



Legendary Strength Podcast Episode 21

Isometric Mind

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Logan: Hey, this is Logan Christopher here with the [Legendary Strength podcast](#). Today, we have another great interview lined up today. We're going to be going into a lot of detail about isometric training, which I know a lot of people are really interested in and for the most part, there's not a whole lot of information out there so we should be covering some very cool things today. Today on the line with me I have Professor "Stone" Paul. Thanks for joining us today.

Stone: Hey, what's going on?

Logan: If you're not familiar with Professor Stone Paul, you may have seen his name. He helped out with the translating actually of the Alexander Zass book, [The Mystery of the Iron Samson](#), from Russian into English which we've made available. There's a whole lot more. He knows, translating languages and everything, but to start with, I think it would be a good idea to give people an idea of your background, how'd you get into the strength training and isometrics and all that.

Stone: Yeah, sure. I cover a lot of this in the introduction of the book, [Developing the Isometric Mind](#), but suffice it to say that it's always been an interest of mine. Just watching other people, especially older kids, I always felt there was something like unfair about kids being older or bigger than me and having this advantage. They were taller so they could run faster because they had longer legs or they were bigger so that they could support more weight and lift more, and I wanted a way because I was often hanging out with older kids and wrestling with them or in sports, I wanted to be able to get that advantage so that I could play on the same level as them.

In the book, I go into the back story about how I first started. There was this neighborhood tradition where all the young boys between like 4 and 10 would get together in the first day of summer, get their heads shaved in this guy, Herb's, garage, get their heads shaved there. Then they would go on to have a primitive bench press contest and then an arm wrestling contest.

I did pretty well the first year with these guys. With everyone who was my age, I beat them all but the older guys I had a real problem with. I told my dad about this on the way home and he said it doesn't really matter how old you are or how big you are. You can still be really strong. I mean of course there are limitations obviously. A 15-year old is always going to be stronger than a 5-year old.

Then he showed me a few isometric exercises like how to arm wrestle yourself, how to push against a parked car, stuff like this. I was able to do this over and over again. My dad had this philosophy. He said it all the time: just practice, practice, practice. He was like a parrot. Eventually, I started becoming the same parrot and any time I wanted something I would practice.

Now it kind of related to that time. I had a lot of chronic illnesses as a baby and as a toddler so it just kind of motivated me a little bit more to overcome these strength things, to feel like I have more a solid foundation. Eventually I went on and I got stronger. I did better at the contests in the years to come and then even better later on with other contests. When I got into sports all these same theories applied. I don't know how deep you want me to go into this right now because I know you probably have other questions about the isometrics but suffice it to say I started playing a lot of sports and I did very well at the sports because of what I learned from isometrics. Throughout my childhood, I knew I won lots of trophies. I've worked really hard and did well.

Eventually I got to a point where competitive sports and teams and stuff, I kind of lost my taste and went more in the artistic direction, where I started getting into music and all. I guess there was just a sort of mentality with the athletes that were surrounding me at the time that kind of turned me off. So my athleticism went more into training by myself or for myself, challenging myself with weights, stones, odd objects, things of that nature, then of course flexibility, mobility, strength, and speed, what have you. Then of course, getting where you just had a good physique, balance, you don't have much fat on the body and everything.

I had a lot of friends who were asking me for advice. It eventually got to a point where too many people were asking me all the time so I just thought it would be much better to design these programs and put them out on the web eventually so I could reach more people. It was just more time effective. I guess that kind of brings us up to the day, skipping over a lot obviously.

I guess the thread through all this is also being a musician and touring a lot throughout my teens, being on the road, I didn't have access to a lot of equipment. I also didn't have a lot of money so it's not like I could just walk into a gym where I was and just pay a bunch of money every time. Sometimes, you get a free day pass and all but really, I had to be creative. I had to develop systems of getting stronger, quicker, and more mobile without having access to a lot of expensive equipment.

I figured a lot of other people would be into that because I meet people all the time. I just like not having that excuse of like, “Oh, I don’t have a gym membership”, “I don’t have money for this or that,” or anything else so I really liked to get into the philosophy of being able to accomplish anything with what you have available to you. So I try to make that available to my customers.

Logan: Right. I completely agree with that. Let me ask you this. Obviously, you’re not going to say isometrics are better than lifting weights but what are some of the differences that you get as far as your athleticism, your fitness, your physique if you train with isometrics versus training with weights?

