



Legendary Strength Podcast

How to Learn Parkour with Thomas Tapp Part

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Hey, there. It's Logan Christopher from [LegendaryStrength.com](http://legendarystrength.com) and I have a very special guest with us today. If you have watched any online videos or seen movies recently, you'll likely have heard of the art of parkour or free running, seeing that it's really amazing. Of all the physical things you can do, it's something that's really taking the world by storm and it's quite an interesting thing to watch and also train on, and all that. I have [Thomas Tapp](#) here with me today, who has been doing this for—how long have you been doing this, Thomas?

Thomas: About seven or eight years now.

Logan: Okay. He's also taught a lot of people so we're going to be talking about what parkour is, how to get started, how to train for it, and all that. It seems it's a thing that not a lot of people really get those details on so I was happy to bring Thomas on the line today to find out what those details are. Thanks for joining us today, Thomas.

Thomas: Yeah. I definitely appreciate you having me on, man.

Logan: Yeah. You're welcome. I guess a good thing to start with would be getting your background. How did you get started in this and we'll go from there.

Thomas: Yeah. My brother and I are twins and started in parkour so we've been training with each other for a while. Our story is kind of interesting because usually people have the background of martial arts or gymnastics but for my brother and I had no experience in any of those things. We just played basic sports when we were younger.

We loved Jackie Chan movies and like ninja turtles and stuff like that. We were fans but we never really trained that often on that stuff. We were about 15 or 16 years old and we lived in a small country town so there really wasn't much to do during the summers. Without training out with friends and stuff, it got pretty boring so we'd always go on the internet and look for crazy things.

One day, we found this video of this guy jumping across buildings, running up walls, and he's basically like a freaking Spiderman. Once we saw that, we were like, "Man, what is this? We have to start doing this." It's something crazy. It's an adrenaline rush so we've got to do it. We found out it was called parkour and the guy's name was David Belle. He's the founder of parkour.

Right when we saw that video, we started practicing our rolls in our room. We immediately climbed on top of our roof and jumped off and rolled. It was a horrible idea but we just did it anyway. I wouldn't recommend that. From then on, we fell in love with the discipline of parkour and we began to train and practice it.

The only problem was since we lived in a small town, there weren't people trained on it and also it was such a new thing that no one was really doing it. The only videos we could find of parkour were of these guys from France but they didn't have any tutorials or anything so we'd have to watch their videos and break down each movement, kind of study what they did, and just try to practice it outside. So it was a big process but we started to pick up the moves. We saved up a bunch of money to buy a video camera, started filming ourselves doing these movements, and then we just started training on YouTube and emailing it to different people. We tried to get on news stations and whatnot.

One guy got us as backups. We were like 16 or 17. He was like, "Do you want to do a commercial with us?" That was kind of our break into commercial work and things like that. When we started doing commercials, started getting more and more commercials, and then we started doing live shows, performances, it kind of snowballed from there. After getting all this work and putting our videos on YouTube, we started to get people asking us, "How do you do this stuff? How'd you learn?" At that point, we realized that we could dedicate a site to teaching people how to do it so that's what we started to do. That's kind of like the small synopsis of our story or the small summary.

Logan: Actually, there are a lot of cool directions I want to go in over the course of this. From the beginning, you and your brother were basically self-taught besides observing these other videos, trying to break it down, and learn from that?

Thomas: Yes. Exactly. I think being self-taught kind of made me appreciate the discipline even more even though I wouldn't recommend that—if you can learn from someone, do that—but it really made me have an appreciation for everything, for parkour.

Logan: Yeah. I imagine it also was frustrating at times. I've had that sort of experience myself. When I was first trying to learn how to do a handstand, I didn't really have much coaching at all and I made a lot of mistakes. Eventually, I had success but it was a hard journey trying to pave my own route.

Thomas: Yeah. Definitely, man. It's always like little things that you don't think about. Someone can tell you and you learn in like five minutes but for guys who are self-taught, it takes like five months to learn that little thing so it can be very frustrating.

