

- S1 00:11 Welcome to the Sports Medicine Podcast, brought to you by the Sydney and J.L. Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance in the Department of Health and Kinesiology at Texas A&M University. At the Huffines Institute, we're always working to facilitate, apply, and bring you the most up to date coverage of the wide world that is sports medicine and human performance, all in a language you can understand and share with your friends. And now, here's our host, the Director of the Huffines Institute, Dr. Tim Lightfoot.
- S2 00:40 Hello and welcome to the weekly edition of the Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance podcast. I'm your host Tim Lightfoot and I'm so glad that you took the time to join us today. Every week, we have interesting individuals in the world of sports medicine, human performance, and general health many times. Today is no exception. We actually are bringing you a twofer today. We have two guests with us in the studio today. We have Major Nick Barringer from the army with us. Welcome to the podcast, Nick.
- S3 01:06 Thank you, thank you. Glad to be here.
- S2 01:08 We also have Captain Will Kobe from the army as well. Welcome, Will.
- S4 01:12 Thank you. Good to be here.
- S2 01:14 It's good to be here and I want to take a little bit of time and tell the audience why you're both here, then we'll just jump into the conversation. Both of these gentlemen, these distinguished gentlemen are here at Texas A&M furthering their educational pursuits in service of the United States Army. We're glad to have them here. Major Barringer, who'll go by Nick from now on or we'll have to start saying sir and saluting. We've already had those conversations already.
- S2 01:42 So Nick is here, he's a registered Dietitian and a licensed Dietitian, certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist. His Master's degree is from the California University of Pennsylvania, got his Bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia. We were reminded of that. He's here pursuing a Doctorate in Exercise Physiology at Texas A&M University. His previous assignment was at the 75th Ranger Regiment, where he served as a Regimental Dietitian for five years. We also are joined, as I said, by Captain Will Kobbe, who is a captain in the Army. He is working on a Masters Degree in Exercise Science here. His Bachelor's degree is from Villanova. Immediately after finishing his Master's degree, he is being assigned to West Point, where he will teach Physical Education and a variety of other fun things there, right?
- S4 02:26 Absolutely, in the Department of Physical Education, molding minds and bodies for future combat operations.
- S2 02:32 Excellent. Sounds like you practiced that a bit.
- S4 02:33 In the mirror, a few times, with or without sleeves on my shirt.
- S2 02:38 If you're listening, you can already tell this is not going to be our normal podcast, so we're glad to have these two gentlemen with us. In the past, we've had other representatives in military forces here talk primarily about physical training in the armed forces and how that relates to general health and well-being. I'm going to start with a real simple question and tell us what's physical training like in the army. Is it as strenuous as everybody-- and you heard about boot camp being terrible for people. Is it terrible because the people come in so unconditioned or is it just that strenuous? Will, we'll start with you. We'll ignore rank for right now. We'll just go Will.
- S4 03:19 Sounds good. I think from my experience and Major Barringer's experience, it definitely depends on what unit you serve with. We're both light infantry guys,

light airborne guys. Our units were more focused on running, cardio-endurance as opposed to strength endurance. I know I've had great experiences, Monday through Friday, 6:30 through 7:45, was regimented PT; always started with a three to five mile run to continue with push ups and pull ups - just full body workouts. I've been with other units, not so much regimented PT. It was the number one priority, serving in the 82nd Airborne definitely strenuous PT, Monday through Friday without fail. To include afternoon PT, so what you read, what you see in magazines, what you see in the movies is the real deal there. I'm sure Nick will say the same thing about serving the regiment for so long.

S2 04:08

Is it true?

S3 04:09

It's much the same. The physical training was strenuous. I would say the army as a whole, physical training is really focused on cardiovascular. And, the reason being in the 70s, Dr. Cooper and all that, and the army took to that, and so the test is the army physical fitness test is two minutes of push-ups, two minutes of sit-ups, and then a two mile run for Tom. You, being a professor, Dr. Lightfoot, you probably realize everybody trains for the the test. Because of that, a lot of units for PT, they just focused on the run, run, run, long slow runs. Something that I was able to do with the 75th Ranger Regiment was work as part of the Ranger Athlete Warrior Program. We realized long slow runs aren't indicative of what you do in combat. I think Will will agree with me there. So we started adding explosive components, cutting, planting more athletic movements and teaching individuals how to move. That's how our PT was different than I would say we'll call the big army and the rest of the army where most of it is focused, five days a week, long slow runs.