Stone: Like you said, I don’t know if there’s really an isometrics versus isotonic exercises or lifting with weights. I do believe they work hand in hand and a well rounded athlete who’s going to have a long athletic career is going to need to address physical fitness from both sides of that coin. They do work hand in hand.

Isometrics work more on the skeletal system or the joints more than the muscles. I mean obviously they work on the muscles but you’re really working more on the sinews, the bones, the fascia, the ligaments, and the tendons that are ultimately hold muscles in place and everything else. But the thing is this is like traditional isometric exercises. I don’t know how much isometrics you have been exposed to but I know most people don’t know much. There are a few moves they know like for instance in the [Alexander Zass book that I translated](#). Bruce Lee had a book too where he went over a few isometrics. I know you work with a couple of other people that do isometrics.

It tends to be very limited to a degree because as you know isometrics only make you stronger, only strengthen your sinews, in that specific position that you’re holding it in. So if you’re doing like isometrics that are the same as the Bruce Lee one—I’m sure there are many people who did it before him—where he would do a standing bicep curl isometric—are you familiar with what I’m talking about?

Logan: Yeah.

Stone: Yeah, and just basically a bar up with a chain hooked into the ground. He would hold his biceps at 90 degrees and just pull up as far as he could for about ten seconds. That’s great and it will make you stronger but essentially it will only make you stronger in that one position because you’re not contracting the muscle whereas isotonic exercises, when you’re lifting weights, you’re using the entire range, hopefully. Now everyone uses the entire range of the muscle but ideally, you’re using the entire range of the muscle.

If you want to get your muscles as strong as you possibly can, you need to have a foundation in your sinews, in your tendons and ligaments. That makes sense, right? Because your muscles can’t be stronger than what your sinews will allow for because otherwise any time you’d fully contracted your muscle, it would rip itself right off the bone or off the joint, and would dislocate itself if it were a shoulder or a hip. Am I answering your question or did I go off in the wrong direction?

Logan: I think that gives a good overview of how to use them or the purpose of using them. Your new course is called [Developing the Isometric Mind](#), which is a very interesting title. When I saw that, aha, what exactly is that? I think that would be a good thing to cover. What is the isometric mind?

Stone: Well, the isometric mind, how I see it, I like saying the isometric mind because it was what I discovered in the book, as I say as a very young child, is just a way of thinking. It's just a way of thinking, a way of seeing macro patterns, and what I later call in other endeavors, the mind of the master. Many people approach new endeavors as a beginner and at the time, interestingly we're taught to think as beginners and all our mentors teach us as though we're beginners. It's assumed that you need years of dedication to handle the material in order to become a master and develop the mind of a master. But really it's something that can be done from the very start.

Whatever subject that you happen to be studying, whether it's guitar or foreign languages, whether it's raising a family or whether you're training in isometrics, there are macro patterns, ways that I believe we were all innately born with, hardwired ways to think. We think in these macro patterns. I mention in the book that all languages throughout the world work with these macro patterns. Every language has nouns and verbs in it, and all the basic parts of a language. They work relatively in the same way, no matter how bizarre it might seem to a foreigner

Well what I learned when I started isometrics, I started seeing these macro patterns. For instance a very simple one I could use right now as a demonstration is pronation and supination of the hand. Of course, you can do that with anything. Basically for people who don't know those words, pronating is turning your wrist all the way in towards your body so your hand is facing down if your hand is out in front of you. Obviously if your hand is behind you, it's going to be facing up. Then supinate would be twisting your fist all the way up to the side so your wrist is facing up towards you if you're holding your bicep at a 90-degree angle.

So you can see how this will apply to the rest of the body, no matter what exercise you're doing. For instance, let's say you're doing a bicep curl. The bicep curl becomes a completely different exercise for not just the biceps but for the forearm, for the legs, and the glutes. Once you start to develop this isometric mind, you are able to hone in on these micro subtleties in your muscles that usually people aren't aware of.

In the bicep curl, if your hands are supinated it's a completely different exercise, I'm sure you know, than if your hands are pronated. Most people are much weaker when their hands are pronated. Usually, they only use this move to work their forearms but essentially that's working your neck, your traps, your shoulders, your back, your legs, your glutes, everything, even your calves would work if you were standing up doing a reverse bicep curl, what they call a press with your wrist pronated.

