



## Legendary Strength Podcast

### Al Kavadlo on Bodyweight Training

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**Logan:** Hey, it's Logan Christopher here with the [Legendary Strength podcast](#) and I'm super excited about this episode today because I have a very special guest, Al Kavadlo, who if you're not familiar with him is quite an extraordinary [bodyweight training](#) guy. We're going to be talking about a lot of stuff. I've got some great questions in store. I've known of Al for long time but this would be my first time really meeting him on the phone. Thanks for joining, us today, Al.

**Al:** Thanks for having me, Logan.

**Logan:** We should have a lot of fun. So could you give a little background for people who haven't heard of you. How'd you get into what you're doing these days?

**Al:** Well, like a lot of people I started off as a kid just getting into strength training because you and I were similar. We're both kind of skinny kids who wanted to put on some muscle and over years, oddly, it's actually led to a career. Now I've got a couple of books out and a DVD and things have been going pretty well.

**Logan:** Awesome.

**Al:** Most people, if they don't know me, my main focus is, like you, also on the bodyweight strength.

**Logan:** What led you to focusing on bodyweight rather than going any other route?

**AI:** It was a gradual sort of thing. I started out in the beginning doing pushups and pull ups and also doing some weights. I got into the bench presses and a got into a lot of the usual teenage guy stuff. In my twenties, I started finally getting into doing legs. Like a lot of teenagers, in the beginning legs did not really interest me that much but over time, I came to try a lot of different things. As a trainer, I came to start exploring different stuff and the more I say bodyweight exercises, the more they appealed to me.

I remember the first time I saw a pistol squat. It was probably 10 or 11 years ago now and that was definitely a game changer for me. Like a lot of people, I underestimated how hard it would be. I thought I'd just be able to go ahead and jump right to it. Of course, as anyone who tries to do a pistol quickly finds out, you get humbled pretty fast. After that, muscle-up was a big game changer. It's the same thing when I first saw that. I was like that's cool. I bet I could do that and it was like nope. I can't do that. Gradually learning those skills gave me a better appreciation for it. Every time you think you've seen everything, you see new exercises and you've got to try that one, too, right?

**Logan:** Yeah. Most people think, seeing me and you these days, that we've always been really strong but I remember I couldn't even come close to doing a [handstand pushup](#) the first time. I had no flexibility for a bridge. I had to work a few weeks just to be able to do a pistol so everything can be built from the ground up. It just is a process you have to go through.

**AI:** That's the only way to build it, I think, it's from the ground up.

**Logan:** Obviously.

**AI:** I know you get it because you walked the walk yourself. I've been really impressed with the stuff you're interested in.

**Logan:** Well, I have to thank you very much for a couple of things though I mentioned those. I saw on one of your videos—I don't know if you have a name for it but I was calling it the back lever raises, where you're in the back lever position and basically doing hyperextensions, a reverse hyper—

**AI:** Yeah, like a reverse hyperextension hanging off the—

**Logan:** That exercise is really fun.

**AI:** Yeah. Well, you've got to be pretty strong if you can have fun doing that one. Also, I can't—

**Logan:** That and the tiger bend. I saw you do the tiger bend. I think that was on the Dragon Door forum, they asked you, "Okay, what led you to do that?" I believe your answer was something like just a lot of freestanding handstand pushups so I started working on those more then I was eventually able to get the tiger bend. It was ugly but I managed one. So I have to thank you for that.

**AI:** Oh, I'm still working on getting that one cleaner myself. I know all this stuff is always a work in progress.

**Logan:** Yeah, it's amazingly a tough skill to do.

**AI:** Yeah, that's one of those skills I can't do at will every time. On a good day, I can get it but I have days when I try to do one and I still can't. People have got to remember that when they see these videos. You're seeing highlights. I film hours' worth of my training and edit it down to two minutes to show you the best parts. You don't see the times that I fall down and stuff but it happens.

