volume. It is important to track and be aware of these instances.

Instead of a sport coach overseeing the training, you have active duty members. Similar to sport coaches where some think how they trained is the only way. Some active-duty leaders get it and some need more education on the subject. This is all new to the military so you may face the "Back in my day, we just did cals and ran miles," leaders or you might get the new innovative type that lets us try something new so candidates are not broken like myself.

Just like working with a sport coach and building their trust, the relationship you build with active duty makes the difference. Building that trust like you would with the head coach allows you to open up that arsenal when it comes to training meth- ods. When too much volume training occurs, and overuse injuries happen, the discussions on correcting this become easier and changes are more welcoming be-

cause of that relationship you built. Be open to active duty feedback as if you were learning the dynamics of a new sport you are working with in college.

In college, once you complete a year or two, you begin to see trends and develop a training system. The same can be said for the tactical world depending on how long you work with specific personnel. The training process becomes a rinse, refine, and repeat. It is just a short and condensed version of college.

Training is similar to training freshmen in college. The meat and potatoes of the programs are how to squat, hinge, and move correctly. You spend a lot of time perfecting the basics and making sure candidates understand it to carry over to specific tasks. Some candidates will perfect that technique quickly, others will need repetition every day.

Finally, similar to athletes, the personnel you train love to compete. Use that to your advantage and make training fun.

Overall, the switch from college to tactical/military has been a true success. By no means am I rich. I make enough money to have the balanced lifestyle that I had always wanted. I am not allowed to work myself into the ground since I am restricted to a 40-hour work week. When it comes to your strength and conditioning career, I think you need to figure out what you want to get out of it. When I first started out, I thought the big/flashy school job was everything. And now looking back on it, it was a great experience, and I'm glad I did it, but I just wanted to train hard-working individuals and still have that balanced lifestyle.

For some of you, you may want the glamor to be on TV training professional athletes. If that is the case then I would not recommend the tactical training environment. If you love game day and the hype, this is not the group to train. If you enjoy training and the process of training and want to help average people do extraordinary things, while having a little more free time for a balanced lifestyle, then I suggest you look into it. Whatever your path is...make sure it brings joy and meaning to you. By no means did I want this section to be a bash to the college realm. I just wanted to possibly open the door for other strength coaches who find themselves in my shoes. I actually want to thank all the great coaches that I have had the privilege to work with, wonderful athletes who had the drive to want to be better and trusted in me, and especially the fantastic mentors that I have worked under in my career. I have learned so much from each of you and I appreciate the time you invested in me. I definitely would not be where I am without all the great teachings I learned in the college realm of strength and conditioning.

You Want to Make The Switch to the Tactical Realm:
Here Is What You Need to Know: Part II

Zach Kinninger

In my previous section, I discussed why the switch to the tactical realm made sense for me and briefly compared my new role to the collegiate world. In this second part, I will discuss what you need to know before you make the switch and what I've learned being a tactical strength coach the last two years. Definitely through this switch there have been some growing pains and a learning curve. Much of it is due to "That is just how the military operates."

Personnel/location

When strength coaches reach out asking for advice on where to start when it comes to transitioning to the tactical world, the first step is to figure out what type of candidate you want to train. Do you want to work with a special operations unit, pilots, basic military training, a specific branch (Army, Air Force, Marines, or Navy)? Based on those particular individuals that you want to work with will dictate what specific bases you will need to move to. Are you willing to move? If you want to work with special operators that could be down in Florida, North Carolina, California, Washington, and even overseas in a few different countries. Keep in mind that most of the time if the base is not near a big city then there is not going to be much to do around there (good to know for family situations). I suggest not living right next to base, which may result in over a 30-minute commute. These are all variables that you may want to consider and/or research before applying to a tactical military strength and conditioning position. Fortunately, for myself, I just got lucky and all those factors lined up. If I would have worked with basic military members, I am not sure I would be in the same situation that I am currently in. I recommend researching the group/personnel that you would be training and asking what part of the training is this for them. Are they experienced trained individuals or individuals who just completed basic?