S2 05:11

In the past - and I'd mentioned this earlier - we've had General Ramirez on, who was the commandant here on the corps, who's Brigadier General, and had quite a bit of a service in his background. One of the things he talks about is the problems with bringing young adults now into today's army and having them meet the physical training criteria that we've got out there. Is that something that you all saw when you were in training with the some of the new recruits coming in? Are they in worse shape that they've been in the past? How quickly do they get into shape?

S4 05:42

It's funny from a personal experience when I joined the army. I was somewhere about 245 to 240 pounds, not exactly the lean mean fighting machine that I'd hope to be one day.

S2 05:52

That you are now.

S4 05:54

No.

S2 05:55

Those of us that can see you will say that.

S4 05:57

It was a hard transition for me because I was always the 2-3 hours in the gym lifting the heavy weights, instead of understanding that in the army that's not what you need to do. That cardio-endurance, that cardiovascular strength that you need to continue fighting on a mission is something I had to adopt and had been ingrained in me since I joined the army. Having fought these own personal battles then as company commander in the 82nd, I understood where these guys came from but I did see a trend in it, not a positive trend, where guys come into the army and weren't meeting the requirements we needed to. Because of that, it caused me more trouble than I had hoped with having to shape these guys into the soldiers that we needed. We spent on a lot of time reshaping these 18, 19-year-olds, who previously come into the army fit to fight.

S3 06:43

One of the issues we saw-- so we had an assessment selection process the last unit I was in. Over the five years, I got to see guys trickle through that process. A trend we definitely saw was at one point, most of the guys who were trying out,

they had played baseball, they have played football and so, they had basic movement skills. Something as simple as when you plant and cut, you keep your knee tucked inside your ankle, so you don't roll your ankle. We saw that erode away, and you would have guys who were in "cardiovascular" condition. They could go north and south. They can move in the sides you're applying. But as soon as we put a load on them, and then they had to plant and cut, we saw a lot of rolled ankles, we saw knee issues. So we had to take a step back and something with PT. Because you're having so many people who're just playing Nintendo and Xbox, those things is teaching those basic movement skills that most of us got growing up playing sports.

S3 07:32

I would say that's definitely something that the army as a whole is lacking. Everybody might be able to run north and south, but again, indicative of combat, you need to go east, west, plant, cut, and turn. Since, the younger generation, they're not playing those sports, they're not learning those movement skills. So taking a step back and just teaching people how to move.

S2 07:53

Is the washout rate in basic training now higher because of this? Do the recruits do wind up getting in shape? I know one thing Dr. Ramirez talked about was that the higher number of kids coming into the service now with type 2 diabetes in particular. Now, that's becoming a big problem in the army. You think those things are leading to increased washout rates or do they adjust?

S4 08:19

In terms of washout rates, by the time soldiers get to it. Myself, for the officer level, they are already to us, so it's the guys who make it through. We don't really don't see the washout rates in basic training. But you mentioned about dietary needs, the army starting to focus on-- why Major Barringer is here is because we're starting to understand that diet is a huge factor in the overall physical health and endurance. That's why it's important that Major Barringer continues on, keeps preaching what he's doing with proper dietitian and also recovery. We weren't taking the proper steps to recover our bodies because these guys are new to working out at the conditions we need them work out. We also have to understand, Hey, we can't push these guys everyday, all day. They need time to adjust. They need time to work it.

S2 09:00

You just bring up something that I think that the audience would be interested in. Is this common for the army to send its officers back for education? I mean, you're soldiers, you're supposed to be trained to fight and kill and I'm sure you can, but Will's here for Master's Degree in Exercise Science and Nick you're here for a PhD, is this a common thing?