**Logan:** Oh yeah. You've got to have some blooper videos out there, too.

**AI:** Yeah, maybe at some point I'll put out something like that. I've certainly got enough footage to do something like that. I kind of like people having that illusion, though, to a certain extent. I don't know if I want to show the bloopers just yet.

**Logan:** Okay, I'd like to ask some questions about your training and go a little deeper than I think a lot of people would go. I imagine—and I could be wrong here—a lot of listeners do a lot of bodyweight training and they've probably just gone beyond just doing pushups and sit ups so I'm going to get into some deep stuff that really makes how you do bodyweight training your own because as you and I both know, there are so many different ways you can do it. Could you start it with what do your workouts look like? How do you put them together? I know this has evolved over the years as it has to but these days, what do your workouts look like?

**AI:** Like you said, there's so much variety and I don't do the same thing every day or every week but lately I've been kind of focusing more on skills than on the typical sort of set and rep, like I'm going to come in and do these exercises and do three sets of ten reps of that or five sets of six reps or whatever a lot of conventional programs call for. I might go and say today, I want to work on practicing my handstands, practicing my elbow levers, and practicing my pistol squats. It might not be such a structured amount of sets and reps for some of those skills. Then there are some days where I just say whatever. Today, I'm going to do 100 pull ups and 100 pushups and 100 dips, or whatever and rep out.

There's a lot of variety to the way that I train. The main factors that you have to manipulate when you're designing a program—and when I say designing a program, I'm using that as a very loose term because I'm all for a certain amount of improvising happening during a workout—you've got the intensity and you've got the frequency. So when you train really intensely, you have to take more rest, and when you treat your workout more like a skill practice, it allows you to train on more days without having to take as many rest days. I'm so into really working out so I like to try to do it like that when I can.

**Logan:** So if you're working on the pistol and some certain pull up variation, do you go one skill at a time, working with those variations with taking rests or are you typically going back and forth in sort of a circuit-type fashion between different exercises?

**AI:** Lately, I haven't been doing as many circuits myself because I think that it's best for pure skill work, I think, to not do a circuit because it allows you to build off each effort a little more because you're not doing something else and then coming back to it. But I think circuit workouts are great for a lot of

people, one, if they don't have as much time to dedicate to training as I do or two, if they want to get more of a cardio component to their strength workout also. Right now, the cardio is not my top priority, just getting my skill set as refined as I can itself.

Yeah, it's usually like you said. I'll do say whatever it is, skill A for like 20 minutes and skill B for 20 minutes. Sometimes I might go back at the end and I want to try this one a little bit more. Sometimes if you're practicing something like a handstand, your shoulders start to get tired. It's like let me do my pistols a little bit and come back and do another one at the end. So again, there's a lot of room for changing it up and improvising a little bit.

**Logan:** I have to say that's pretty much how I do my training as well so a lot of similarity there and it is very important to note that with the bodyweight training, really at the higher level it is so much more skill-based, not say there isn't a lot of strength because there's even more strength required there but the skill component becomes an even larger portion of it so the training does have to reflect that.

**Al:** Totally. But you know the thing is, like you said, it's more of when you do some more advanced skills. Sometimes people who are beginners hear that and it might not be the best way for a beginner to train. A beginner is better off having more structure and going and taking their basic exercise and doing three or four sets of 10 or 20 reps or whatever it is and having that structure until they start to get a good foundation laid where then it can become more of a practice or playing or a fun thing even, hopefully.

**Logan:** Yeah. So regarding what exercises you do, would you call yourself a really intuitive trainer? What do you want to work on today or do you have some sort of somewhat set structure, obviously it's not sets and reps but I'll work on this on certain days of the week or every day of the week? How do you balance that?

**Al:** Sometimes priorities shift and you might for a couple of months get really into a certain skill and what to practice that almost every single day. Then for a little while you might get into something else or there might be times where you're kind of just trying to maintain everything because it's a really busy week or whatever. Again, I guess the intuitive trainer is probably more of what I would fall into if I had to pick between the two but I hate being boxed into one category or the other so there's definitely a little bit of both.