GS vs Contractor

The next option you want to consider is a contractor job or a general schedule (GS) position. I am sure you are asking yourself "What is the difference?" I began as a contractor and recently made the switch to GS. In both instances, the military had a need for this specialized position, so they utilized two hiring methods to fulfill these positions. Going the GS route, you are hired through the government. You receive excellent benefits (insurance, retirement, etc.); incremental pay increases based on time in service, while also taking into consideration the cost of living in your area; and even tuition assistance if you decide to go back to school just to name a few perks. Another positive about going the GS route is that in the event your position is dissolved, the government will place you in another job since they were the ones who did away with your position at that particular unit. Additionally, just like active duty, GS positions come with rank on a scale up to 15, i.e. GS-11, and require a certain amount of basic skills, such as leadership, management, etc. GS employees, can at times, work hand-in-hand with active duty. They may seek advice or ask you to provide evidence of specific matters to aid in decision making.

One downside to being a GS employee is that the government holds you to working 40 hours a week, so if you have a super slow day and/or are done with your tasks early, you either take a half day (report it) or sit at your desk and collect hours until it is time to leave. It is not like college when you can just leave once your teams have completed training for the day. As I mentioned before, a GS position is more of an administrative position much like a director position in college. Which means you could have less floor time coaching and more administrative work to aid in the direction of the program. Meaning, there is more of a clear path to move up in the GS route. It may take time but there are different military education courses to help you learn how courses and curriculums are developed. This is a lengthy process but is very beneficial. I recommend learning and/or knowing it as a GS strength coach. Another valuable nugget of knowledge being a GS employee is knowing how budgeting and execution of funds works. This will save you a lot of headaches down the road...trust me on this. If you're interested in a GS position, apply through USA Jobs. And it doesn't hurt knowing someone at the same place you would like to work at. One downside to a GS position is the hiring process and how long it takes to be onboarded. That can take up to 3+ months.

I have heard a lot of tactical strength coaches say that the job security is much better than college and that is not entirely true. Working for colleges you are given a one year contract (at least I was). When working for a contractor you are an at-will employee. That means, if the government gets rid of the contract or the contracting company finds you are not bringing value, they can cut you immediately without any compensation. Being a contractor within the government, the vendor must go through a bidding process in order to win the contract. Within this contract, the vendor has specific details outlined for every position they plan to hire to fulfill said contract. When hiring employees, unless stated within the contract, the vendor doesn't always have to hire the most highly qualified individuals. Additionally, you will also have a wide range of experience/career paths on your staff, which can be a benefit having different perspectives or this could be frustrating. Imagine you are a coach with professional/college experience working with a young coach who has only worked at Lifetime. Obviously, then researching the contracting company/vendor is extremely important.

Your vacation/time off and work hours are dependent on that contractor. If you go that route, which is not bad if you find a good contractor, then most of the time it is no different than a GS position. The major difference is the administrative work and "say/advice" in the program. In my experience as a contractor, you definitely have less of a voice in the direction of a program and most of the time you are hired to only coach. With that being said, on days that are slow with very little training/coaching going on, depending on your contracting company, you may be able to leave work early. If you hate doing administrative work and only want to coach and leave, then contracting may be the route you want to go. If you want more input in the program then GS is the route you may want to go. When looking for contracting military jobs, many times those can be found on Indeed or the actual contractor websites. Some of the big military contractors are KBR, Aurora, and T3i.

Equipment/Facilities

An eye-opening experience that I think is important to mention is the equipment

and facilities that you are working with will not be on the same level as a D1 university or even maybe a D2. From my experience, unless working for a program/course that has been well established or is supporting a specific unit, the equipment will be average, if not below. Ordering equipment is a much more difficult process than it was in college. College is simple when you think about it. Once money is actually given or donated, you as the strength and conditioning professional can spend/order the equipment that you feel is the best. Most strength coaches know what brands for specific pieces of equipment work best. The military is a much different process. You are given a budget just like college and you must use it or lose it very similar to college. Fiscal years begin in October when budgets are approved but that doesn't necessarily mean you'll be able to spend right away. Money has to be routed all the way down to the lowest level before you can even swipe a purchasing card. On top of that, money doesn't fall all at once, meaning you'll only get a portion of your entire budget. Then there are card limits and single-purchasing limits. Those can be restricting on S&C coaches, especially when you're trying to buy the good stuff. If it's more than the single-purchase limit, it must go out to contracting to complete the purchase and that can take a while before it's even processed. And sometimes you won't even get what you want since there is a bidding process (contracting requires three quotes). That makes getting the fancy Sorinex, Dynamic fitness and other big-name brands tough to get. So don't expect the big, flashy, fancy weight room equipment that you'd see at a university on a military base. In general, think of basic simple pieces of equipment to get the job done.