This applies to more than bicep curls actually. If you were doing tricep exercises and you pronate, if you were doing shoulder exercises, you can pronate, supinate, or half pronate or half supinate. Then of course, there are all the different degrees between those, approximately 180 degrees, a little bit less, a little bit more on some people, depending on their mobility. That's one tiny macro pattern that could be applied universally to almost any exercise, even with your hips and your feet because you can both

pronate your hips and you can pronate your shoulders. That's one of them. Others would be if you were lying prone and if you were lying supine. These are different variations and that can go into all these micro patterns.

But what you realize is they're like a fractile. You can start stacking patterns within patterns and at this point, you see your body in a completely different way. You see ways to challenge your body that you never thought possible and they are, for all intents and purposes, infinite. There are an infinite number of ways you can challenge the body and in real life, the body is always being challenged in this way. Very rarely does a back squat come into play if you're working as a lumberjack, if you were a wrestler, or even a baseball player. How often does a proper form back squat really come into play? Very seldom, if ever.

The reason why so many injuries occur is because people are training in this perfect form all the time. So they're strengthening their tendons and their ligaments to be like, as I said earlier with Bruce Lee's curl, his tendons were only being able to support more stress at that 90-degree angle, that 90-degree bicep curl. It's the same thing for the back squat. Of course a back squat is going to make you overall a much stronger and stable person but a lot of injuries occur when the same amount of stress is put on the body when it's slightly a few degrees outside of this comfort zone of proper form, like for instance in a proper back squat.

So part of developing the isometric mind is that one, seeing these macro patterns, and then two, being able to know how to implement stress into these awkward and contorted positions in an effort to get you into a state of all-around strength and loosen that fear that comes. For instance, when you're a toddler, you run around, fall down, and everything, and of course your body is more supple then so it's less susceptible to injury. At the same time, we lose this from training, from becoming adults and doing the same things over and over again, and developing these comfort zones. When you develop the isometric mind and go through the kind of exercises that I talk about in the book, these contorted and awkward angles, positions, and variations, you become much more supple like a child, where you're able to take on stress from almost any angle or any contorted position without the fear of being made susceptible to injury.

One more thing, I guess, would just be of course the plateau. Many people are trying to develop vertically. You see this with Olympic guys. You even see with baseball players, football players, etc. they see one way to train and a lot of times, coaches and the environment they're raised in, teach them how to do this, to think vertically and just go straight up as fast as you can. Of course if you're only thinking vertically, for instance, if you're building a building on a small, narrow foundation, there's a limit to how many stories you can put on that building before it starts getting wobbly and before you reach a plateau where you can't go any higher. So you have to expand the foundation, the lateral, the horizontal foundation of that building before you can go above a certain amount of stories.

When we're taking these isometrics, these variations, all different angles, we're expanding. It can be done I think to almost an infinite degree, expanding your horizontal or lateral plane you're working on. When we expand our lateral plane, it gives us a much sturdier foundation on which to build higher vertical stories, if that analogy makes any sense.

Many people think that if you distract yourself with the lateral strength that you are not going to excel vertically but I found both myself and in my clients that they excel much better, much more stably, and I guess predictably, when they have this horizontal foundations intact. They always know that they can expand more horizontally then they don't even have a fear of reaching a plateau. Not only that, but they're not just ramming themselves into a wall all the time. They always have different ways of expanding vertically instead of only expanding vertically in that one way that they've always done their entire lives.

Logan: That reminds me, I think, of a Russian study or something I saw regarding children playing a bunch of different sports, kind of like the horizontal building you were talking about versus kids that specialized early on and those that had the wide range of experience. It's the same sort of thing here. You're developing your body in all these different ways and all these different angles just from the sports. It's a little different but same sort of concept. Those kids that then specialized later on were able to have better longevity, less injuries, and ultimately succeed better in what they did rather than those who just did a single thing too early on.

Stone: Yeah. It makes sense.

Logan: Also, I really liked your concept of preferred form which is different from proper form. Could you go into that a little bit?