**Logan:** Okay. As far as the different skills that you're going for, do you have like a main focus at any one time typically or do you have like a certain number of different ones? Because if you're trying to do everything all at once and trying to push everything then you tend not to get the best results so how many typical goals are you going for at any one time that you're really driven and focused towards?

**Al:** Right now, I've got these upcoming [PCC workshops with Dragon Door](#) this summer and I'm focusing on getting all of those skills that I'm going to be teaching as tight as I can because when I teach them to people I want to have the best form and the best experience. So for right now, there's basically about 10

to 15 skills that we're going over in that and some of them I'm better at than other so some of them need a little more remedial work and those are the ones I'm trying to give the most attention to right now.

The handstands and the bridge, I'm really doing a lot of those lately, but you can't just do handstands and bridges so I'm still doing my pull ups. I'm still doing my levers, and all that other stuff in there, too, but as I said, those two skills lately are the two that I've given the most attention to.

**Logan:** I'm with you there. We seem to have a lot of similarities in how we train. It's very interesting.

**AI:** Yeah, I've learned stuff from you, too. You've got a lot of great content on there. Your bridge is definitely inspirational. You've supported way more weight in a bridge that I think I ever have.

**Logan:** I have been doing the bridge for a very long time, like since I really got serious about training so I had a lot of time spent on that. I actually don't even do all that much with it anymore but just having that background, I guess it is one of my strengths at this point.

**AI:** Well, that's probably why you're so good at it. You've been doing it a long time.

**Logan:** Yup.

**AI:** Yeah, I've been doing pull ups and pushups a lot longer than I've been bridging. That's why that one's getting a higher priority these days.

**Logan:** Do you find it's the flexibility more than the strength that's holding you back, that and the handstand? Because that's another interesting thing once you get into, I guess, some of the more advanced bodyweight training, that your weak point may not just be strength. It really depends on the skill. It can be the flexibility or just the skill of the movement or some different factors in there.

**AI:** Absolutely. Something that inevitably happens when you do as much pulling as I do is your shoulders get tight. So the handstand work and the bridge work complements that really nicely. That's something I wrote about it in *Raising the Bar*, how important it is to do handstand work to keep your shoulders mobile when you're doing a lot of pull ups.

But yeah, something that I'm constantly trying to make sure that it doesn't become an issue and improve the mobility. It's like a tug of war when you do your pull up days and then you're trying the next day or two days later do a handstand, do a bridge day and work on mobility. That's part of why I've been giving the handstand and the bridge a little bit more volume in my training lately because I feel like many years ago I did the opposite. I was doing too much volume and got myself a little tight.

**Logan:** Yeah, there's always a little give and take with your different exercises.

**AI:** Definitely the mobility in the shoulders and the upper back is such a big part of doing a good handstand or a good bridge.

**Logan:** Yeah, absolutely. Would you say you spend more time going after the really hard skills, like always pushing the limits of what you can do with an exercise, once you get the [freestanding handstand push up](#), you're going towards the tiger bend, or do you spend a lot of time just really perfecting the basics even going back to basic pushups every once in a while or maybe slightly harder variations and spending time with those?

Sounds like with the upcoming certification, you're obviously spending more time with everything to make sure that it's perfect but if that wasn't the case, how would you structure your training? How have you done it in the past? Is it more towards really advanced, what's the best thing I can do, or more towards the basics?

**Al:** More basics really. Like a lot of the moves that I do that people know me for on YouTube are not things that I'm doing every day in my training because it would be too much if I did. You can't do a human flag and a one-arm pull up every time you train or you're going to destroy your joints. So those are the kind of things that pull out once in a while and the way that you get to the point that you can pull them out once in a while is, like we said, by having that really good foundation and of course doing the skill specific work to acquire those skills.