I hope this article is a perspective of what tactical military strength and conditioning entails. For most college coaches that I have spoken to about making the switch it is due to a variety of issues. The hours or workday are no longer feasible, they are not valued whether that is from their sport coach or from the athletic administration, or because of salary. Again, from my experience all those boxes have been checked with my switch to the military side. Workdays are restricted to 40 hours per week. Fitness and exercising is extremely important and part of the culture in the military so from my experience you will definitely be valued. A lot of that comes down to the relationship you develop with active duty, much like working with different head sport coaches. Finally, salary will definitely be above the average in the college world but you will not be making the head football strength coach salaries. The biggest difference/change is there is not a gauge of winning in this realm. In college, you have game day to show/display results and on this side there is no game so the only way to exactly see/ hear results is that comment from a trainee or active duty saying, "You really helped me out coach" or "Thanks for helping my progress in this....I was really struggling." Those are the results/wins on the tactical side. Then constantly reminding yourself that one of these candidates that you are training could do something extraordinary and make a true difference. Compare the real world implications of these careers to games where a W-L really does not matter in the grand scheme of things.

Learn from the Past, Work Toward the Future, But Live in the Present: 15 Years Working in Tactical

John Hofman

We often see coaches have different roles within their respective fields. The Certified Strength & Conditioning Coach educates and trains athletes for the purpose of improved sports performance. The Fitness Coach / Personal Trainer will provide instruction and assistance for the purpose of reaching personal health and fitness goals. The Financial Coach will focus on making sound advice or guidance for those seeking financial security. What about the Tactical Coach, what is their role? The purpose of this section is to help define the role of the Tactical Coach and to offer suggestions and strategies on how to become a successful coach within the Tactical community.

Who Are You Coaching?

I often say planes and helicopters both go into the air, but they are different and that is true when comparing athletes to tactical athletes. According the Merriam Websters definition an athlete is "a person who is trained or skilled in exercises, sports, or games requiring, physical strength, agility, or stamina." The Tactical athlete (operator) is anyone in the conventional military, special operations forces, law enforcement, fire/rescue, first responders, or a related field. They all work within a strenuous, hazardous, and stressful occupation, but the Tactical Coach must understand that that no one calls 911 on a good day. Why? Because it could create barriers of entry for the Tactical Coach to influence change or to help them. As President T. Roosevelt said, "No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care."

It Is More Than Just Fitness

Yes, their job is physically demanding, but fitness is just one tool that is utilized. It is imperative that the Tactical Coach is well versed in other areas other than just fitness. Understanding how chronic stress / cortisol and poor sleep affects their well-being or having knowledge of health risks such as heart disease and nutrition can be just as important as exercise. As a Tactical Coach it is our job to lead them to success and sometimes that takes different tools and lots of patience.

The Basics Work

Understand that the tactical athlete does work in physically demanding environments and are brave, but this does not qualify them to be a "superior athlete." They are great at their job, but most have not had much experience with high level exercises such as Olympic lifting or Turkish get Ups. Even worse, their posture could have changed from the job making certain movements difficult and could increase the chance of injury. Utilize the basics and keep it simple for them so they can do it on their own. Remember, those who already exercise and eat well are easy to work with, but our jobs are to also get those who do not exercise to embrace the value of health and wellness, and that's the challenge.

Fit for Duty

There are 6 categories, and each category is specific to needs of the job and longevity of the tactical athlete.

1. Do they exercise?
No such thing as a bad program, just bad coaches. I do not care what type of exercise they do just do something for 20 minutes a day 3-4 times a week. All exercise programs work and when the tactical athlete makes it a priority, we can then make it better for them, and there is nothing wrong with it being fun, but the most important thing they can do throughout their career is maintain their muscular strength. The stronger they are, the harder they are to break.