Logan: Right. Okay, I guess having that experience of teaching yourself and also now teaching other people, where is the place, where should people start if they want to get into doing parkour?

Thomas: Right now, I would recommend if you have access to a gym close by—more are popping up, especially here in the US. It's getting more popular—I would do this, Google wherever you are and see if there are any parkour gyms close by. It's still early though so you might not have access to a gym close by. If you don't, go online. You can look on YouTube for tutorial videos. My brother and I have several on YouTube. Also, you can go check out our site, LearnMoreParkour.com. That's a good place for people who are just getting started, and they want to learn the movements and stuff, and have tutorials since they don't have access to a teacher close by and things like that.

Logan: Do you think it's essential to have a basic level of fitness and what would that level be before you start in this training? Should a grossly overweight person just jump into doing parkour?

Thomas: You're exactly right. There should be a big foundation of fitness. That's one of the things I learned when I trained with some of the founders of parkour that came to the US and other workshops. One thing I never forgot from Laurent Piemontesi was that his training consists of 80% conditioning and 20% play. That conditioning is just building up that physical foundation.

To do parkour or to do it really well, you need to be a high performance athlete so you need to train in those things. One of the things I really focus on at the beginning stages is that you work on the movements and learn the techniques but most of your training is going to be building up those basic building blocks. I've kind of broken them down to about seven. You work on your speed, your power, your strength, your agility, your stamina, your flexibility, and your mobility. All these are the things we need to work on at the beginning stages. We need to really develop that.

Like you mentioned, if you're a little overweight, one of the things you want to do is cut down and probably change your diet up a little bit if it's not good. Focus on that at first while also still incorporating parkour movements and really building up that foundation of fitness.

Logan: Okay. Could you go into a little more detail on those building blocks and I guess how you personally train them?

Thomas: For speed, I'm doing things like sprints, running. If you're overweight or say your joints are pretty bad, I'd go with biking or swimming so you're working on that. For power, I'd train explosive jumps so a lot of quick box jumps or explosive pull-ups. If you're a little overweight for that, you could do assisted pull-ups or different things.

One of the workouts I use a lot for beginners is quadrupedal movement and butt scoots. I'll have to send you the links to some videos like that but I'll try to describe some of it. Quadrupedal movement is when you're on all fours, you're crawling on your hands and feet, and it builds up your core, your upper body, and your lower body at the same time. It's a great workout. I picked that up from the founders. That's one of the things they really harp, doing the quadrupedal movements. Then the butt scoot is just a great core-building exercise and butt scoot is pretty much like in the name, you're just going to be scooting your butt pretty much off the ground. I'll send you a link to that.

In agility, I picked this up from soccer. One of the things we focused on were cone drills and if you played football, you'd do some cone drills and stuff. It's really good to work on that. What we'll do is have like four cones and you'd run forwards, and you'd run backwards, and you'd run side to side, as you just work on your agility.

Then for stamina, I usually incorporate some form of HIIT training, which is high intensity interval training. So you're doing quick bursts of training. You'll do ten sprints, one for like 15 seconds then you rest for 30 seconds, then you sprint again for 15 seconds, rest for 30 seconds. While it's hard, it's actually a good way to build up stamina and also cut down if you want to cut down. Then also in stamina, you do some endurance training so planks for an extended period of time, running long distance, things like this.

For flexibility, that's really important especially when you start getting into the more advanced stages or if you're trying to get your Kong vaults, you need to be flexible. Recently, I've been doing yoga because I've had access to it from a friend but the other thing is just making sure to stretch and really focusing on that after your training.

Then for mobility, this is one that's often neglected but having that full range of motion with all your joints. I've picked this up from a good friend of mine, Ryan Ford. He's a teacher in Colorado and he really harped on the third world squat. If you go to a third world country, they usually don't have chairs and stuff like this. I read this is an article. What you'll see is them, when they're sitting around and waiting, they're down in the squatted position but they're all the way down. So it's not at 90 degrees. It's all the way down. They can hold that for extended periods of time.