Stone: Yeah, I'm not saying proper form is in any way a bad thing. I think that it's something that everyone should learn and learn how to execute well. I think it can be a great starting point for people but I think there comes a myopia, a short-sightedness, when people adhere too firmly to proper form or abuse proper form, what I call it. You never here most people say you can abuse proper form but I do think that's the situation for 99% of the athletes out there. I think they are abusing proper form and it becomes a crutch. Just like a lifting belt or a lifting strap, it becomes a crutch that you can't lift that weight without that belt on without hurting yourself.

I believe the same thing could be said for proper form because very rarely, like I said, in real life are you in proper form. A lot of the times, you're lifting and some people get hernias because they don't have time in the emergency situations, not really an emergency but in a situation where you don't have enough time to think and set yourself into a stable and proper form, that you end up getting injured. Not only that but you're not as strong as you thought you were, not as mobile as you thought you were, and can't perform in the real world like in Red Iron or wherever you are, to the ability that you hoped you could given all the training that you've done.

So where preferred form comes in is it is the proper form in the context that you're in. Now in the article, in the [guest post I wrote for you](#), I think we were talking about powerlifters. If you're a powerlifter or an Olympic lifter, of course form is essential and you need it because you're trying to lift the most amount of weight to win a contest. Your objective is to win a contest so you want to put up the most amount of weight you possibly can without getting injured. So you can use chalk, lifting straps—I guess you don't always use lifting straps—but a lot of times you use a matched grip or whatever and lifting belt. You're going to of course use the most stable position.

Because what is proper form when it comes to deadlifts, back squats, or bench presses? A proper form is the most stable position that your body can be in to support that weight and to put it up. So of course this is going to be preferred for the powerlifter but now if you take the powerlifter outside of his context, it no longer becomes proper form necessarily. That's why I like the term "*preferred form*" because in a different context, there would be a different preferred form for whatever exercise you would be doing. Did I cover what I was supposed to?

Logan: Yeah. What you're talking about, my mind keeps going back to kettlebell juggling, which is something that I love to do. I said those same concepts. It's great to have that preferred form for your swing, your snatches, but the great thing about kettlebell juggling is it makes you work outside of that preferred form. It really hits the body from so many angles to where you really are building up all those weak points in the body.

Let's talk a little bit about the isometrics. I had a chance to look through your course and there are literally, when you look at all the different combinations, thousands upon thousands of exercise. Can you just give an idea of how this works and how you even put it all together because a lot of people come from a place where less is better, where you only have a few exercises? For powerlifting, you've got squat, bench, deadlift, and maybe a few assistance exercises for those. How do you go from that sort of mindset, and I guess that's part of developing the isometric mind, to really working these thousands of different positions in the body with isometrics?

Stone: That's a great question. Isometrics, I believe, needs to be approached in a completely different fashion than isotonic exercises, than lifting weights because for the very fact that your tendons and your ligaments need to be challenged from all these different positions. If you only challenge your body isotonicly speaking, if you're lifting weights, your bicep will get stronger no matter how you challenge it. It won't just get stronger in that one position and not only that but also always going, like we said, through that entire range. With isometrics, there's no movement so you're only getting stronger in that one position.

So you can't really approach it. I think that's the approach most people take all the time and although it can be effective to a degree, I think they're missing out on 99.9% of what isometrics really has to offer. I do believe in keeping life simple sometimes. I do believe that's definitely a way to go, again in the context. We're talking about context. When it comes to isometrics, you're in a completely different context so keeping things simple isn't necessarily what's going to yield the best results over time.

That being said, I do feel there is a simplicity to what developing the isometric mind offers. I do talk a bit about how we live in a magic pill society, where people want to say just tell me what exercises to do, how many reps, and how many times per week. Tell me exactly what to eat. They're not developing their mind. They're always going out looking for the next thing in the never-ending cycle, always looking for the next new system, next secret to six-pack abs, and what have you.

Isometrics and developing the isometric mind really shows you that the simplicity doesn't lie in finding a specific schedule or specific diet or what have you. The simplicity comes in your approach to relax and really discover your body. Don't be in a rush. Because in isometrics, you don't need to get in and out,

like do a 40-minute set, get home, and eat like you do with isotonic exercise. Hormones don't react in the same way. You can take an entire afternoon and really just explore almost meditatively your body, what you're doing is really educating yourself on every inch, every facet of your body, and all the different ways it can be challenged.

