



Interview With David Aaron

from [White Collar Job, Professional Athlete Body](#) Blog Post at [BuiltLean.com](#)

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Marc Perry



David Aaron



Marc Perry:

Hi everyone, this is Marc Perry from **BuiltLean.com** and I have a very special guest with me, my friend David Aaron. I invited David to talk about his experiences because he's been able to balance a really busy career with staying in great shape, and I thought he could share very valuable insights with you. So without further ado, I just want to say thanks Dave for joining us today.

David Aaron:

No problem. Hi Marc. Glad I could help out and give any type of helpful advice, or give a sense of my background. Any time I can add to the health of the nation, I'm all for it.

Marc Perry:

Awesome. Okay, so I guess I'd like to start out with how you became interested in fitness. Were you always interested in fitness growing up?

David Aaron:

Well, I guess everyone has the same story, or the majority of us, in the sense that we got started with sports as a little kid. And then my specific history involved playing sports in college. I was a wide receiver for the University of Texas and I also ran track there. So it was always instilled in me that you had to be in the gym, it was part of a daily routine and it was mandatory.

So I've had to transition from there to now where I'm sitting in a cubicle at a desk all day, looking at emails and doing spreadsheets. So going to the gym is my outlet. I detox from my long day by

going for a workout, or a run, which is a nice transition from being in an office in unnatural light to finding some free time to release a lot of pent up energy.

Marc Perry: Great. And I remember when I first met you, we were both reverse commuting out to Greenwich and I think your hours were actually worse than mine. You must have been getting up at 5:00am or 6:00 a.m. and getting home by 8:00pm or 9:00pm. So how did you possibly have the time to workout? How did you squeeze it in?

David Aaron: It was a tough process. I was getting up at 6:00am in the morning, getting into the office around 7:30am, and then leaving the office at around 7:30pm or 8:00pm and getting back into the city around 8:30pm or 9:00pm, something like that. So what I realized is that I had to really maximize my time in the gym. So it meant that I gave myself certain times to complete a certain exercise.

But also, just in general, it meant that I had to schedule in my workouts. It meant that during the week there was very little I could do. I took it from a perspective of I've got to schedule in a workout. So my days went Monday, Tuesday working in the gym, Wednesday was an off day so I could do something during the week once I got back into the city, and then Thursday and Friday were the same way. Saturday was also either an off day or I would do something in running.

But it just meant a lot of time management and meant that I had to make working out a focal point. I think, luckily for me, I've always found working out and competing and being active as an outlet for energy. So that's how I managed a difficult work schedule with finding time to get a workout in.

Marc Perry: Right. So just to be clear, on Monday and Tuesday, those are workout days, you aren't doing any social events. And then on Thursday and Friday you were also working out.

David Aaron: Yes.

Marc Perry: Okay. Got it. And you talked about working out being like an outlet; a lot of people may think, "Well going to the gym takes too much energy." They just don't have the energy because they had such a long day. So I know that you're reverse commuting, working long hours, so how did you find the energy to do it?

David Aaron: Well, I have to be completely honest. I guess I was a little fortunate in that that my commute back into New York City took about an hour. So if I wanted to get a nap in before the workout, I

could do that. If you can't do that, then I think it's about finding something that interests you in the gym. Whether it be the VersaClimber or the treadmill or lifting weights, it's finding ways to stimulate the mind. There's a different correlation in terms of energy and being active.

So as you become more accustomed to working out and exercising, the result is you have more energy. So it's not this back and forth. I think when you have a pretty strenuous job and you feel like you're too exhausted to go to the gym, I think it's your body telling you that you're not exercising and it doesn't have enough energy to sustain itself.

Marc Perry: I think that is really well said and you make a great point. I've definitely found with myself that when I work out more I actually have more energy.

I want to talk a little bit more about your exercise regimen. So how many times do you currently workout each week?

David Aaron: I work out four to five times a week. I typically try to do weights and run on Monday. I'll do weights again on Tuesday. I'll be off on Wednesday. Thursday I will do weights and run again, and then Saturday I'll do weights and run.

Marc Perry: Got it. I think it's interesting that you're combining the strength training and the cardio. Is there any reason for doing that?