With parkour, when you have that kind of mobility, your precision jumps are going to be so much better and you can reach higher distances and avoid injuries. You get mobility in your legs and then with the shoulders, being flexible and being able to have a full range of movement there. So that's basically the breakdown of those seven points I like to focus on.

Logan: All right. Just to recap, it's speed, power, agility, stamina, flexibility, mobility, and what was the last one?

Thomas: That was it. Speed, power, strength, agility, stamina, flexibility, and mobility.

Logan: Okay. Got you. I'm taking notes here so I only had six and needed to get that seventh one. So you have all these different things you're training for and you said 80% of it is training and like 20% is skill

work. What does an average day of training look like? Are you doing all these things in one day, in one session? How do you structure it?

Thomas: I usually break it down. It's changed over time. Early in my training, I would do two a day. I would train in the morning, I would work on my acrobatics and things like this and then at night, I would work on my conditioning. But say for today, I'm going to do a workout, if I'm getting prepped for a Ninja Warrior coming up, I'm going to work on your basic bodyweight workouts. So I'll do pull-ups, pushups, different variations of that, and work on my jumps, weighted jumps.

On my hard days, I usually break it down with like speed, power, strength, and agility. Then on my light days, that's when I work with and really focus on the flexibility and the mobility. Today's a hard day and I'll do those weighted exercises or bodyweight exercises and then tomorrow, I'll do yoga or I'll do mobility exercises so I really work on my alignment and getting that full range of motion. That's pretty much how I go. I go hard day, light day, hard day, light day. I make sure that two days on the weekend, I don't do any type of physical activity, maybe just some stretching.

My workout on my hard days usually consists of about one to two hours of training, and same with the light days. But that's just what I'm doing right now. That might change up in the future. I might go back to two a day again or something like that but right now, I'm at a pretty good level.

Logan: Yeah. It's working for you?

Thomas: Yeah.

Logan: You said that's right now. In the past, what did you do? You said the two-a-day. Is there anything else in the past that worked really well for you as far as how you did your training?

Thomas: For improvement, let's say if you're kind of just starting off, I would definitely, especially if you're trying to learn your parkour skills, one thing that really helped me to excel really well was drilling those basic movements. If you're doing a convault or if you want to learn your convault and get it down, if you want to learn your lazy vault, any of the basic vaults that you learn in parkour, we're going to drill these until we get it down so well and so easily that basically it's just like walking.

What I would do is when I would train my convault, I would do 50 convaults to a run or something and I would train my lazy vaults on each side 50 times, and really just work on perfecting each movement. Once you perfect each movement, then we work on putting all those together in a run and then we drill on that. So we'll do a full run with those perfected movements. What I found was when you do that, you excel very quickly, it also prevents a lot of injuries, and you become very skilled.

Logan: That makes a lot of sense. So you drill specifically a lot on just those basic moves then put them all together. I don't want to get so much into the exercises like the vault because talking about them is not the best way to teach. Over the phone is not the greatest way to do that. You mentioned a run. What does that look like? I know it's all kind of things but just to get some idea.

Thomas: Let's say if I were training at a park, you would find certain obstacles that you would want to set up or go through so there might be a vault or a convault that I see over a picnic table. I'd run from there a few feet to another vault, let's say there's a rail, and I do like a speed vault, and then I would go to a wall run if there's a wall there, things you do with the environment you're training in. A good thing to do is when you're doing your training like this is to train in an environment that's parkour-friendly.

Usually college campuses are pretty good. There's a lot of different architecture. Parks are good, and gyms, if you have access to a parkour gym. So you can set up these things, these runs that I'm talking about, where you can vault over a picnic table, do a wall run, swing over some rails, things like that. Did that help?