S4 09:19

This is in the army especially with the officer core. This is a pre-regular for us, they term it as a broadening assignment for us. We can go back, get our educations, then come back, and help expand the army. With my case, I'll head to West Point, I will teach for the next two to three years. The future officer corps will have learned my experiences in combat and now my experiences here at Texas A&M. Gives me that educational basis to be able to teach, and then from there, I'll head straight back into the operational army, I'll flip the switch and be ready to answer the call whenever I need to deploy to.

S2 09:49

While we're here talking to you Will, you're not the only one here.

S4 09:52

No.

S2 09:52

We have-- there's at least one of the individual in our program that's on the same path as you are at this point.

S4 09:57

There are actually four of us across the army right now. We've had the tremendous opportunity to pick a school. So I selected Texas A&M for some of the reasons you mentioned about the core cadets and some of the traditions they have here. Myself and Captain Richard Juden, he will leave with me next

May after we graduate here with the Master's degree. We'll both head to United States Military Academy and teach for next two or three years.

S2 10:18 How about you Nick? Is it common to send back for people to get PhDs?

S3 10:24 Yes, as part of the medical, I fall under the medical department in the army. They have something they called the Long Term Health Education and Training Program. This is part of it. One of the reasons they have this is one, to do research through the military. We realized that research is important and again having that advantage of somebody who served, you understand the community better, and so you can ask those better questions.

S3 10:48 Then also, the other reason they're doing this is, down at the A&M Center School in San Antonio, Texas, a lot of those programs are accredited through different universities. Like the army, if you come in as a dietitian, you can actually get your Master's and do a didactic there in San Antonio. It happens to be accredited through Baylor University so they require a certain number of PhDs, that's why this program was started. It's a great program and currently, there's two other military dietitians here at Texas A&M studying. One in the Department of Nutrition and then one is at a community health, public health.

S2 11:24 This is a common thing. It's great to have you guys here on campus--

S3 11:27 Great to be here.

S2 11:27 -- for the things that you bring to us. Nick, a few minutes ago you mentioned the Ranger Athlete Warrior program, can you tell us a bit more about that and how you got involved with that?

S3 11:38 Love to. Yes. The Ranger Athlete Warrior program was started by now he's Lieutenant Colonel-retired Danny McMillan. I got involved in that. I was actually deployed in Iraq and found out they were looking for a dietitian. They were having tryouts and I immediately threw my name in the ring. I got to and try out and got the unique opportunity as a medical officer. We sometimes don't get to go through a lot of the training that the infantry do, such as Ranger School and those arduous programs and they afforded me those opportunities, so it was really interesting to go through that process and see.

S3 12:14 Physiologically, I knew when my body is breaking down at these points, you know what's going on. When you smell that ammonia you like, Oh that's catabolic, it's protein breaking down, that sort of thing. That's how I got involved with it. The component about the Ranger Athlete Warrior program and now it's even being pushed out across the army, this thought process is that the soldier's a tactical athlete. They rely on their body for a living, so that makes you an athlete. And so getting that across the soldiers so they think about things, like we'll mention refueling after workout, eating right, doing these things, and making them more cognizant of their body and performance. That's what we did at the Ranger Athlete Warrior program. We focused on performance nutrition. We focused on sports medicine. We focused on the physical training which most people just think about and then we also focused on mental toughness. We actually had an Occupational Therapist who talked about focusing and visualization and those sort of things. That was the team and we went around and we trained the soldiers in that. I think we had a really successful program.

S2 13:15 I tell you that's a really nice pivot there when you talk about tactical athlete, to really refocus what people might think of as soldiers. Because all of the things that you talked about, the four qualities there, I can see where it would be very important on the battlefield.

S3 13:28 Yeah. So many of the guys just think of PT or just the PT in the morning. What we're trying to do is get them to think about, No, this is something you're doing

everyday.