David Aaron: Well, again a lot of what I do comes from what our coaches taught us in college. It seemed to work for us when I was competing for major championships, so I didn't see any reason why I should change it after the fact. But the other thing is I think it was about maximizing as much time as I could. And I think it's also about having fitness, but fitness in terms of muscle and muscle development, but also having a good base of cardio to go along with it.

Marc Perry: Right. It sounds like more of a complete physique. How long is your average workout?

David Aaron: My average workouts tend to be about two hours, two and a half hours. But I enjoy the gym so I think mine might be more than the normal person. But I think if you're in the gym and you're really focused, you can get in a good weight workout and do a little bit of cardio and be out in an hour, hour and a half. But it means you're not sitting around, you're not having conversations with people

about what's going on in the day. You're in there to get a task done and get out.

Marc Perry:

Right. I mean I personally, I work out 45 minutes to an hour. But as you say, when I'm there I work out very hard. So I think that's definitely good advice. What body parts do you focus on each day?

David Aaron:

Okay. So on a Monday I would do chest, triceps, and shoulders, that's my Monday workout. And then I would either finish that workout with a treadmill workout or a cycling class, for example, and then finish that with abs. And then on Tuesdays it's back, biceps, and legs. And then I may run after that, it depends on what I'm trying to do from a symmetry standpoint.

I think most guys have specific areas that grow faster than others. Because I ran a lot, my legs take a little bit longer to develop than the upper body. So I watch that symmetry. So if I see that I'm not where I'd like to be leg-wise versus my arms, then I pull off of my arms and I pull off of running until they're staying equal or until I'm pleased with the ways things are symmetrically.

But typically Monday and Thursday are chest, triceps, and shoulders. And then Tuesday and Saturday are back, biceps, and legs. And then I may throw in a long run on a Wednesday or a Friday just to break up the monotony.

Marc Perry:

Great. All right, I think what you're describing, it's many times referred to as a push/pull split, where you do all the pushing muscles one day and the pulling muscles on the other day.

David Aaron:

Exactly.

Marc Perry:

I think it's really effective. I think it's a little bit more advanced, so if people only have like two times a week to workout it might not be the best split. But I think for more advanced people like yourself, it obviously works well.

I also have another quick question about how long your workouts were, I mean were you doing two hour workouts when you were doing the reverse commute and working that long?

David Aaron:

They were about an hour. They would probably be an hour and a half. But when I was doing those two hour commutes, that was when I put myself on a time clock. I had a set number of exercises that I wanted to do. So typically I'll start with pull-ups and then go into bench press, and then go into incline and decline. Then go

through a series of workouts on the dumbbells. But because I was already pressed for time and I had to get up at 6:00am, I gave myself an hour and a half to do everything.

So if I was tired or maybe I wasn't doing well on a particular exercise, then I moved onto the next exercise so that I could get everything done. So maybe one day I don't get through three sets of dumbbell or bench press, I only got through two sets because I had to get to French press before my hour and a half was up, so I could still get in the running, so I could still get home at a decent hour and eat and get some sleep.

Then the weekends, I would get up early and do specific areas or catch up on things that I wasn't able to do because of my time constraints during the week.

Marc Perry:

Right. And what are some of your favorite strength training exercises, or exercises you think are the most effective?

David Aaron:

Well, I think nothing is more effective than the simple bench press and squats. I think when I'm walking into the gym I see a lot of guys that may not be their ideal weight doing more intricate exercises. Maybe they're doing curls on a balance ball or things that I think that are more agility focused or things that you may see a professional athlete do. I think when you're coming in and you're on time constraints, I think it's really important to stay focused on the larger muscle groups and then tie that in with cardio.

My favorite exercises are power cleans, like Olympic lifts, and then I do this really interesting treadmill workout. So I'm not just jogging on the treadmill for like 20 minutes or an hour, which I think is boring, it would drive me nuts. So I do what would be the equivalent of a quarter miler or a 800 runner's workout on the treadmill. It makes the time go by a lot faster and you actually get in a lot of exercise in a short amount of time.

Marc Perry:

Awesome. I want to talk about your cardio in just a second, but I have a couple more quick questions about your strength training regimen. And David, I think that's amazing advice you gave about focusing on the larger muscle groups and combining that with cardio. I mean it's so powerful and effective.

Do you use the same exact exercises every time you work out? And the same thing with your rep scheme, I mean do the exercises you do and the amount of reps change over time or do you do the same exact workouts?