2. Do they eat well?
Nutrition is similar to exercise and people make it too complicated. There are only 3 categories: plant based, high protein / low carb, and low calorie; pick any famous diet and they will fall under one of those 3 categories. Don't get caught up in what's "best" but rather what works for them. We want to focus on a habit-based approach vs diet based. Remember it is not all or nothing so focus on consistency.

3. Do they get blood work on an annual basis?
At the very least simple tests such as blood sugar, cholesterol, spirometry, and inflammation should be monitored. Blood work will prolong their well-being into retirement and it will provide valuable information to the tactical coach if they share it with you, but always encourage them to get their annual physical.

4. Are they mentally sound?
Mental health problems are very common within tactical, and the tactical coach can play an important role in helping them. The Tactical Coach needs to understand how certain exercise programs can impact their cortisol and make them feel "wired and tired" or the importance of low intensity and/or cool downs to help them recover. Being a part of the peer support team and / or having a network of mental health professionals can be valuable. Remember, no one calls 911 on a good day.

5. Are they tactically sound?
Exercise compliments the job, it does not replace it; the more physically fit they are the harder they can train and training saves their life. Health and wellness will save their life over a career, training will save your life on the job. Just because you're in shape and can run 1.5 miles in 8 minutes does not mean you are tactically sound. Training is done to reduce the chances of the unknown so the brain knows how to process it when "bad things" present itself and they can make sound decisions. In the early stages of training everything is reactive but the goal is to make it instinctive so you can continue to improve your training.

6. Do they have physical pain?
Let's be honest, it's not a matter of if you get hurt, but rather when you will get hurt. Being a tactical athlete is a physically demanding job and injuries will occur somewhere during your career no matter how in shape you are. There is one thing I know for sure, they all age and get old, but the job does not change and that means there is an increased possibility they will get injured. This is important to understand because it may prevent you from performing the other 5 pillars. Throughout my experience I have helped many or our members rehab their injuries. If a tactical athlete is suffering from low back pain they may not be able to perform the

annual fitness assessments or worse not train properly. On the other hand, I have experienced with some of our tactical athletes the negative side effects of pain management and prescription pills. I have seen the toll it has taken on them mentally and physically. So we must remove the pain (the best we can) so they can function properly and have a safe and healthy life.

SECTION 5: INNOVATING WITHIN THE TACTICAL SPACE

Jake Labhart

When I left the military, I went through what I feel a lot of service members feel, an identity crisis. I wasn't sure what I was going to do next, but at the time I had a family and knew that I couldn't sit around and sulk. I was fortunate to have completed my bachelor degree prior to entering the military, and just so happened to have completed the majority of prerequisites for grad school in multiple healthcare professions. I grew up in a household where both of my parents were physical therapists. I recall growing up and seeing them work with athletes and patients and be a true change in society in how they impacted our community through recovery. Therefore, I applied and somehow got into grad school to complete a Doctorate in Physical Therapy.

It was during my second year of grad school when we took on our capstone project to be presented in our final year. Coming from my military background, I knew I still wanted to be involved with the tactical community, and I knew I had no interest in sports, pediatrics, geriatrics, or any of the primary fields that my peers were pursuing. That said, I didn't know what I actually wanted to do within the tactical community. At this time, there were multiple human performance special operations programs throughout each branch, but they were hit or miss in terms of how they were viewed upon by the operators as either a resource or a waste of time. So instead of looking at the military, I decided to shift my focus onto law enforcement. I hopped on the computer, googled the local sheriff department non-emergency phone number, and called to ask if I could talk to their SWAT commander. To my surprise, they just put me on hold and transferred me over. I explained I was a grad student and asked if I could schedule a meeting to talk with him about some research I was hoping to do, and a week later I was helping his team develop a physical fitness test that their team would use for entry to the team, but also retention for his SWAT officers. What I did not realize at the time, was this was a pivotal point in my career in how I not only got an opportunity, but it took me to where I am today.