- S2 13:38 This is part of the context that you need.
- S3 13:40 Right. Sleep was a huge thing. We taught the guys, we would put up slides and show that, Hey, how many guys got four hours of sleep last night? The majority of the guys would raise their hands. We would show them research that shows, Hey you're basically inebriated at work. As some of these cross-studies relate with the sleep deprivation and alcohol. Then I would show them studies done in Ranger School, which is a school where you're sleep-deprived regularly and show testosterone levels. Testosterone levels were like that of a four year old girl and I'm like, How many guys want to suppress their testosterone? You know me, and so [inaudible][crosstalk].
- S2 14:10 Immediately you get to sleep.
- S3 14:11 Then the guys start focusing on sleep and it was amazing. I can tell you how many guys came up to me, just changing that one thing. It would be like, Man, I feel great. I'm lifting more, I'm running more, I've lost weight, just because they weren't getting enough sleep.
- S2 14:25 Yes. Given that topic, it's interesting how much crossover there is between-- when we think of sports medicine, we think of the sports, the bat and ball sports, and so forth. But the things that you talk about now are the things that we've heard from coaches when we have strength and conditioning coaches over and over again with their athletes. It's sleep, proper training, proper recovery, proper nutrition, and these are the same things that you're talking now about the modern soldier that they need.
- S4 14:46 Just like a Division I athlete who just relies on his athletic strength through high school and stuff, he can get away with that stuff. When he gets into the army, you see these guys in the cafeteria and stuff, and you just can't believe they're fueling their bodies on some of the things they're eating. I think that's one other thing that we're really trying to hit on now is, Hey, you've got to treat your body 24/7 if you want to see the outcomes that we push on you guys. You're a soldier 24/7, this is your job and you do your job better if you treat your mind and body better.
- S2 15:14 You come from the 82nd Airborne and we've all seen pictures of people jumping out of planes, especially the soldiers that got all this pack and all this other stuff between their legs and so forth. What's the average pack weight when you guys come out of a plane like that? Are you talking about 80 pounds or so?
- S4 15:30 Yeah. We're talking-- probably at the low end about 65 pounds. Probably the higher end, your mortar men were carrying 82 millimeter mortar tubes, we're looking at it about 100 and 105. I've seen some sweaty faces, some guys with a little trepidation and fear when they're about to hit that door. I'm telling them their parachute will work. They will fall to the ground. Actually, it happened a lot faster than they had hoped. Yes, obviously, with missions like that and Nick is accustomed to having the 175, they do the same thing we do, tactical airfield seizure. It's a very physically demanding process and leading up to it, it's an eight hour mission leading up to it. Then we're expected to fight for 24 hours - no sleep, no eating, fighting, digging security positions and stuff like that, so you really need to rely on your body. That's why we prepare them. That's what you try to teach them. This is all leading to these big missions. That one real world event is basically your game time. This is where you shine. That's why you prepared so hard is to execute your mission to your fullest capabilities.
- S2 16:28 Yeah, and you may look back on this question a little bit, but some of this conversation brings up the question of what do you two think at this point - you may have different opinions and that's fine - what do you think are the biggest

challenges now that the army has concerning the health and welfare of their soldiers?