David Aaron: Typically what I play with is I play with the volume or the quantity of reps that I do. So every two weeks I'll change from sets of 15 on bench press to sets of 4. Then with that change in quantity there's a big difference in the volume that I'm putting on the rack. I think muscles adapt quickly, and as we get older we're not going to see a whole lot of new muscle development because your body's already reached its peak.

Marc Perry: Right.

David Aaron: So then it's about either maintaining or slimming down. I think a lot of guys get in trouble when they look at these muscle magazines are thinking okay, if I do this I'll be like Flex Wheeler. It's not going to happen. You don't have that type of time to spend at the gym and you're not going to see those type of results without drugs, if you're doing this thing naturally.

So I think it's about managing your own expectations of what you can do in the gym and then creating a workout that focuses in on getting that particular task done. I think it's also about understanding symmetry, and sometimes it's so easy for us to go in and do bench press and do biceps because those are what I consider "pretty muscles." Whereas like legs and calves and things that you can hide sometimes get neglected.

It's about having a better game plan and understanding your body's symmetry and working on areas that may not be as fun, but are just as important.

Marc Perry: Right. That's well said. I think some of the people who are more advanced will appreciate those comments. I want to talk a little bit about your cardio regimen as well. Given you were a sprinter in college, are most of your cardio workouts just on the treadmill or on the track?

David Aaron: Living in New York makes it difficult to get to a decent track. So typically I do three, typically three treadmill workouts, and then I'll do a long run on the weekend. The long run will be anywhere from three to six miles. What I've found out is if I do too much long distance, I lose muscle mass. So what I do on the treadmill is like a series of sprints or long sprints. It would be the equivalent of one lap around the track, and I'm doing that and then giving myself a limited amount of time to rest and recover before I have to do another one.

If you've ever seen a sprinter, sprinters are symmetrical. They've got amazing bodies and they're runners. And if you see distance runners, they've got smaller frames because of how long they're running and it eats into the muscle gain. So I try to balance the two, but I think cardio is so very important. And as you get older your leeway or that margin that you have to cheat in terms of what you eat and how often you get in the gym is, I think, a direct relation to how much cardio you're doing.

Marc Perry:

Right. I think that's interesting and I definitely agree. So you just mentioned briefly before, but you talk about the difference between interval training and what exercise physiologists, or people in the industry call "steady state".

So you focus on interval training, which helps increase your aerobic capacity and you get better workouts done in less time. Can you just give me one example of some interval training workout you do?

David Aaron:

Sure. So on the treadmill I would do – okay, let's say the treadmill runs from a 1 to 12.

Marc Perry:

In terms of the speed, right?

David Aaron:

In terms of the speed. So typically most treadmills will go to a 12, if you're lucky you'll get some that go to 14; let me know when you find those.

Marc Perry:

I know, right?

David Aaron:

But when you get to – what I typically do is I will jog and do a warm up. Let me back up and say if I'm not in a rush, I try to stretch out before I get on the treadmill. So I'll do a typical stretch out, focusing on lower back and calves and hamstrings. And then I'll get on the treadmill and run at a speed of seven for five minutes, and that's my warm up. When that five minutes is over I'm standing on the sides of the treadmill as it continues to run and I'm stretching out, but I'm still on the machine.

I give myself about two minutes, and within that two minutes I slowly increase the time on the treadmill and run at like 10. My goal is to get to 11 and then do my workout at 11 or 11.5. But I don't jump from 7 to 11.5. So I'll do a couple of 30 second runs at 9 and 10, and then stretch my back out, and then I'll crank the treadmill up to 11. Then I'll run for 2 minutes at 11, when that 2 minutes are up I'll stand on the side and have a minute to recover.

When that minute is up I'm back on the treadmill and I'm running for two minutes.

When that minute is up – and I'll do that for four times. Sometimes if I'm feeling good and I'm trying to slowly increase speed, then I may do an extra one or two sets on the end. But it's a great workout because I think that one of the things that makes the gym boring for some people is that it's pretty monotonous and you don't have to think much about it. It's like counting.

But when you're on a treadmill and you've got to pay attention to the belt and you're watching the time and you're thinking I just got to get through this last ten seconds, it makes things more interesting and I think it's a good challenge. Every time you get accustomed to, your body gets accustomed to the workout, you can change it.

Marc Perry: Right. Right, and by the way that sounds like a hard workout.