Logan: Yeah. That was good. I guess it's really going to depend on your environment but how many moves are there typically in a run? Is it like three to five or just whatever happens to be there?

Thomas: Depending on your level at the time, one of the things I did when I was first training, was that I always tried to do at least one upper body movement or high intensity upper body movement and one intense lower body movement. I would usually have about five or six moves and I would try to switch it up. Let's say I would train at this garage and one of the specific runs was I would do a vault over this ledge, then run to the wall to go to the second story, and then I would go to the second story then take a small little drop and work my basic landing to a roll, and then go into another vault, so something like that.

But it depends on what you feel like doing at the time. If your skill level is not that level, then you might just be doing a vault to another vault and then repeating that. As you progress then you start adding more and more moves and vaults. As your stamina increases, you start adding more and more.

Logan: Okay. Like you drill the specific moves, would you then do the same run ten or fifty times in a row?

Thomas: Yeah. Exactly.

Logan: Do you try to like loop it around or do you take breaks in between?

Thomas: It depends on how I feel. When I was really, really training, I would loop around. One of the things in soccer when we do a circuit, which is we do all these exercises, we'd complete the circuit, and then walk back to the starting point and then go again. That's what I used in that a lot. I would complete the run, walk back to the starting point, and then complete it again. I'd go about ten times or five times, depending on how difficult the run was.

What I realized was that type of training is perfect for things like [Ninja Warrior](#), the huge show. My brother and I were fortunate enough to do a lot of the testing this year, be some of the guys who helped put it together, really put the obstacles where they needed to be and things like this. When we got to test it, we found out that we didn't really know how difficult it was going to be. I saw it on television. I thought it was going to be extremely hard but it's very similar to that self-training.

So when we had to run the course like we had to run Stage 1 for the different courses several time and the producers were like, "You've got to run it again. You've got to run it again," because they had to get it right for the camera angle. We're running the first stage like five or six times and that's when it really helped us out, doing that type of training. It was pretty crazy.

Logan: People who haven't done it don't really realize how tiring just adding these different acrobatic movements and everything when you're exerting your strength, how much that can take out of you so the necessity for that stamina is big. So can you tell us a little bit more about the Ninja Warrior? I'd imagine most people listening to this have probably seen the show on some level but can you describe a bit more what that was like?

Thomas: Basically, the Ninja Warrior concept started off in Japan but the idea is they wanted to create the hardest obstacle course in the world. If you've probably seen the military obstacle courses, it's similar to that except on steroids and on an extreme level, and like crazy water splits. If you fall and that stuff, you fall in a huge tank of water, it splashes, and you've got a crowd and cameras watching you. If you've seen [Wipeout](#), too, it's very similar to that except a little more serious and more about attacking the course and not people failing.

It's definitely the hardest obstacle course in the world and you've got people from all over the world who come and try out. They try to get a chance to make it through all these obstacle courses. What they did last year was they had prelims so they had a course in California, it was Venice Beach, a course in Dallas, and a course in Miami, Florida. The winners of these and the people who did the best in these specific courses got to go to the finals in Vegas. This is where they had three separate courses that people would have to complete. It's insane how difficult it is.

For Ninja Warrior, I would recommend if you were training, there are a few things that I've noticed that give people the most trouble. That is the warped wall, which is basically a vert ramp, and you just have to run up that wall and go over the top. That gave people, even parkour people who were used to doing wall runs, a lot of trouble because people aren't used to that curved angle. One thing you can do for that is to train on skate ramps or go to the gym that have a vert ramp, which some parkour gyms do. The other thing was mini tramps, which was kind of interesting because people weren't used to hitting off mini tramps and they would mess up on their jump. The third thing was rock climbing skills. That's another thing. There's a lot of rock climbing skills that's involved, especially later on in the course of Ninja Warrior.

Logan: Yeah. In addition to all the acrobatics, so much of the course seems to be very grip intensive. Besides rock climbing, what else do you do to train that ability?

