



NFL Strength Coach of the Year talks Combine, Training, Advice for Young Strength Coaches

Darren Krein joins Lee Burton to discuss his recent accolades, changes in the NFL Combine, his training philosophies aimed at keeping players on the field, and advice for young strength coaches regarding professional development.

Hi, this is Lee Burton with Functional Movement Systems. I'm here having a conversation with Darren Krein, the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach for the Miami Dolphins. Darren thanks for agreeing to come in and talk with us a little bit today about some of the stuff you're doing.

Darren: I appreciate you guys having me.



***Lee:* Darren, I saw you a couple weeks ago at The Combine. Gray and I were fortunate enough to be there and we had a dinner with all the other strength coaches. You were honored as NFL strength coach of the year and I've seen a couple of these honors go out but I think this one was a little more special, in my opinion, because it was voted on by your peers. That had to be just a tremendous honor.**

Darren: Well, you hit the nail on the head in the sense that you talked about it being a peer-voted award, and to me that means a whole lot more. I think sometimes we get caught up in the awards based on, 'hey, your team won the Super Bowl' or 'hey, your team did really well so we're going to give you an award.' But this is one where the guys think highly enough of me to vote for me and so it really was an honor and to be honest with you, I'm really humbled by it and I appreciate all those guys. I think there's a lot of other great strength coaches in the NFL and I think they all do a great job. I'm just fortunate that I'm the one that they picked this year, but it means a lot to me and it's something that I'll always cherish and look back at fondly.

***Lee:* In talking about The Combine, Darren, there are a couple things. Give me your perspective. You've been doing this so long, going on your 15th year now. What are some of the things that you think were important but maybe not now or some things we need to focus on a little bit more?**

Darren: You know what; to be honest with you, I think that when I was a player and I went through The Combine, I think it was a little bit different in the sense that it



was more about the medical. Yeah you bench pressed, yeah you ran. Now it seems to be even more about the performance side of it, and I think The Combine has done a pretty good job. I remember going and having to do the bench press after I had to go through all the physicals. All the doctors trying to sublux your shoulders and hyperextend your knee and all that sort of stuff to see if you're hypermobile or whatever the case may be. I remember thinking, 'Man this isn't really easy after doing all that.'

The Combine has done a good job of changing that up but you're right, it has changed a lot. I think the biggest change for me is that you see guys that may have been a second round pick and all of the sudden they've performed so well at The Combine now that they're a top-10 pick. I don't know, for me I'm a little bit skeptical of that because I feel like the tape and how you play is a bigger component than how fast you run or how many times you do the bench press. I think sometimes a lot of the stuff that takes place at The Combine, not all of it but some of it, you can get really good at it and it doesn't always relate to football, which is the thing that kind of throws me off a little bit.



Lee: Kind of switching gears a little bit Darren, how do you determine how you rank and prioritize what's important, what's going to translate to get them ready to play on the field?

Darren: Well, I think we take a look at, first and foremost, what is asked of an athlete. Obviously on the professional level the athlete is asked to be explosive, is asked to be very powerful in the things that he's doing, asked to be strong, and asked to have endurance. One of our big focal points is just trying to keep the guys healthy and so we call it durable, being a durable athlete. We want guys that are willing to do maybe some things they haven't done or warm up a certain way because it's going to activate the muscles the way that we want them to activate that generally aren't activated.

There are a few quirky things that we do, but for the most part our goal is to help you to be injury free during the season. That's not always going to happen but we look a lot at soft tissue injuries and if we see a lot of those, you know, it's one of 2 things. It's either over-reaching, over-training or it's just the guy's not ready from a physical standpoint when he's out there practicing. Or, to add another one to it,

there's an asymmetry or something that we should have picked up through the screen or through some of the movements that we're doing with the guy that we need to clean up in order to help him.

Lee: A big question Gray and I get all the time is 'how do I put the movement screen to what I'm doing?' Give me a sense of how you work, because obviously you screen your guys and that's part of what you guys do. Obviously it's not the whole thing; and that's one thing I want to make clear. It's not everything but it's a part. How do you work and how do you try to be as efficient as possible knowing that you're always going to be limited with how much time you have, even at your level. These guys are at meetings. They're in and out. How do you work all that in?

