



Legendary Strength Podcast

Breathing With Jon Haas

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Logan: Hey there. It's Logan Christopher with the [Legendary Strength Podcast](#). Today, I have a special guest and we'll be getting into an exciting topic, mostly centered around deep breathing, how this can be used to enhance your performance, and a whole lot of other stuff. Today on the call with me I have Jon Haas. Thanks for joining me today, Jon.

Jon: Hey, Logan. Thanks for having me on the call. I appreciate it.

Logan: This should be a lot of fun. For people that are not familiar, can you give a bit of your background information?

Jon: Sure. Basically, I have been a student of martial arts, physical culture and strength for, well martial arts for about 30 years and physical culture and strength maybe almost as long. I got very interested in it when I was a kid and watching Bruce Lee movies, Saturday morning kung fu movies, and just seeing how, as I grew up reading, how Bruce Lee would incorporate strength and conditioning into his martial arts practice and how he thought that would make him a better martial artist.

So as an aspiring martial artist, I just decided you know what, that's probably a wise move and it's something I should start looking into. So as I grew up, I started studying all manner of strength, conditioning, fitness, physical culture alongside martial arts.

Logan: What sort of martial arts are you into?

Jon: Well, currently I've been doing a martial art called Bujinkan Budo Taijutsu, which is a Japanese martial art. It's something that was used in the battlefields of feudal Japan so the martial arts are about 900 years old. What they do is they incorporate self defense, protecting others, and all types of techniques that were used to defend and save somebody's life in a real battle-type situation. So there's no real sport application. It's just a combat-oriented martial art.

Logan: Right. Awesome. Could you tell us a little bit about the sort of physical training? Obviously, it's going to have evolved over the year but what's some of the typical stuff that you do in your strength and conditioning training outside of your martial art in order to improve that?

Jon: Well, a lot of what I do is centered around joint mobility, breathing exercises, some yoga practice, as well as a lot of work with [kettlebells](#), clubbells. We do tons of [bodyweight exercises](#) with my clients and me personally.

Logan: That's a good combo. So we can cover a lot of ground with those tools.

Jon: Absolutely. I found that as I progress, I always fall back onto the basics, what's going to make me healthier and also improve my performance in martial arts and also in life. Obviously, the staples of breathing exercises, mobility work, flexibility and agility all have to be part of my daily personal practice. Then I supplement all that with strength and conditioning.

Logan: Yeah, there are so many different qualities of movement that if you were a martial artist, really in any sort of sport, they really need to all be brought up. You can't just focus on one thing like flexibility or just strength if you really want to be better at moving. It takes a lot more than that.

Jon: Absolutely.

Logan: So what got you really started on incorporating deep breathing and what set you looking in that area? Depending on what people are looking at out there, some people have a big focus on that while other ones it's really not much of focus at all. So what really got you focused on that area?

Jon: Well, for me it was always I absolutely loved to read. I read pretty much everything I can get my hands on and if I find a topic that interests me, such as martial arts, I'll read. I'm not limited to looking at the martial art I study. I am open to reading and studying about pretty much every martial art from India, to China, to Russia and Japan.

So as I was doing all this reading and research growing up, I noticed one common denominator of master martial artists. It's that they were always talking about or doing some types of deep breathing exercises. You look at anywhere from Ueshiba, who founded aikido, to other masterful martial artists in different countries, they're all talking about some type of breathing exercises that they're doing.

So my thought was well, if these guys are doing it and they're operating at this high level, shouldn't I be doing that, too? Isn't that something that I should probably try to research and understand and wrap my head around, as to why they think that it's essential for my development? If I want to get to a high level

myself, shouldn't I do the type of training that they do? That was kind of the impetus that led me to start studying these breathing methods.

Logan: That makes a lot of sense. I would have to agree with you there. All these top people are talking about it. There's probably a good reason. So what would you say it sort of boil down to? What is the reason that you really should focus on our breath as opposed to just doing other things?

Jon: Well, let me sidetrack a little bit because what I found was that when we talk about breathing exercises today, most people are talking about a very relaxing, deep breathing exercise, maybe some type of meditation or something that to you would do in a yoga class that's going to kind of calm you down, make you relax and feel good. Those things are very important to wind down and for health, to lower your body pressure and stuff like that.

