

Huffines Sports Medicine Podcast Transcript

#174 – Dan Guiliani

- S1 00:00 Hi, this is Tim Lightfoot, the Director of The Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine & Human Performance. I am so excited to let you know that The Huffines Institute now has apps for your smartphones and your tablets. We have apps for the Apple products and for Android products. You can go to iTunes or go to Google Play, either one, download those Huffines apps and you can pull in our content every week. Now, onto the podcast.
- S2 00:26 Welcome to the Sports Medicine podcast brought to you by the The Sydney & J.L. Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine & 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. Now, here's our host the Director of the Huffines Institute, Dr Tim Lightfoot.
- S1 00:56 Hello and welcome to the weekly edition of the Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance podcast. I'm Tim Lightfoot and I'm so glad that you took the time to download us and you're taking the time to listen today. Every week we strive to bring someone interesting from the world of sports medicine and human performance to you in the podcast to talk a little bit about what they are doing and how they're changing our discipline and today is no exception. We have Mr. Dan Guiliani today with us. Welcome to the podcast Dan.
- S3 01:24 Thanks a lot Dr Lightfoot. It's a pleasure to be here.
- S1 01:26 Then we will tell the audience little bit about you and why we've got you on. Then we're just going to kick into the conversation here. You're good with that?
- S3 01:32 Sounds good, yeah.
- S1 01:33 Super. We have Dan with us today. Dan is the CEO and co-founder of a company called Volt Athletics. Dan has a Masters degree in Sport Administration and Leadership from Seattle University. He is also an adjunct Professor of sports performance in the collegiate athletic leadership program in the college of education, University of Washington. Recently, his company Volt Athletics has been identified as official partner with
the National Strength and Conditioning Association for a unique approach they take to resistance training. We're just going to start the conversation off. We're going to let you give us your big spiel about what does Volt Athletics do?
- S3 02:14 Yeah, sure. Volt Athletics is a technology platform. It's an online web-based strength and conditioning delivery system that's designed to bring high level strength and conditioning programs to more athletes and coaches around the world.
- S1 02:32 Why is this needed?
- S3 02:34 It's mostly an issue to do with access, Tim. You have schools like Texas A&M, you've got your division ones, your professional level teams, you got your elite levels where you have your strength and conditioning experts, your human performance, sport performance what have you, personnel on campus or working directly with the

athletes. But if you look just one layer below the division two, the division three, the NAIA's, and if you peer into the high school levels, you see a huge disparity between resources that are available for coaches and for athletes when it comes to strength and conditioning. So Volt was really designed when we started this thing a few years ago to tackle that larger issue. How could we provide really sound training? How could we provide an affordable way for athletes to access the methods and the principles that are traditionally accepted and implemented across the country in strength and conditioning environments?

S1 03:33

How does this work? Is this like a real-time connection, or do people just dial in, or pull it up and there are video vignettes of particular weight programs? How does this thing work?

S3 03:47

It's actually rooted in a pretty interesting technology, Tim. What Volt does is leverages an algorithm that we built designed to bring some level of strength coach expertise into the actual programmatic process and then the web platform is-- it's easy to think about it as a portal. An access point where a coach or an athlete would sign in and they would access their particularly workouts for the week, designs as part of a more comprehensive periodized training program optimized for their team's training calendar, their competition calendars and what not, the phases throughout the year as well as the sport that they're training for. Each work out, each program is personalize to the athlete in terms of their strength levels. We're really trying to equip them with the best opportunity to get the right work out given their training purpose and the adaptation they're looking for in the weight room.

S1 04:42

You're really working to augment the local strength and conditioning folks under there with more advance knowledge. So someone would-- say I was a strength and conditioning coach for a small university. We could get a subscription for our athletic department and I would go in and put in all my athletes, what sport and kind of some goals I had for them and one of your folks there would build a program or--

S3 05:07

Yeah, similar to that. Actually, we work with a wide range of different environments. From the-- for the lack of a better term, for the extremely sub-optimal where you don't have anyone on campus with strengthen and conditioning expertise which unfortunately is the reality. I played Division Three football at Colby College which is a tiny school in rural Maine and we had no strength coaches anywhere around. Every sport coach-- we had 30 sports that the school offered so every sport coach was on their own to develop, or to adopt, or procure a training program to try to put in place with their athletes.