Thomas: Yeah. Rock climbing, fingertip-specific exercises, an easy one that I do especially when getting ready for Ninja Warrior is I'll get a couple of towels, I'll wrap them around my pull-up bar, and just work on my grip strength. I call them towel pull-ups. I'll work on that, and then rope climbs. There are a lot of ropes usually used in Ninja Warrior so get used to climbing rope and get comfortable with the rope.

Logan: Do you use different diameter ropes or just regular rope?

Thomas: Usually, regular will be fine but if you really want to make it even more intense, you go skinnier and skinnier. It's harder on your fingertips. I like to do that but usually for the course, it's basically regular in diameter and they have a really big one if you make it to the finals or the very final stage. Last year, no one made it to that point. You had to do this huge, I think it was like a 60-foot, rope climb.

Logan: Okay. Is it all [bodyweight training](#) or do you lift weights at all? Do you find that that's helpful or not at all?

Thomas: If you have access to weights, doing weight training is fantastic, especially your squats, your deadlifts, things like this. Right now, I'm not doing too much of that. I would like to but right now, I'm doing sandbag lifts. I'll do squats with that. Another thing I do is I have a weight vest and I'll do pull-ups with the weight vest. I do other bodyweight exercises with that and a little bit of dumbbell training. I'll do lunges holding dumbbells. I think weights can be very good but primarily, most of my exercising is bodyweight training.

Logan: All right. Do you also do something like the gymnastic feats like flags? Do you find that just easily incorporates in with your training?

Thomas: Yeah, definitely. That's kind of one of the things that comes hand in hand. You do the flags. I'm trying to work on my planche. That's one thing, to have super strength, and also like one-arm pull-ups, things like this. Especially when you build that basic foundation, you'll find that those movements become so much easier and that's one of the reasons I was able to pick up the human flag, one-arm pull-ups, and things like this. It's so much easier because when you build that foundation then it's easier to transition to that. Also with handstands, same thing.

Logan: Yeah. It really all goes hand in hand. Parkour is all about controlling your body and getting what you want it to do. It's the same with those different bodyweight exercises.

Thomas: Yeah, exactly.

Logan: Just for curiosity's sake, how much do you weigh and how tall are you?

Thomas: I am 5'7" and I weigh between 135 and 140. It just kind of fluctuates between that.

Logan: Okay. Are most people that are involved in parkour on the lighter side? Obviously there aren't really any heavyweights doing it but somewhere around your weight?

Thomas: Yeah. Most Americans are usually a little bit shorter, like 5'7", 5'8" and pretty light, not big and bulky, very lean and cut, usually very ripped. Overseas though, it's pretty interesting. It's like guys who are 6'1", 6-foot, some of the really talented guys are close to 6-foot. Usually, for acrobatics and stuff, you're shorter. If you look at circus guys or gymnasts, they're usually between 5'5" and 5'7". That's what I found interesting, that some parkour athletes overseas are pretty tall and big.

Usually that is the case, smaller stature, light weight, very efficient muscle, kind of like the Bruce Lee-type body but I have friends and guys who are a little bit bigger. I have a friend who's about 6'5" and he

weighs over 200. He used to weight over 300 but he lost a lot of weight through parkour. He can move around pretty good. He can do front pull-ups, things like this. So it really depends I guess on the person who's training, their body, genetics, and things like that. Yeah, usually smaller stature.

Logan: Yeah. It definitely helps. I'm 6'2" so doing gymnastic feats certainly isn't easy but I want to do it anyway but that's just one question. A lot of people will use that as an excuse or complain about it but if you're big, you've just got to be better.

Thomas: Exactly. I know a guy overseas, a really good tricker and he's about 6'2". It's amazing to see that. That's cool. I didn't know you were that tall. That's awesome.

Logan: Yeah, I'm pretty tall. It doesn't make doing levering movements really easy, or handstands or anything.

Stay tuned for Part 2!