But for me the real key was when I started studying Russian martial arts. They have a slightly different take on breathing exercise and it's using the breath to actually survive and thrive under stress. So the exercises are quite different from the normal inhale for ten seconds, exhale for ten seconds and relax type exercises. So when I started looking at that, it kind of clicked and I saw this is how you could start to increase your performance in a martial art or physical fitness because in all of these things, you're under stress. If you're lifting a heavy weight and you're pressing that kettlebell and you can't quite get the kettlebell all the way up, how do you use your breath to make yourself a little bit stronger? How do you push through the pain of doing a really severe conditioning set? You have to be able to go a little bit deeper and use the breath to kind of guide the body. So that type of stuff was what really got me interested in breathing.

Logan: So you're saying that since breathing is obviously tied into everything that we do because if we stopped breathing, we got some big problems there, but for every different application, whether that's martial arts, lifting a heavy weight, or conditioning, there are different forms of breathing that you can do that will help what you're trying to achieve?

Jon: Absolutely. Yes. That's a great way of putting it. If we look at our nervous system, we've got two sides to the nervous system. You've got the voluntary nervous system and then the autonomic nervous system. Things like your blood pressure, your heart rate, they're all part of the autonomic system so most of the time you can't really change them or influence them. But your breath is something that kind of spans both sides of the nervous system and using the breath you can influence your heart rate, your blood pressure, stuff like that, which relates to athletic performance.

Logan: Right. I've heard that the breath is one of the only things that can be consciously controlled and just run by the unconscious as well and because of that, that is why it's so effective for allowing you to tap into these other things and why it's a huge part of so many different systems.

Jon: Absolutely. I think if you start to look at why these types of exercises have been around for millennia, going back to yoga in ancient India and up into China and Chinese medicine and Qi Gong and internal martial arts, why is the breath always so important? Well, it's obviously because it is. You just

have to know how to correctly utilize the exercises to get the benefit rather than just looking at it then go okay, you're inhaling, you're exhaling, what's the big deal?

Logan: Right. Assuming a person has really not learned anything about breathing exercises before, where would you start them at? What's a basic exercise or what would you do because some people like to focus on the diaphragmatic breathing, making sure you're breathing in low? What's your opinion on that?

Jon: Well, I like to start them out looking at breathing at three different levels, basically with diaphragmatic breathing being the lowest level of breath, the deepest level of breath. But there's also an intercostal level, which is a mid-level, and even in the upper chest, a clavicular level. So there are three levels of breath that you can walk through with different types of exercises. Just get people used to using the different parts of their lungs, to start to open up and increase their level of performance.

Logan: So how would someone go about doing that if they have never given thought to their breath before?

Jon: It's kind of hard to describe on a call. I'd have to show you. I could breathe for you but I don't know if your callers are going to appreciate that, me panting on the line.

Logan: Okay, let's go a little further then. What about breathing for different aspects of performance? How does one go about mastering their breath to achieve these different things, like you were saying before?

Jon: Well, one example that I use with my clients regularly is say we're at the gym and they're running through a very high intensity interval like training. They're doing crazy burpees, mountain climbers, [kettlebell snatches](#), whatever the protocol is, they finish the round and they've got 30 seconds before the next round and they're completely gassed. How do they recover their breath in order to continue at that rapid pace that they're trying to do?

If you exhale really deeply, you start to lower the heart rate, as we talked about earlier, so a deep, deep exhalation will start to lower the heart rate, start to lower the blood pressure. Then if you don't inhale, if you actually hold the breath on the exhale, it will lower it even more. So you would exhale really deeply, hold the breath a little bit, and then allow the inhalation to happen. Do that several times in the course of the interval break you have and that will start to lower your heart rate and get you ready for the next round.

Logan: So if you were breathing really hard, this sounds like it might be something a little tricky to do. Does it take some practice to get into doing this?