S3 05:44

That's really for our first couple of years. We've been around since 2013 working with different athletes at different levels. That's really where we've made our strongest impact because now instead of those coaches trying to piece together a training program based off of attending a conference or listening to a podcast and trying to develop something that's fully comprehensive in its approach, that takes into account movement pattern, symmetries, and asymmetries, and properly unloads their athletes, and progressive overloading principals, and all the things that strength coaches think about and utilize as part of their training program development.

S3 06:25

Instead of a coach having to figure that out themselves, what we do is provide a structure and a level of expertise that those coaches can worry more about the implementation side of things with their athletes and let us take care and let our strength coaches take care of the program development piece. But we also work really heavily-- we're starting to work more with the

higher level strength coaches in the way that you were describing, Tim. Where we can extend the reach of those strength coaches working with athletes on campus so when those kids go home for the summer, or if they're away for winter break, or an athlete studies abroad, or something happens that takes the athletes away from the strength coach in a hands-on training environment, we've optimized the remote delivery system. So that they can put their training programs into the volt platform and utilize the technology to deliver those workouts to the athletes and provide the athletes with the resources to execute the program.

- S1 07:23 Yeah. I guess one of the questions I was going to ask-- each of these programs that are developed are personalized programs, right?
- S3 07:31 Yeah, they are, but it's interesting because personalization when it comes to training is one of those luxuries that strength coaches when they're hands on with kids, they're often working on they fly, they're developing different adjustments, and different techniques that are needed for each athlete. When you have a team training together in the classic team training environment, thirty, forty, maybe even more athletes in the weight room together, we found when we started working with the strength coaches that we work with which is a number of them around the country, is that they try to limit the amount of variation that goes into each program because realistically, there's a limited number of coaches, there are many more athletes. To try to manage a significant number of individualized training programs becomes difficult. So the way that we handle it is we try to equip the coaches with a standard structure of a program that they can then manipulate and that each athlete can access a workout that's-- we call calibrated. It's a little bit of a Volt-centric term, but it's individualized to their strength levels based off some testing parameters that are built into the program.
- S1 08:42 You still are going to depend on having someone, as you said a while ago that can be local that can implement and make sure that adherence is there?
- S3 08:51 Yeah, so that's-- we've never wanted to go down the route of trying to replace the in-person coach. That's unrealistic and untenable and it's probably downright dangerous. Our goal is to help equip those in-person coaches. Anybody who's working with those athletes, with more resources, better training structures, better programs, help them track progress and keep athletes accountable and kind of put all the pieces around them so they can be most efficient with their athletes.
- S1 09:19 Yeah.
- S3 09:20 And confident that the training they're doing has been well vetted. The partnership you mentioned earlier with the National Strength and Conditioning Association was a huge step for us because we've worked really hard. I myself and the CSCS certified strength coach through the NSCA, we only employ CSCS certified strength coaches and we work with an advisory board and a number of consulting strength coaches who are kind of seeped in the heartbeat of the industry. We do that because we care a lot that the actual training programs we deliver are universally accepted and based on the principles and the research of training. They have been proven out through the decades that the industry has been evolving. Our goal has never been to reinvent training, it's been to reinvent the delivery system and the method that athletes can access that training.
- S1 10:12 Yeah. It's an interesting approach. You talked a little bit about your time at Colby and maybe a lack of access to some resources that others have. I can see the genesis of

the idea, but what made you think about starting a company to do this? I mean, what was that process? We often like to tell on our podcast give feedback to people. Tell us what makes them passionate about what they do.

S3 10:38

Sure, yeah. I'll tell you the situation, honestly. I was working in the private sector. I was training about four, five athletes. Their parents were paying me a lot of money in the suburbs of Seattle to work with their kids for an hour and a half four days a week and it was great living. But I found that I was really-- I was lacking passion for the small impact with the few athletics. What was exciting about Volt and what's still exciting and what continues to drive us forward, is that we feel that the technology that we've developed and the business that we've built around it, enables us to achieve us a scale that can put great training in the hands of countless numbers of athletes. We're two years in and we work with nearly 18,000 athletes to date. That's about 650 teams at about 250 schools across the country and we think that's just the tip of the iceberg for us. We hope that as the comfort level with technology grows within the fitness industry at large and within the strengthening and condition sport performance industry, that we shouldn't really have any limits to who we can work with geographical and because it's an affordable way to deliver good training. Now you've got athletes who could never afford this level of training before who all of a sudden have an access point that they never had.

S1 12:06

We have talked primarily about colleges so when you talk about your 250 schools, are high schools involved in this?