David Aaron: It's tough. When I was younger I could do it like at 12. Now I'm hoping to get back to 12 by June.

David Aaron: It definitely makes you watch what you eat on those days that you've got to do what I call, I call it my engine check. So I know if I can do it and I'm not totally dead, then I'm in good condition. But if I need to get off or slow the machine down, then I realize that okay, I'm not doing something right. Maybe I need to do a better job of eating, or maybe I'm not sleeping enough. So that's why I call it my engine check because it's a way of gauging the body's condition.

Marc Perry: That's great advice. I've actually never heard of that before. I also want to touch on one more thing before talking about nutrition, which you just mentioned, definitely want to talk about that in a second. I know that, I think, what are you, 200 pounds usually?

David Aaron: I am. I'm about 202 right now, I think.

Marc Perry: And you're six four? Six five?

David Aaron: I'm six four.

Marc Perry: Six four, okay. So I remember we were talking about this and you mentioned that if your weight gets a little too high you do something, or if your weight gets a little too low you do something else. So are you monitoring your weight, number one? And number two, how does that effect your strategy?

David Aaron:

Well, to answer the first question, yes. I definitely monitor my weight. I try to every Monday weigh myself, and I give myself a cushion. So I say I'm fine with anything in between 200 and 205. So that gives me some room to play around with, but it also gives me something to gauge. So if I go into the gym on Monday and I'll do my workout and then I'll weigh myself, and if the scale says 206, then I know I need to cut back on some calories. But if I'm weighing myself and the scale is saying 195 or, I don't know, let's be realistic, 199, then I know I probably need to increase my caloric intake.

It's probably telling me that I'm running more and I probably need to cut back on running because it's eating into the muscle gain. So that's how I gauge it. I think it's difficult to stay at one particular weight, but I think to give yourself some type of cushion is a good way to go, and then use that cushion to gauge what you should be doing in the gym.

Marc Perry:

Great. Perfect. And by the way, I think the Monday morning weigh in, as I call it is great. I make almost all my clients do this. I think it's helpful. I mean you don't want to weigh yourself every day, of course, because your weight can fluctuate. But I think that weekly weigh in is definitely a smart way of monitoring your weight.

So I want to talk a little bit more about nutrition. Just starting out, what does your diet look like? Are there certain types of meals or snacks that you like to have?

David Aaron:

Well, I think I'm pretty moderate. When I was in college and in season, I was strict on myself. Then I realized I'm no longer competing, so there's no point for that. But at the same time I realized as I get older it's important to watch what you eat. So for the most part I'm eating three meals a day and I may have a snack at around 4:00pm, depending upon the day or how I'm feeling.

Typically that's going to be eggs and toast. Lunch will be a sandwich or a salad, and then a sensible dinner. Then I'll try to follow that up with yogurt ice cream, or every now and then I love Hershey's candy bars with almonds, so I'll do that. But what I typically try to do is I give myself like one free day a week, and on that free day I can eat whatever I want to. If it's Mexican food and then a tub of Ben and Jerry's, it is what it is. But I've structured it so the next day is my toughest workout.

So my free days are on Friday and then Saturday is my hardest workout. That's the six mile run and then I go back to the gym and I actually do a workout. So I notice that although it's my free day, I watch how much of the bad food that I'm eating because I know I've got to get up and do a killer workout the next day. So I think it helps me moderate the free day, and it also pretty much burns whatever I had that night before.

Marc Perry: Right. I think that's definitely sensible. And it sounds like you don't count calories, correct?

David Aaron: No, not really. What I try to do is I actually, I have a big sweet tooth. So what I typically try to do is I count more sugar than actual calories. If I'm watching it I'll try to give myself maybe 50 grams of sugar a day, or I'll try to stay below 50. And a can of coke is like 34.

Marc Perry: Yeah, 39.

David Aaron: Yeah, 39 grams. So you don't want to have a can of Coke a day. So I typically try to keep it somewhere below that and usually save it for that free day where I might have a pint of Ben and Jerry's or something.

Marc Perry: Nice man. *(Laughter)*

David Aaron: Yeah.

Marc Perry: Okay, and another quick question is do you emphasize certain food groups over others? Like do you try to create balance in your meals, maybe a little extra protein here, take down the carbs. Anything like that?