Jon: Actually, it takes almost no practice. I've had people who do it their first day doing some type of interval training and I explain it really quick, Once you do it, you'll see the result almost immediately. It's pretty easy to learn. It's just the deep exhalation. For example if I'm standing, my pelvis is going to tuck up so it's going to roll slightly. My shoulders roll slightly down. I squeeze the core and pull the belly to

the spine, exhale as deeply as I can, and then keep that contraction for a little bit, then release the belly and allow the inhalation to happen. Then I repeat that two to three times.

Logan: You were saying you allow the inhale to happen so instead of just trying to bring in air, just by releasing the pushing out of air, that brings the air back in, right?

Jon: Exactly. Think of it like bellows. So I don't force air into the bellows. Once I let it go, it sucks the air back in.

Logan: Right. Then as soon as the air comes back in, you're blowing out once again or do you pause a bit after that or is all the focus on the exhale?

Jon: The focus is on the exhalation. To lower the heart rate, the blood pressure, the focus is on the exhalation.

Logan: Okay. I just tried that when you were describing it and I could feel the sort of relaxation. It's an interesting feeling that you get from doing that.

Jon: It works pretty well. Obviously the more you practice it, the better it's going to work. It's like a skill but the first time you do it, you can still see or feel a result. So as you continue to practice that with your training, you'll get better and better at the skill of the exhaling and lowering your heart rate.

Logan: It's just sort of a way to become more in tune with your body, it seems, all the different breathing exercises. Like you mentioned before, by doing breathing exercises, you can learn to control your autonomic functions in the body so just through a lot of practice, have you seen that you've gotten that kind of result just by doing a couple of breathing exercises? As you said, you get much better at it so you can really calm yourself down or catch your breath much faster than you could do previously?

Jon: Definitely. Also, even if you're not in an exercise situation, even if you're nervous about something, you're going into a big meeting at work and you start to get really nervous because you have to speak or you have to present or whatever it is, you can do the same exercise and it's going to have the same effect. So it goes beyond just using it in a gym or a martial arts setting. It's something that you can do in daily life as well.

Logan: Because every different state really, most people aren't conscious of it but you do take on different breathing patterns. In order to be anxious, you have to be breathing shallowly so by doing a deeper breath, that's going to take you out of anxiety because that is part of the state and the physiology of it?

Jon: Absolutely.

Logan: What are some other breathing patterns that people can use for greater performance?

Jon: So this was a slowing down and deepening of the breath to lower the heart rate. You can also breathe more rapidly to start to increase the amount of energy available for the body. Like the other day, one of my clients, we were doing [pull-ups](#) and he had gotten to about ten pull-ups his goal was

twelve. He was on ten and he was struggling to get the eleventh rep. So as he's on the bar, I'm telling him, *"Breathe. Breathe in through your nose, out of your mouth really quick."* It's almost like a panting-type breath but as you do that you start to increase the amount of energy available for the body and push through pain a little bit easier. It's almost the exact same type of breath that a woman uses in labor so it kind of helps to control pain. That's why they teach it. He was able to get to the twelfth rep by using this breath. To me, that's pretty cool.

Logan: Yeah, I actually had that just happen recently. I was doing some front squats and aiming for a certain number of reps to hit as my goal. My friend commented afterwards that, *"Well, you were breathing out of control."* It may have sounded out of control to a casual observer but there was actually a specific rhythm and pattern in what I was doing. At the top holding the weight, I was breathing quite quickly, that sort of panting you were talking about, three times real quickly then going down, holding the breath and then coming up. So there was a specific rhythm and pattern. I really wasn't even focused on how I was breathing but that was how I was doing it in order to get those reps.

Jon: Right. Cool. That's good stuff.

Logan: When you're doing your training, are you focused on your breathing throughout the entire time or do you, say after you practice it for a while, does it really become sort of an unconscious process where you're doing the proper breathing unconsciously rather than just breathing like a regular person would unconsciously but not really for a specific benefit?

Jon: Yes. To me, I consider the proper breathing to be part of the form of the exercise. So if we were doing whatever we were doing, if we were doing a kettlebell swing, I'll make sure that people are exhaling on the effort phase of the swing. It takes them a little while to start to match the breath to the exercise. They always ask me, *"Am I going to get used to this?"* I say yeah, absolutely. You're training your body, you're training your nervous system and as you continue to do it and you continue to improve, you'll gradually be able to take that skill and transfer it to all your other exercises. So it's not something that you're always going to have to go, *"Oh my god. How am I breathing again?"* The skill will transfer to all of your training.

