

Translation of the Dutch interview in Ringsports nr.132 june 2013

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“ Rayen Bindraban: the quiet strength in martial arts”

Years ago, *Ring Sports* and the famous strength training coach Herman Debrot focused on the effectiveness and necessity of strength training for martial arts. Debrot achieved great success as a strength training coach for Kenamju with his principle of *periodization* for judo fighting. Apart from Drebot, several more or less well-known names were noted in the field of strength training for martial arts. A name mentioned by an increasing number of top fighters was *Rayen Bindraban*, a man who appears to be very versatile. His resume really does not fit on two A-4 pages.

After finishing high school in Surinam, he graduated as a physiotherapist in Amsterdam. Since then he has been active in his private practice, treating and coaching top athletes in particular. Because his ambitions exceeded physiotherapy, he went on to specialize in training and coaching at several institutions including the *Koninklijke Nederlandse Atletiek Unie* (Royal Dutch Athletic Union). There he earned all possible qualifications and licenses. He graduated as a trainer/coach B and as a top sports coach with specializations in sprints training, strength training, mental coaching and talent development. Reason enough for Ring Sports to come knocking on Bindraban's door.

“Louis van Gaal is absolutely a top coach”

Which sports have you actively participated in yourself? “During my youth in Surinam, I have played soccer at the highest level until my twentieth and I’ve been an international youth soccer player. In the Netherlands I do various things to keep fit. Skiing, squash, running, weight training, kickboxing. It depends on my mood. I can enjoy anything.” **Don’t you think that’s too much of a good thing?** “No, because you should consider me a ‘movement preacher’: practice what you preach. In a short time I will help a professional golf player with his strength and condition, which means I want to know everything about golf. So I signed up for a golf course.” **You played soccer on a high level. Hence the question: what do you think of Louis van Gaal?** “On a number of occasions I’ve had the opportunity to exchange ideas with him and he may come across as an authoritarian figure, but in my view he is someone who is very sensitive to a team’s needs. In short, absolutely a top coach.”

“Home and hearth, the basis of excellence in performance”

Given your education, do you possess any leisure time? And if so, what do you do during this time? “My work is actually a hobby which completely got out of hand. I don’t really make a distinction between work and leisure time. I’m always busy with my profession and this gives me tremendous energy. The spare time I have left, I spend with my children and my sweet wife Vydia who has been my source of support, encouragement and stability for 27 years now. I consider her the ‘secret strength’ behind my success. That is an insight I try to pass on to the top athletes I coach as a starting point. The situation at home should be a source of tranquility in order to achieve excellence in performance.”

“I watch and analyze”

During a preparatory discussion we talked about strength training and nutrition. You stated that ‘everyone’ could be involved in this. I would like to elaborate on that. It is my impression that utilizing strength training and sports-specific nutrition in an appropriate way must be extremely difficult. For instance, there is the ‘periodization’ of strength training by Herman DeBrot and the totally different approach by Hans Kroon (the strength training coach of several judo internationals and of top fighter Gokhan Saki). Furthermore, there are other types of ‘strength training’ which are considered questionable by traditional strength training coaches. So, here are my questions. In

which sports have you been actively involved with strength training? “I’ve been actively involved in track and field, particularly sprinting; also in professional soccer, aerobics, hockey, golf and martial arts including judo, kickboxing and MMA.” **How did you operate with so many different sporting disciplines?** “I watch and analyze. What is his level? How much time does someone have? How many years do they practice? I consider the sports branch. Which energy systems, shapes of strength and exercise patterns play a role? I look at the history of injuries. Where are the weakest links? Furthermore, I assess their mobility, coordination, stability and strength (functional movement screening). And, what’s very important, I check personal, mental (motivation) and physical (body type) aspects. Finally, I inform each client about what they can and may expect from strength training.”