It's kind of one of those things where over a long amount of time, you can get a large arsenal slowly, like spending a long time building a foundation and then once you have a good foundation, starting to do more of the skill work. When you get good at one skill, bring another one in and then slowly you can maintain all your skills while adding new ones into the mix. It just takes a really, really long time.

**Logan:** Absolutely. I completely agree there as well. How do you approach your training mentally? That's a huge subject that I really like diving into myself. What's sort of your mindset when you enter training and how do you keep yourself motivated and to make sure that you're always progressing with the results that you can get?

**Al:** Well, I'm sure you're going to agree with what I'm about to say. You'll probably relate to it but when you've been working out for so long like you and me have, it's so ingrained into your life, the same way that I take a shower every day or brush my teeth every day or I think about what I'm going to eat every day. Looks like it if there's a whole other case there. Exercise is just such a fundamental part of my identity that it's not even something that I even have to find the motivation to work out. Of course I'm going to work out. I'm Al Kavadlo. We're working out.

Beyond that, something that I always tell my clients is not to get too hung up on goals and that's kind of the opposite of what a lot of people in the fitness industry have been saying for a long time. But I feel like when you're too hung up on a goal, either one, you get to that goal and then you're like okay, great, I lost the ten pounds, I can fit into my pants again, and then it's like you stop caring; or get frustrated and give up because the goal was unrealistic and you never make it, kind of like this program sucks, it's not going to work, it's never going to happen. But if you just focus on doing it one day at a time, making

it part of a process and a part of your life then over time you look back and a long time has gone by and you're like, "Wait. Okay, I'm doing this now."

**Logan:** Yeah, there's certainly a time for goal setting but also a time when the journey itself or the process is really what you're going for that, and that with that often you can find a lot more enjoyment than just always focusing on what's out there.

**AI:** I'm glad you said that because there absolutely is a time and a place for goal setting. Sometimes, people hear me say that and they get the wrong idea. It's good to have goals. It's just the problem is when people put there predetermined timelines on goals and then they use that as a way of measuring themselves as a person. Sometimes, people are not as good as predicting the future as they think they're going to be. Things come up and you might get derailed and it might take longer. So if you say to yourself I have to do this within eight weeks or whatever and it doesn't happen in eight weeks, you think something's broken or you're doing something wrong and you feel bad about yourself, or the program didn't work. It's more complicated than that.

**Logan:** Yeah. That being said, what are some of the goals or some of the moves you'd like to accomplish in the near future?

**AI:** Well, I definitely, like I said, I'd want to get that tiger bend push up down better where I could one, do it every time I try it instead of half the time I try it and not being able to get back up, and do it from all of the reps. That's a big one. And I'm working on getting the, as Paul Wade calls it, the stand-to-stand bridge. I'm finally getting to the point where I can drop back into it pretty good but I'm still not able to get up out of it. So just one day at a time.

**Logan:** Yup. Absolutely. We talked a little bit about the training, obviously working the basics and more advances skills, something that goes along with that that I'd like to get a little more details. Do you find that you're obviously not working on sets and reps but sometimes working on easier and harder exercises so your volume with the exercises is all over the place?

**AI:** Yeah, once in a while, like I said, I try to do a day where I am just going to do basics. It'll just be pull ups an pushups and leg raises, or pull ups and dips, and some other basic exercise and just go for a lot of reps but that's only maybe lately only once every week or two I'll do a day like that. So generally, it's just, like we were saying, more skill-based stuff.

**Logan:** Do you believe that making sure you maintain or stay consistent with that base, working sometimes with the easier stuff really helps to allow you to get better results with the more advanced stuff?

**AI:** Yeah, absolutely, and it keeps you from getting injured, too, I think. You've got to get the blood flowing to those muscles and you don't quite get the pump the same way when you're doing the skill work that you do when you're just doing the higher rep ranges of basics. So I think it's important to get that pump sometimes.

That's also why you want to warm up when you do your skill work so I'm always doing some sort of warm up, either pushups or Hindu pushups or maybe a few pull ups before I get into that handstand work out. I'm not going in cold.