Yes, my background is a DPT, but from when I began my capstone project, I then created a validated physical fitness test, and a shooting assessment that went from training SWAT teams all across local agencies, to going out to train with the most elite special operations units at the federal level, to being on the board for a state SWAT organization, and owning my own company. I was fortunate to grow my reputation as a subject matter expert in human performance and how it applies directly to law enforcement special operations. From this, I have trained thousands of officers/agents from how to warm-up, building team/individual workout programs, providing injury prevention strategies, to rewriting training curriculums, assessing fitness and shooting standards, to implementing human performance into shooting courses. Commonly I am asked, "How did you get into such a niche market?", and I always tell people "I don't know". Although that's usually my knee jerk reaction, it's more out of my inability to believe how fast everything has grown. However, when I look back there's some key points that I try to pass on.

First, be willing to break the norm, and if nobody has done it up to that point, you will hit a time where you are asking yourself if you are crazy, or if nobody has not done it for a reason. In grad school, and after, I would say that I have not used my DPT in the traditional sense. In fact, I would say that I am a hybrid between DPT and S&C coach. I took my knowledge of the body, how it moves, learned how to program, and then hyper focused on the tactical community and how I can contribute my expertise to serve them. I chose to break the DPT norm, and although there were times I questioned my sanity, it has proven to be an asset in what I am able to provide the tactical community.

Second take home, is that if you don't know where to begin, just reach out to your local "fill in the blank" and ask how you can provide your expertise. When I share this I often get a response of "yeah but Jake, you were prior military, so you had a foot in the door". On this note, that isn't true, they are very different professions when looking at job and function, and specifically how to program. The other piece is that I commonly tell people, look in your phone, rolodex, ask your friends, but without a doubt you know or have a contact to someone in law enforcement, fire, ems, or military. Reach out and ask them how you can be a resource, and then run with it.

Third point is to be willing to put in "sweat equity". If you are stepping into a big company that has a system that's fulfilling a big contract, such as the H2F program, then get the money you feel you deserve. However if you're trying to be a trailblazer, even if there's similar programs out there, be willing to spend some time fine tuning your craft, understanding the community, and show that community you are doing this to be a difference maker. Yes, you can make money in this field, but if you're looking to make millions, this isn't the field you need to be looking at. That said, I constantly see professionals step into this space who may have the education, but lack the experience and feel they are owed high compensation. Show the community you care, and take opportunities to be an expert within the tactical community so you can be a professional who is making a change.

Last point, not all tactical athletes are the same. Fire, military, law enforcement, and EMS are all different. Within those areas, there are sub categories, and specialties even within those. I chose to really hone my skills within law enforcement special operations. I tried to learn the language, understand their roles, capabilities, and common job function. Within that though, I learned that special operations is different from the patrol officer, but also different from the SWAT unit in city A and from the SWAT unit in city B. Do not be a generalist, treat every athlete as a specialist, and take the time to really understand what they do, then apply your expertise.

I challenge professionals from our field, "be the change you want to see". I wholeheartedly believe if you take your expertise, prove to the tactical community that you want to be a resource, and show you care, that you can go as far as you desire in working within the tactical community. It is a process that won't come overnight, but reach out to family, friends, your local tactical community, and start your process. Human performance within the tactical community is a young field, go out and be a trailblazer and change the world.

SECTION 6: ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Cody Miller
Cody is a strength and conditioning coach with the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. He spent the previous decade in the collegiate setting with stops at Clemson University, Bucknell University, West Virginia University, The University of Missouri, and Robert Morris University. Cody is happily married to his wonderful wife, Cayt, and he has two pups named Millie and Ollie. He grew up on a farm in New Cumberland, WV, and he'd love to get back there one day. After that, you'll never hear from him again.

John Hofman
A leading expert in the field of Firefighter Health and Wellness. The past 9 years, the strength and conditioning coach for the Sacramento Fire Department, John oversaw the Wellness Centre, coordinates the department's medical and fitness assessments, develops recruit fitness training, pre-employment medical and fitness evaluations and assists the department's 20-certified Peer Fitness Trainers. Currently, John is the co-owner and founder of 911 Tactical Performance, LLC - a company focusing on health, wellness, and injury prevention within the tactical setting.