- S3 16:45 I would say the biggest challenge if we're talking about the army as a whole is the issue is the army is representative of the community. We pull our ranks from the American population, and so the obesity epidemic, it's the same issues facing the American population. That's a concern. Are we going to have enough soldiers or soldier applicants, I should say, physically ready who can meet those demands? That's a legitimate concern. The other issue sometimes is musculo-skeletal injuries because what you have is, you have guys coming through who haven't trained, who didn't go through that body-toughening process if you will. And they're getting stress fractures, they're getting all these things, just from the training itself. I would say, is the American population has become de-conditioned that we have all those issues. The army is not immune to that because that's where we get our soldiers from, so those are the two big issues that I see.
- S2 17:40 You talked about the lack of experience in sports in general, that so many of them have as well.
- S4 17:46 I think our biggest thing, we've talked a lot about physical toughness versus the mental portion of the game and we try to teach, we're building our bodies, to build their minds at the same time. We've been in combat for 10, going on 12 years now. We got a stressed force and it's only to get smaller. The burden of responsibility is going to be displaced on a fewer amount of soldiers. Because of that, we do have to be more mentally fit so we're going to see more mental issues, I believe, because stress is just going to continue to increase. We're still going to be asked to do the same things far away with lands, still have to juggle home. I think it's the mental issues that we really need to shape and be cognizant because it's dangerous what the mind can do to you.
- S2 18:26 Yes, one of the things that old timers in academia will talk-- when we get together and we talk about changes in students. One of the things we talked about is the lack of coping skills or the relative of lack of coping skills that we see now compared to we'll say older days. Will, of what you just said I can relate to that. Seeing what we have seen here in academia is the smallest things make our students seem to fall apart and so I can only imagine if you put them in a real stressful situation in the army, how that would be difficult.
- S4 18:53 Right. I don't know how many times myself and Juden have look at each other and kind of winked or smiled when we hear the complains of, I only got six hours of sleep last night or I did this and I haven't been out in this and that. We're like, Hey this is the easiest part of your life. When I was eighteen, when I was 20, I believed that that was the hardest portion of my life too. It was a rude awakening standing in Baghdad when I was 23. I understood and appreciated where I come from. That hardens you up very quickly. I'm thankful for those opportunities. I'm thankful to be back here to hopefully show those opportunities. Show my experiences, be like, Hey, take everything, take everyday that you have because this is a great opportunity.
- S2 19:31 So should we take all of our 18- to 20-year-olds and put them in the service for two years?
- S4 19:34 Yes.
- S2 19:36 We're not identifying who actually said that.
- S4 19:38 No, I think we should shift to a model that there is some sort of community service once you leave the high school. I've talked about this. It doesn't have to be military service. It could be something in the police force, firefighter, but I believe everybody should have to give something back to the community that

they were raised in. There are other models, other nations who do that. It doesn't have to be, Hey you need to jump out of airplanes and deploy every 12 months, but I think we should all be. As citizens of an all-volunteer force, I believe that we should give back to our nation.

S2 20:07

That's probably in the context and again you say it doesn't have to be military, but it's in the context of broadening their horizon, and helping them see themselves in the context of the greater good, as opposed to just being about themselves.

S4 20:19

Absolutely. When I was a young, 21-year-old walking around Villanova, like I've said, I thought I had the hardest day of my life. At that time, I didn't think that about that young 18-year-old that was deployed in Iraq, and I know his day was a lot harder than mine. As I went home and watched the initial invasion on TV from the comforts of my dorm room, the eyes opened up few years later when I had that experience. Had I had that experience more, I probably would've attacked every day of Villanova a little bit harder than I did. I didn't really take full opportunity. That's why I'm here. This is my job, and that's why we really get attacked everyday here. Every assignment, every class, we're really showing up earlier and trying to do our best, because we know what a great opportunity this is.

S2 20:59

Nick, do you want to add anything into that? You've been quiet during this part of the conversation.

S3 21:02

No. I agree wholeheartedly with Will as far as the service model. A lot of other countries use it and even here at A&M, a lot of the Korean classmates we have, Korea is a mandatory service and I think you see that in the students. They're a little older, they're a little more mature, they're a little wiser, and they appreciate, they have that life experience to appreciate the opportunity afforded to them. Israel is another model that uses it. So I actually tend to agree with Will on that is some sort of service model. I think it's good because the biggest thing we'll hit on, and I always tell people who counted about the military, what I'm most appreciative of is those, can I say, times that suck, if you will, because that gives you a great life perspective. It makes you who you are, when your mettle is tested. And then no matter what you face after that, you know it's not going to be as hard as that was and I can get through that. You're not going to break under pressure like a final exam. Even if it is surprisingly more stressful than I remembered.

S2 22:10

What can we say to that generation to get them involved in these kind of service things, to have them understand that they are in a bigger thing than what they seem to be?