Logan: I like that distinction that how you breathe is actually a part of the proper form of the exercise. If you think about it, breathing itself is just a certain muscular movement happening as well as any sort of other movement. It is movement so it is part of how you move in trying to do any exercise.

Jon: Absolutely. You can come into my gym any day of the week and pick out any client and say, *"Does Jon talk about breathing a lot?"* They go, *"Oh my god, yes!"* But then they'll tell you a story of how they were breathing correctly and how it helped them in their training.

Logan: Yeah. I'd say this is definitely one critical piece that you need to look at, especially if you've never done it at all before. It is an essential component of really any sort of movement, especially if you're trying to achieve peak performance.

Jon: Absolutely.

Logan: So where could someone go to find more information about you and even more on the breathing?

Jon: Well, they can check out my website which is, WarriorFitness.org, and on the website you can see I actually have a product that I've put out called [Evolve Your Breathing](#), which has all of the breathing exercises that I have been using, I myself in my training and with my clients for over a decade. So it's stuff that I've researched, I've trained myself, I've taught other people, and I've had very good results with. So I've put all of those exercises into a product and I call it [Evolve Your Breathing](#). That's a great resource to check out if you're interested in the topic of breathing for performance.

Logan: I have to say it's quite comprehensive. I've been doing this sort of stuff and like you, investigated a lot of breathing exercises over the years and going through your course, there's quite a bit of new stuff for me so it's very comprehensive and I think it's well worth the price.

Jon: Cool. Thanks, Logan.

Logan: So are there any final things that you'd like to share that maybe I didn't ask about that you think would help the people listening here?

Jon: One of the things that I would say is that if you're interested in any type of strength training, if you're interested in improving your performance, if you're interested in martial arts and becoming great at something, then you kind of have to follow the people who were legends in their field. To me, I think, like with you and the strongmen, looking at these guys and then trying to follow what they're doing, I think that's awesome.

I would encourage people to find their area of interest and start to look at who were the really greats in this field and what were they doing? How were they training? Not just what they said and what they wrote, look at how they actually trained. Then see if you can train in that way because there's a reason that they were great and if it's not because of their genetics, their parents or whatever, it's because of what they did in their lives and how they trained. You have to emulate these people and try to become or even greater than they are or were.

Logan: I agree and I think you had a real important point in there. You can't always just look at what they wrote about doing. In some cases, they didn't give the full truth or even some people might have lied about what they actually did because they didn't want people to know their secrets. In other cases, and I'd say this happens for more, they really didn't know how to put their ideas out there about what they were actually doing or there was a lot that they were doing that they were unconscious of and those could be the hidden components that really led to their success. So like you said, you sometimes have to go much deeper than the writings, which unfortunately isn't always easy to do but you really have to look at the whole picture in order to be able to model them properly and get the best results.

Jon: Right. Absolutely.

Logan: All right. Is there anything else you want to mention?

Jon: No, I think that's about it.

Logan: I would say just take these, I guess we went over two different breathing exercises, take them, start applying them into your training and you'll see, like Jon said, some results from them right away. It really is an important factor in your training. If you want to reach the best success that you can, like I said, really the breath is an important component of the form. If you think about it, for anything that you're trying to do, there will be a best sort of breathing pattern that will work for what you're trying to accomplish. It may take some thought, practice, and devotion to it to figure that out and it does depend on different exercises that you're doing, different things you're going for but that is available there. You're going to have to work with it to find what works best.

Jon: That's a great summation. Yeah.

Logan: All right, well thank you very much, Jon, and like I said, check out WarriorFitness.org. If you're checking this out on LegendaryStrength.com, I'll have links over to his website and also the [Evolve Your Breathing](#) product which, like I said, I highly recommend you check out if you want to take your breathing level, if you want to evolve it like the title says.

Jon: Excellent. Thank you so much, Logan.

Logan: Yes, thank you and I look forward to next week. We've got a podcast every week and I've got some cool stuff coming up. Thanks, everyone, for listening and I'll talk to you soon.