David Aaron: Me and a buddy of mine had a pretty interesting conversation about protein and he was saying that you could eat as much protein as you want because it changes to amino acids and that actually gets used by the body. My thought was I think it gets excreted out. And we brought in another friend who's in medicine and he said the protein does change to amino acid, but your body can only uptake so much amino acid and the rest is excreted out of the body.

So with that being said, I think we sometimes overeat and we got into a conversation about it. He goes, "I was reading in *Men's Health* that said average active male needs..." like, I don't know how many grams of protein a day. And I said, "Well, the fallacy in your argument is IF you're an active male." *(Laughter)* And what

I meant to tell him was that I think you can't eat the way you ate in college.

So you've got to pare down that because no matter how many times you're going to the gym it's not what you were doing in college. So I think we as males forget that we have to watch what we eat and we're not going to burn what we used to burn. So that does mean cutting back on the calories, and I think you can do in a way that keeps you from eating salads every day. It just means maybe you can't have both sides of a meatball marinara sandwich, maybe just have one, and no chips.

Marc Perry: Right.

David Aaron: So it's just monitoring that. But I try to eat three meals a day, each having protein and then I'll try to have a vegetable and a starch. Then I actually on most days I'll have some type of dessert. So it's either fruit or frozen yogurt, or maybe a Popsicle.

Marc Perry: Ok.

David Aaron: I try not to deprive myself of anything, but I use that weekly weigh in to determine what I should be doing or what I should cut back on.

Marc Perry: Right. Okay, and I think we're just about wrapping up here, but I have one more question for you. Again, thanks so much for your time. What would you say to someone who struggles to get to the gym and eat healthy with their busy schedule? Do you have any general advice to give?

David Aaron: I would say schedule it in. If someone hates the gym and is not motivated about it, schedule it in. If it's two times a week, then make a schedule about it and then find a trainer or someone that you enjoy that can keep you motivated. Or partner with people, whether it's someone in the office that you feel like you can be competitive with. Like, "Oh I went to the gym yesterday, I did this, did you go?" So at least you have some type of checks and balances.

And then I think from an eating perspective, if you're not going to the gym you have to cut back on the calories. I had a buddy who hurt his back at the gym and so he was trying to figure out what can I do in the interim. I'm like well, the reality is you should be resting. But while you rest you've got to cut your calories so that when you get back you're not twice as big as you want to be.

So there's got to be some type of balance. If you're not going to the gym on a regular basis because you're too tired or your work is too demanding, you can't eat like you're going to the gym. It's just doesn't work that way. So it's about listening to your body and finding ways to check what's going on, like the weigh ins and finding ways to stay motivated. Finding a trainer or working with a partner so that you're not bored and you're not alone in there.

Marc Perry: Right, well listen David I really, really appreciate that. You gave tons and tons of awesome tips and I'd love to have you on in the future. So thanks again.

David Aaron: No problem Marc. I really enjoyed it.

Marc Perry: All right. I'll see you later.

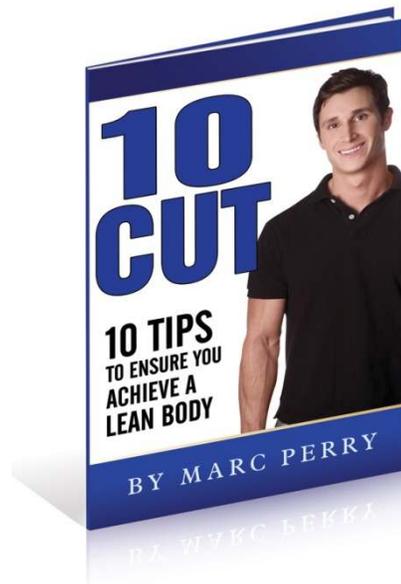
David Aaron: Okay man. Bye.

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About Marc Perry

Marc is the founder of BuiltLean.com and is CEO of Elite Training Partners, a privately held company based in New York City that develops fitness products and services for busy professionals with demanding lifestyles.

A Yale graduate and former investment analyst, Marc has dedicated his life to helping others improve their health. He is a Certified Strength & Conditioning Specialist (National Strength & Conditioning Association) and a Certified Personal Trainer (American Council on Exercise).

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PROJECT FALCON

Project Falcon is a code name I've given to a BIG project I've been working on that will transform you into a lean machine. I can't tell you any more right now, but I'll keep you posted!