RK Barker
RK is part of the Customer Success Team for TeamBuildr, where he helps educate coaches on how to optimally use the platform to better save time, energy, increase revenue, and better serve their athletes and clients. RK specializes in training tactical athletes, novice athletes, and rugby players. Previously he worked with EXOS in the Army H2F program with the 82nd Airborne Division out of Fort Bragg, NC, worked with two teams in Major League Rugby, coached in an out-patient orthopedic physical therapy clinic in Austin, TX, and prior to that served as an officer in the US Army. RK holds a Master's Degree in Exercise Science and the NSCA CSCS.

Jake Labhart
Jake is a former Army Airborne Infantryman, who upon leaving the military founded In Extremis Performance. Here he worked exclusively with law enforcement special operations units at the federal, state, and local level. Over the last 5 years he has worked primarily with federal law enforcement special operations units to build human performance programs to optimize performance, readiness, and longevity. He began developing research backed physical fitness tests and shooting assessments for operational units, as well as training pipelines.

Jake holds a Doctorate in Physical Therapy from Campbell University, and has continued to work with prior and active-duty military and law enforcement special operations units in an effort to deliver science and human performance in a way that enhances the end user's combat effectiveness. Jake currently serves on the TTPOA board, and has implemented a performance course to enhance a health and wellness initiative across the state of Texas in law enforcement. In addition, he continues to work alongside some of the leading experts in the tactical industry, as well as human performance industry, to educate and maximize potential in the special operations community.

Lastly, he is now the Director of the Tactical Division at Ten Thousand, where he works with tactical units across the country to develop premium tactical apparel. He founded the Tactical Performance Lab, where Ten Thousand provides specialized training to law enforcement special operations units, bringing in human performance professionals to enhance operational success.

Kosta Telegadas
Kosta currently serves as the site lead and strength and conditioning coach for tactical athletes overseas. Prior to working overseas; Coach Telegadas obtained his Bachelors of Science in Kinesiology & Exercise Science from Longwood University in 2016 and his Master's of Science in Education in Exercise Physiology with a concentration in Strength & Conditioning in 2018. Telegadas has an extensive and diverse background in strength and conditioning. With over 9 years of professional experience, he has worked with middle school, high school, collegiate and professional athletes prior to coming to work in the tactical setting.

Telegadas has a deep love for competing in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu tournaments, writing articles for the next generation of S&C coaches, and presenting on topics in the tactical setting. In his personal time, Telegadas enjoys spending time with his dogs Vinny and Lilly, going to DC Sporting events, and exploring new countries abroad. To contact Kosta, please email him directly at CoachKostaTelegadas@Gmail.com or DM him on instagram @Coach_Telegadas

Zach Kinninger
Zach is a Strength & Conditioning Specialist, in the U.S. Air Force Special Warfare. Kinninger began his career with Air Force Special Warfare as a contractor for T3i before making the jump to a civilian government employee. Kinninger now manages a staff of 20 coaches and oversees the training of 230 Air Force Special Warfare trainees. He directs and monitors the progression of training for these Airmen, along with the integration of technology, in order to better prepare these future Special Warfare Airmen throughout their two-plus year training pipeline. Additionally, he ensures that all Air and Education Training Command (AETC) protocols are being met for the safety and well-being of the trainees. Prior to his transition to tactical training, Kinninger was an Assistant Director for Strength & Conditioning at Rutgers. University He received his Associates of Arts in Personal Training (2013), a Bachelor of Science in Strength & Conditioning (2013) and a Master's Degree in Education (2016) - all from the University of Findlay.

Austin Womack
Austin Womack is an Exercise Physiologist with the Austin Fire Department. He is also a tactical athlete himself currently serving as an Officer Candidate in the US Army National Guard and previously as a wildland firefighter. A former college baseball player, he earned his Bachelor's degree in Kinesiology and later earned his Master's degree in Exercise Science. He is TSAC-F certified and spent several years of his coaching career training hundreds of professional athletes in the MLB, NFL, and MLS, including two seasons as a strength and conditioning coach with the MLB franchise Kansas City Royals.