**Logan:** Right, you don't want to just into the hardest things you can possibly do without getting ready for it.

**AI:** Exactly.

**Logan:** I'm all about being ready to do things but yeah, if you're pushing the limit of what you can do then some warm up is certainly necessary.

**AI:** Absolutely.

**Logan:** So what are some of the things you do that you would say a big part of the results you've gotten, besides being consistent over the years, that you don't see a lot of other people do?

**AI:** Oh, I think you hit the nail on the head, being consistent, that's something I don't see a lot of people do and the few people who do tend to do that are the ones who get results. But I think, I mentioned before, making fitness a part of your lifestyle is the biggest thing towards long term success. It can't be something that you're trying to cheat the system or get something out of doing nothing. You just have to really accept that all right, if this is something that I want to do I've got to really make it a part of my life and sometimes that means sacrificing other things.

But in the end, honestly, Logan, it's hard for me to understand sometimes how people don't want to work out. It's like it feels so good. It's not something that I feel like I had to be forced into or like bargain with myself in some way to get myself to do it. It's also because of part of how I guess I sell myself, being a trainer, not to say that I'm unsympathetic to people who have a hard time with working out because there are things I have a hard time with, too, and that I could only wish to be able to do better. But for me, fitness has always been a natural and fun thing.

**Logan:** Yeah, absolutely. Actually, I won't say it's always been that way but once I started to, it was largely the bodyweight training that I actually started seeing actual results from it rather than doing the classical commercial gym stuff that wasn't really working, but also having a lot of fun with it. Then once you get there, if you can find training that's fun then obviously you're going to want to make it a part of your life because it's something fun that you get to do every single day. I actually, if I don't work out for a few days, I start feeling grumpy and depressed a bit because it is such a part of me that if I don't get moving then I'm not feeling that great.

**AI:** Yeah. It's also who you surround yourself with. When you work in the fitness profession, a lot of your friends become other trainers and you're just around that vibe all the time so it's just so deeply ingrained in you. But for a lot of people, if they don't know anyone else who's into working out they can't talk to anyone else about it really or they don't have that much in their life where it's relevant. It's



part of why it's great that people like you and me are out there on the web interacting with people so if they don't have anybody out there that they can talk about working out with. It's good that we're providing that.

**Logan:** Yup. It's always fun.

**AI:** You can just take it for granted when you're selling like you or myself that this is just what you do. How do you not work out?

**Logan:** Yup. It's just such a part of our life we can't understand how other people aren't there.

**AI:** Obviously, a lot of the people listening to this, we're preaching to the choir.

**Logan:** Absolutely. So you have a new book, [Pushing the Limits](#), that just came out recently. Can you tell us a bit about that stuff?

**AI:** Yeah. I'm really excited about it. It's pure bodyweight. My last book was all about exercises you could do with a pull up bar and this one has taken the whole minimalism thing to the next level. Every exercise in this book, with one or two exceptions, requires nothing except the floor so no excuse. Everybody's got a floor. If you don't have a floor, you've got much bigger problems than worrying about this stuff. It goes over a lot of what we were talking about, pushups and lots of different kinds of them, squats and everything up to the pistol squat, and the bridge and the other inversions, the handstands, headstands, etc., they're all in there. I'm really excited about it.

We actually, right now, only have it available as an ebook but the paper book is going to be coming later this month. It's one of those books, if you've seen other Dragon Door products—I know you have but not everyone listener certainly has—they're big, colorful books that you really can hold on to and have a real experience with. I'm really excited. I actually haven't even gotten my hands on an actual copy of this book yet. I'm going to hopefully very soon but it's just an exciting thing to have the book in front of you and I can't wait for it.

**Logan:** Absolutely, and Dragon Door has always done a real good job with laying out their books and I am a guy that just loves to be to hold it in my hand. I spend enough time in front of the computer. I don't like to read my books on that as well so I'll definitely be waiting for the paperback when it comes out.