S4 22:21

I think that question is above my pay grade. I don't believe I can change the nation but what I can do is bring my experiences to my classroom. We've had people come up and talk to us and ask us about our experiences. Something like this, when Nick approached me about doing this. This is a way for me to get my message out there and tell people they have to learn from experiences and grasp every day. Mental fortitude and mental toughness is not something that is given to you, it's something that's learned, something that's developed over the years. This is our way of trying to get our message out there but I don't know if my model of service is going to start any time soon, hopefully. Maybe, I don't know. We'll see where it goes.

S3 22:59

I would agree. Like you were saying Dr. Lightfoot, as far as putting out there that the army educates people and you have all these great opportunities. I've had a lot of students here coming to me and they didn't know they did this. I even had one, and I won't name him, a good friend of mine here. He's like, Yeah, I would've went into the army but I wanted to go to college. I think that I don't

want to say that stigma or that thought process is out there a lot of times is the military is something you do if you don't go to college. They don't realize all the education that's available in the military and all these opportunities that are afforded to us, that it is an educated officer corps. Also, there's a lot of non-commissioned officers who get their degree through the military and who study through the military. I think knowing that these opportunities are available that it's not just, you're going to be digging ditches and they only know what they've seen on the movies, that sort of thing.

S2 23:53

This is not the movie world.

S3 23:55

No. It's not the movie world. Granted sometimes, it can be but no. For the most part the military both officers, non-commissioned officers. It's a highly professional organization, and it sets you up for success and no matter what you're going to do after that. Even if you don't decide to make a career out of it, you're going to be more successful at whatever you attempt, I think, having that military experience.

S2 24:20

Well gentlemen, we thank you so much for being here today. I've got a couple of other closing comments in a second but we always give our guest a moment at the end to give us their take home message, and we'll go by rank this time. That means Will you get to go first. What take home message would you have for the audience?

S4 24:35

My take home message will definitely be for myself and everything I try to do, I try to write down attainable goals and some things that are definable. Something I can put down on paper and say, Hey this is something that I want to accomplish - not only today, tomorrow, or the next week, the next year, the next five years in my life and I think that just helps me create an azimuth or path for where I want to be in the next segments of my life. Whether it be personal - I want get married, I want to have kids, I want to do this - and professional - I want to get my Master's degree, I want to go here, I want to do this. I think definable goals also being attainable are very important for everything we do in our daily lives. That's my take home message.

S2 25:11

Good take home message.

S4 25:12

Thank you.

S2 25:13

Next, Nick.

S3 25:15

No pressure. No I'm going to focus on-- since health kinesiology is people's physical fitness. We hear so many times, Hey I don't have to work out. Or, I don't have time to do this. I don't bother. I think we need to put working out. The mind and the body, there's a connection there for a reason. How important physical fitness is, and if you even look at-- it can affect national readiness. If the trend continues and people aren't physically fit or not training or not doing activity, who are we going to pull for if are attacked or we need to have the soldiers? I guess my take home message is there's always enough time in the day to get something done, to get some sort of training in. I'm sure there's been a lot of good training advice on these other Huffines podcasts they should probably go back and listen to.

S2 26:04

Thanks. We like that - the endorsement. I appreciate that. Well, gentlemen again, let me thank you. On behalf of our listening audience, thank you for being in the service and your service to the country. I know Nick fairly well because he's in one of my classes, but what I'll say is that, for the listening audiences, these are two fine individuals. They're great representatives in the army and great representatives to our country. Thank you gentlemen for doing that and for being here with us. For our regular listeners, you know that at this time of the podcast. We have our podcast question of the week. Here with our podcast

question is-- for the first time it's our new associate producer Alen, and Alen's going to give us our podcast question of the week.

S5 26:45

Who founded the Ranger Athlete Warrior program?

S2 26:48

That question's out there, so whoever the first one is to send us the correct response via email at huffinespodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu. You'll win one of our nifty podcast t-shirts. Again, thank you gentlemen for being with us.

S4 27:02

Thank you.

S3 27:03

Thank you.

S2 27:03

Thank all of you, that have been listening or taking a time to download this. We hope that you join us next week for another interesting person in world of Sports Medicine. And until then, we want you to stay active and healthy.

[music]

S1 27:16

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