S3 12:15

They are. It's actually about half of our Volt family as we like to call it are high schools and we found that if you look at the percentages, there's so many more high schools out there. The growth opportunities for us within the high school sector are immense. High schools are a little less consistent we found than colleges when it comes to the coaches involvement. Since we really like to work with the coaches so that we can provide them the resources to then work with their athletes. At the high school level, you may have a coach that's really heavily invested, heavily involved, and they might love a resource like Volt.

S3 12:56

You also might find the next coach over at the same school who is a part-time coach who works a full-time job elsewhere and is really maxed out when it comes to their level of involvement with their kids. We're working with a large variance when it comes to the type of coach, but we found some high schools have adopted it. You know what's actually interesting Tim, is the best stories we have at the high school levels, at least my favorite stories, are the rural schools. The schools where they might have 50 or a 100 in the whole school and they might be hundreds of miles away from any major, or even minor city. In which case, it's unlikely they have anybody personnel-wise who's on campus or who's nearby who can work with the athletes to develop the type of training programs that

Volt can provide.

S3 13:45

For those schools, we'll work with the entire student body in some cases. We'll work with all the sports, we'll put

sports-specific and non sports-specific. More general, physical preparedness programs in place so that now every athlete has an equal opportunity if they choose to take advantage of it, in order to help raise themselves to a level where they can then maybe take a shot at playing at a Texas A&M or an equivalent school.

S1 14:11

I can certainly relate having gone to a very small high school like that where we had

no one that knew anything about resistance training.

S3 14:18

Right. That's common.

S1 14:19

Yeah.

S3 14:21

It's a resource dearth at that level and what we really love is that our jobs here at Volt are to research, are to dive into the science and the publications, and listen to the podcasts. All the great resources that are out there and then help synthesize a lot of that information into a highly practical approach and a truly implementable system that a coach at that level, at that type of school, with the lack of resources that they're dealing with, can implement with their athletes with little extra effort, extra time spent.

S1 14:53

Do you ever get any push back from coaches who may say no, we're not going to do that cause we don't think that works?

S3 15:00

Very rarely. I'll tell you what the biggest challenge for us is. It's sweeping over some of the egos that are involved in our industry and that's one of the reasons that we've continued to iterate off of our technology. We started off with programs that were very inflexible. They were developed by our staff. We felt like they were very sound and principled, but there wasn't a lot of leeway. It was sort of a package deal. If you want to use Volt, you have to take this program along with it. But as we've evolved, we've developed a new technology that enables us to work with a lot of different coaches and implement their philosophies, allow them to make changes and adjustments based off of equipment, based off of time and other parameters they might be dealing with in just preference, frankly. As we've flexed our platform and our technology, that resistance has decreased significantly and that's been huge for us.

S1 16:00

It just struck me that you certainly-- you're in Seattle, so you certainly have a great depth of resources there as far as doing online kinds of things. Tell us a little bit about the team that it takes to bring this kind of thing to life.

S3 16:14

Yeah, your intuition's right. I mean Seattle is deep in the technology sector which in some ways is great for us. As a startup, as a small company, there's a lot of people around us who have a lot of talent when it comes to technology. But on the flip side, it's challenging because we're competing with the Amazons and the Microsofts of the world here in Seattle for the kind of tech talent. But when you commit to being a technology company like ours, you have to bring in really skilled engineers. A good chunk of our team is our product development engineering team and then we also employ strength and conditioning coaches. We have a coach relations and support staff who work with the coaches, who come into the Volt family to make sure they have a great experience and to answer any questions they might have.

S3 17:05

That's actually Tim, one of the things that we committed to really early on was that when a team signs up, or a coach signs up to be a part of Volt, we want to make sure we're there for them for the entire year or multiple years they might be part of our family. They have an easy touch-point, they have e-mail and phone contact, and we have strength coaches at the ready in case they have any questions. We really care a lot about the way we support our coaches.

S3 17:32

That's sort of our team. It's technology, it's strength and conditioning, and it's coach relations and support. Then we've complimented that with about 10 to 15 different strength coach consultants that we work with around the country and an advisory board of strength coaches who are more on the strategic side where they help us

make sure that what we're developing is continuing to further the industry.

That's one of the ways that we've enabled that acceptance and we haven't seen as much push back as because we've gotten some really core strength and conditioning industry folks to buy into what we're doing and to be a part of it.