**AI:** I know that the ebook is a very popular format nowadays. I totally get that people are into that but for me, personally, I love having the actual book in my hand and seeing the ink on the page.

**Logan:** Yeah. I think it has something to do with also a lot of people that work out seem to be, just because we're hands on types of guys, we enjoy the movement and everything, so being able to hold something, there's something to that that I've seen a correlation in that versus people that just like the digital stuff though definitely there are those as well in the exercise world.

**AI:** I think you're right. I think that's a good point.

**Logan:** What would you say sets this book apart from some of the other bodyweight training products like even [Convict Conditioning](#)? What sets your book apart from that?

**AI:** The thing that makes this book different is that it's me. *Convict Conditioning* is Paul Wade's take on a lot of the same types of exercises but he and I don't agree about all the specifics of everything. We agree about probably 85% of stuff but there are a few places where we diverge. Part of what I love so much about these books that I've done with Dragon Door is the photos and doing the photos and getting to take pictures all over the city. A big part of my branding, if you will, is being outside and it's a blast from there. A lot of people have told me that that's one of their favorite things about raising the bar. It's just all the great full color photos in there because that's a big part about what makes this book really special.

**Logan:** Okay. Excellent. If you're listening, you can pick that up at [Dragon Door](#). Actually by the time I post this interview, the paperback version may be out. Also if you're on my website listening to this there, I'll have links over to it. Any final thoughts or things that you want to share before we go for today?

**AI:** Just that I'm really excited about everything that's happening right now in the bodyweight community. It seems like the whole thing is just getting bigger and bigger all the time. There's just so much positivity about it and everybody is so supportive of everybody else. It's really good talking to you and being your guest here. It's a really exciting time for all of us.

**Logan:** Actually, I did have one more question regarding the [Bodyweight Certification program](#). Could you tell us a little bit about that and how excited you are to be a part of such a big thing? I was just going over the details and it really is quite comprehensive, everything that you're going to be teaching there.

**AI:** Yeah, it was a real honor when Paul Wade asked me if I would do it. It's going to be great. This is, as far as I know, the first real official certification of this kind. It's going to be three days, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, all day, doing various bodyweight skills, learning not only how to perform them but how to teach them to others. This is ideally a trickle down thing so these people who come and take PPC are going to go out and train clients and maybe work at gyms or work independently, open their own studios, and start taking this to the mainstream public. My hope is that over time, the type of training that you and I are doing is going to be something that everybody is aware of, the same way they're aware of running and other things that are happening out there and these things like that.

**Logan:** Right. So many people still think the only way to get fit is to go out there and jog or go lift weights in the gym but that is changing.

**AI:** It's nothing against those things but this is a whole other thing that a lot of people would enjoy that they don't even really know about.

**Logan:** Yeah, we're on the forefront of that so of course we're living it and seeing it every day but that doesn't mean everyone is there so it really is that whole trickledown effect, like you said. It happened with kettlebells and bodyweight training has been growing over the years. Because it is something that doesn't require any equipment and you can go so far with it, I can only see more and more people doing it in the future.

**AI:** That's what we're hoping for. The RKC has continued to be such a successful venture for Dragon Door and they've got dozens of different RKC workshops going on all over the world all the time so we're hoping that over the course of several years this PCC can grow as big and even bigger than that.

**Logan:** I think it will happen.

**AI:** Right on. That's how these things turn itself. It's good to know we've got your support.

**Logan:** Okay, thank you very much for this interview, AI. It was a good time and it was very interesting to see that without having really talked in detail before that our approaches are very similar which must mean that we're both doing something right.

**AI:** Definitely, because it works.

**Logan:** All right. Thank you very much, everyone, and look forward to another call coming up next week.

**AI:** All right, thank you, Logan.

**Logan:** You can get *Pushing the Limits* and also AI's other materials on [Dragon Door](#). If you're on [Legendary Strength](#), you'll see links to everything available over there. I'll talk to you next time.

**AI:** All right. Thanks.