It's a long term investment and you're never done. Part of knowing the isometric mind or having the mind of the master is realizing that you're never going to master anything. So there is no quick fix. There is no single answer to anything in isometrics but the point of the course is to develop your mind to think so that you can become your own guru, so you can increase your own flexibility for your own boy because you're really the only person that really has enough access.

I don't have enough access to my clients' bodies. You don't have enough access to your clients' bodies to actually give them everything they need to reach their maximum potential. We can sell them a course or program that will help them and point them in the right direction but what I aim to do with this course is really help turn themselves into their own guru where they can rely on themselves to such an extent and in such explicit detail that, not to make people like you made obsolete, absolutely not, but that they have solid foundation and confidence in their own body and getting to know themselves on that level.

I see that that all these styles of exercises and variations on themes and everything can be overwhelming and daunting for people who see simplicity only in one light. They see simplicity only in the light of getting down to just the basics, deadlifts, squats, getting things simple. Simplicity comes in a different light sometimes, a different form, and I think that form can be let's just make it simple and discover our body from every angle, every aspect, every muscle, every tendon, and every joint. Let's see all the different ways that they can get stress put on them. Put stress on them in controlled environments and get them to expect the unexpected. To me, that does seem like simplicity. Do you see what I'm driving at there?

Logan: Yeah.

Stone: Is there anything that needs to be clarified? I'm not quite sure.

Logan: No. It's pretty good. One other question that I'd like to ask because you really have detailed that to take a different approach to isometrics, basically the way I see it, there is what you're talking about and isometrics can also be used for like a single exercise if you're trying to strengthen a certain weak point in the exercise. They're great for that but this is really a whole different approach. Would you recommend that someone stop doing what they're doing and just spend like a month on what you have covered in the course? Is it really as a standalone thing or how would you integrate it along with weightlifting? Can you give us some ideas there? Or [bodyweight exercises](#) or whatever sort of lifting people do, the isometrics and isotonic together?

Stone: Yeah. That's a great question. I feel you should always be getting some kind of isotonic exercise within the week. Let's say you could dedicate a month or two or more to what I'm covering in the course and that will benefit you very well. I do however think, I believe that isotonic exercises will only help benefit so even if you're dedicating 90% of the time to the isometric exercise, you need to at least some

isotonic exercise to get the blood flowing because even isotonic exercises get blood to your sinews. The more blood and nutrients you can get to your sinews, the more they are going to heal, grow, and get stronger from what you're doing with these isometric exercises.

I want to leave this up to the individual. I'm glad you asked that question. You can do this in a way where you can either do a little every day, a few minutes every day, and you'll definitely feel the benefits from that, or there's a day you can dedicate to it or you can dedicate every Sunday afternoon while the rest of the week you're doing weightlifting or athletic training for sports, running, what have you. You can mix it in. It definitely goes well to mix in. If you have a four-day schedule, you can do Day 1 do isotonic, Day 2 do isometrics, Day 3 isotonic, Day 4 isometrics.

So it's very versatile and I leave that up to the student to decide what is going to suit him. He also has to take into consideration what their long term goals are as an athlete and just as a healthy person in general. A lot of people sometimes get tunnel vision and go, "*I want to win this contest,*" but what are you going to do after the contest. I think that's very important to take into consideration. That's what a lot of this course revolves around.

Logan: Okay, great. I think we've given a lot for people to chew on. Obviously, we've been talking about the isometric mind course and we've decided to put together a special deal for people that want to pick that up. We don't quite have a web page for that yet. Do you have an idea where that's going to be?

Stone: It's going to be through StoneAgeStrength.com.

Logan: Yeah, it's going to be a 50% off deal just for a few days or a week or something like that. I've checked it out. It's really cool stuff that really does go more in depth with isometrics and using them without any sort of equipment except a rope or something along those lines.

Stone: And your imagination.

Logan: Yeah. It's really cool to help open up your mind and your imagination to the different ways you can train in, really tackle the whole body in so many ways that you're not going to possibly hit just doing isotonic because you really can do every single possible angle. So it's really cool stuff. I highly recommend you check it out.

Stone: All right. That sounds great. Thanks for having me on, Logan, anytime.

Logan: Yup. It's been a pleasure. Thank you, everyone, for listening, be sure to go check that out and pick up Developing the Isometric Mind. Thank you very much.

Stone: All right. Thanks.