Darren: We try to put the onus a lot on the player, here's the shoulder corrective, here's the inline lunge corrective. It's got the guy's name on the board and then he just goes to that area in the weight room, grabs the card and starts working through that. Then from there they go to the workout. Then what we try to do is get them to do it, at the end of the workout. Maybe, even better, we ask guys to take a card home and do it at night while you're watching TV or just spend some time and have some awareness and being focused on it.



As coaches we sometimes think, hey we have guys in the weight room, we have to get everything out of them. Yes, we do. But it's such a small timeframe that we have to be able to utilize our resources and the relationship that we have with that individual and get them to do things at home. Whether it's shooting them

a text or talking about it first thing in the morning or whatever the case may be. It's just gaining that trust, building that relationship. And then the greatest part about that is that when you do that, players know that you genuinely care about them.

Lee: That's perfect. That's great Darren. What are some of the things that as a strength coach kind of fall in that same area, some things that you looked at now that you didn't look at maybe 10 years ago.

Darren: I think that involves looking at guys in the way that they walk; looking at them from a lateral view; looking at the way they run. Because if you think about it, the way you walk is pretty close to the way you're going to run. The way your posture is, that's pretty close to the way your posture's going to be when you're working out and when you've got a guy that's got a strong lordosis in his back or, he's up on the balls of his feet in everything he does, you just kind of know there's going to be a little bit of a problem there. So, I think probably more than anything, just having an awareness of guys, when they're just moving around, walking around, but too when they're moving.

We spend a lot of time really mastering the fundamental movements of just bodyweight lunges, bodyweight squats just all that sort of stuff. All the dysfunction that you have tends to come out in that first and so we try to get that out first and then kind of load it. I think sometimes people kind of get it backwards. They think oh we're going to squat, just put a bunch of weight on there. Well, you know if you're really terrible at squatting, you've got crappy squat technique, and you add a bunch of weight on, all you're going to have is crappy squat technique with a bunch of weight on your back. It just doesn't make sense. So, we try to think about it a little bit more in reverse and try to just work on mastering the ability to do basic movements with your body and then build off of that.



***Lee:* I think that's a huge piece right there. I think even 15 years ago or so people still thought you just had to lift as much weight as possible and I think you even said earlier, at the level you're at you're not going to get them that much stronger. Now it's a matter of just trying to make them more durable, trying to get them to use better movements. They've already got the strength, let's just use it a little bit better. I think that's a huge thing to try to get back to and it's always good to get back to the fundamentals because these guys are strong and powerful.**

Darren: Yeah, it really is the efficiency of the movement. I was talking to one of our players about this the other day. I said, "Hey, if you think about it, if you're set up this way and you go out and run, think how much energy you have to expend moving from point A to point B and then you multiply that over a day or over a

practice, over a day, over a week. But if you clean up that movement, you're so much more efficient. It's easier to move. You're wasting so much less energy and you just don't feel as tired at the end of the day."

That's the same thing going through the 4th quarter. If I've saved up some of my energy I haven't used as much energy on the game and kind of have more going in to the end of the game. There's a better chance that we're going to be able to win that game, so efficiency of movement is probably a good thing to be thinking about as well. Going back to the walk, if a guy's not efficient when he's walking, he's probably not going to be efficient when he's running and so those are all types of things that



can be cleaned up. Part of it, and this is what guys don't always get, is that there has to be this awareness and kind of going back to the investment in yourself, you've got to be willing to change a little bit within that investment.

Lee: Right now you guys are kind of in the offseason but I know that really right now there's really no offseason. Is that right?

Darren: Yeah it kind of it keeps going around. From a professional standpoint we're always trying to go out and do other things. I'm doing a mentorship program in 2 weeks. So, I think as coaches too, that'd be another thing to just say to maybe these young strength coaches. Don't ever overlook the fact of learning more, like I've been doing this a long time and I'm in the process of finishing up my Master's and I'm always willing to learn something else. I don't feel like I know everything. I feel like I'm a work in progress, so to speak, and I'm always trying to get new training techniques or new recovery techniques, whatever the case might be. I'm not always maybe going to do them but I feel like it benefits me to know and to understand what it is and why I won't use it, or why I will use it, than to not know it at all.

Lee: I think that right there is in a nutshell a great piece of advice. All of us definitely have to take advantage of the people around us, take advantage of learning new things and continue to grow and do certain things. Like I said, I appreciate you taking just a few minutes out of your busy schedule to join us and I hope to see you soon man. Thanks a lot!

Darren: Okay, thanks Lee!