S1 18:12

Yeah. I was impressed when I looked at your website as we were doing the background work on it that you don't make claims about average strength gains. Some of the things that you see in so many other aspects of our business, people brag about how much strength you gain, or size you can gain, or whatever. But how do you determine your outcomes that you are a successful company?

S3 18:33

Yeah, it's mostly anecdotal responses from our coaches that we work with. The athletic trainers at the schools saying that they see a reduction in non-contact injuries. The coaches themselves saying that they've been healthier, that they've performed better, that their athletes had more capacity later in the season. All of those things have come back to us and because we're so hands-on and proactive with maintaining the relationships with other

coaches, we get a lot of feedback.

S3 19:04

We've had coaches actually, if there's ever been a negative response it's been, "Well, our bench press didn't go up as much as I wanted it to." It just shows a really interesting lack of consistency or communication between the strength and conditioning world and the typical sport coach world where we don't really care how much you you're bench pressed. How did your kids do this year, coach? How healthy were they? Were they on the sidelines or were they on the field? What do we care about here? Honestly, the work that I do at the University of Washington which you mentioned at the beginning teaching sport performance. That's a Masters program that's designed for coaches so it's GAs mostly from around the country. I have the opportunity to interface directly with coaches in an educational, academic environment, and that's one of the first things I teach them right away. Is that the outcomes here are on the field. We can test all we want in the weight room, we can test all we want, and we can provide different parameters, but what really matters to us, what really matters to you, is what happens with your kids when it comes to performance? Are they healthy? Do they perform? They're having a great experience? Do you win ultimately? If we can achieve that, then that's the end result that everybody is looking for so we try to stress that with the coaches we work with as well.

S1 20:27

Yeah, those are the best outcomes, aren't they? When the kids stay healthy.

S3 20:30

Yeah, it really is. It's one of the cool things our industry is doing. I know that you guys are all over this and I think it's starting to seep down into the lower levels and we're trying to help push that is to help convince coaches that fatigue management, that injury reduction or mitigation, has got to be top of the priority list for them. The more that we can do to help educate them through the Volt platform, through our content that we have on the Volt blog, through our social media to help push that, that's a huge outcome which I think for the industry as a whole has become really important.

S1 21:06

Yeah. Regular listeners of the podcast will hear a common theme that you just mentioned there cause that's-- when we have strength and conditioning folks on that's the one of the things that I always say. If we can get them to sleep, if we can get them to recover, if we can get them to manage their fatigue, they're so much better athletes and they're healthier.

S3 21:23 That's true and one of the things that we've worked hard on inside of our platform is to provide what we call a resource library that is full of content associated with all those other elements of performance related to sleep, nutrition, recovery, how to fix certain issues that athletes or coaches might have during a training session. Different ways that we can equip coaches with resources at the ready so they can help their athletes with any situations that they might be confronted with.

S1 21:52 Cool. Well, Dan I'm getting the sign here that we're running out of time and this has been a great conversation and I think one of the directions that we all have to go in our field. As our regular listeners know at the end of every broadcast, we give our guest an opportunity to give us their take home message. If you want anyone to remember your message from this podcast, what would it be?

S3 22:14 I think it would be technology as a whole is coming and one of the great things about what technology is doing within the sports performance world is it's providing more access and if we think just a minute, or a layer below those high level athletes, those high level teams, the more that we can provide those kids that if they are given the right resources will jump all over it and would elevate themselves to a higher level. More we can give them access, then the less haves and have nots that we've got out there. My take home message would be that technology is probably bringing that about faster than anything by making access to great principles of training and all the things that we know and love in the industry more affordable and more accessible to more athletes.

S3 23:04 Great take home message. Dan, thank you for being with us today.

S1 23:07 Yeah, thank you very much. Appreciated it.

S3 23:09 We've enjoyed having you. For those of you that are regular listeners, you know that this time in the podcast is when we have the podcast question of the week and here with our podcast question of the week is our producer [Ayland?].

S2 23:21 What outcome measures does Volt use to determine a successful program?

S1 23:25 Great podcast question [Ayland?]. Be the first person to email us the correct answer to that question and you'll win one of those nifty podcast t-shirts. Until next week, and we hope all of you join us again. We want to thank you again for your time. Dan, once more thank you for your time today.

S3 23:42 Thank you very much Tim.

S1 23:43 You're welcome and we hope that all of you again join us next week for another interesting person in the world of sports medicine in human performance. Until then, we hope that you stay active and healthy.

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S2 24:42 From all of us at The Huffines Institute, we hope you have an active and healthy week.