“Always aim for a basic fit level”

And just what may top fighters expect from strength training? “Strength training is a means to better performance. However, the ratio between strength training and other types of training should be balanced. This means that if you only have three days a week available for kickboxing, by all means keep on kickboxing and forget about separate strength training. Initially, the specific technical and tactical skills required for a particular discipline are more important. But when it concerns professional athletes who have eight to ten training units a week at their disposal, I organize strength training sessions with them on isolated days. Periodization like Herman DeBrot does with judo is very difficult to organize for kickboxing, because there is no fixed annual plan. As it has been said, many other sports disciplines do have an annual plan. I advise my clients to always aim for a basic fit level. And once a date has been announced, only then can we fine-tune the physical fitness level.” **So, the phase of basic fitness actually contains basic exercises?** “To each athlete, about seventy to eighty percent of the basic exercises are the same. I’m talking about exercises like squats, bench-presses, dead-lifts and the like. Without any aides, by the way.” **What do you mean by “without any aides?** “No belts and bandages. My motto: The physique has to gain strength in its entirety. If the back can’t handle a certain weight during knee bends, the back must be strengthened first. One of the dangers is that nowadays all kinds of exotic fitness methods are being displayed on YouTube. These methods completely ignore the notion of providing the appropriate (exercise) impulse at the right moment. Simply copying exercises from YouTube can cause more damage than desirable. Because measured and properly timed exercise is extremely crucial.

“Responsible starvation and dehydration”

The same possibly applies to nutrition. When it comes to nutrition, experts contradict each other as well. For example when it comes to weight loss. Huge amounts of kilograms in just a few days. The doctor employed with the Judo Bond Nederland (Dutch Judo Union) is very worried. How do you guide your top athletes in matters of weight loss (weight management)? “When it comes to weight loss I mostly concern myself with kickboxers who need to attain a certain weight before being measured for competitions. Having a weight of approximately four kilograms above the mandatory number, during three to four days at the most, that’s where I draw the line. The assessment of weight is just a snapshot. I try to use the ‘most’ responsible manner. To me, this means appropriate timing and adequate nutrition. With my method, responsible starvation and dehydration is applied during a maximum of 18 to 24 hours. My philosophy is about maximum retention of muscle mass. That’s why during this phase, there is also a moment of maximal strength training. In order to prevent injuries or colds for example, the coach and his athlete decide together on a nutrition- and exercise plan which gets fine-tuned to the last phase of dieting. The challenge is in balancing fluids, carbohydrates and proteins, along with administering supplements.”

Which supplements? “Among others green tea extracts to maintain the immune system and a high-dosage glutamine preparation to counter muscle loss. I have applied this system many times and kept an extensive record of data concerning blood pressure, glucose, fat tissue, muscle mass, fluid balance and alertness. Within this entire weight loss system I also advise the fighters under my supervision to regularly visit a sauna. The body should be trained to sweat profusely all year.”

“Not only stronger, but also smarter”

You speak about a common theme: the added value of strength training and/or guidance in nutrition. Is that a mental guidance? At the very least, it must be something specific coaches are not able to hand down to their pupils. Because many top fighters think the world of you. Does this common theme involve, for instance, the approach of haptotherapist Ted Troost? Because even though you have an elaborate resume when it comes to education, there isn’t anything in there about psychology in sports. So you

must be doing something different that makes top fighters speak so highly of you. “Of course I can’t say why top fighters speak so highly of me. But I can maybe say something about the way I supervise them. Everything I do I try to instill on my athletes. I teach them how to analyze exercise programs and nutrition. It’s important for an athlete to understand his own body, so he’ll eventually know exactly what works for him. In addition, athletes can then give sound advice to pupils close to them. I attempt to not only make my athletes stronger, but also smarter. I do this by sharing my knowledge.”

“Think about the future”

I read that you highly value the circumstances around an athlete. “That’s true, kickboxers are more than just fighters. They are people who practice kickboxing from within a certain environment. Their partner, children, father, mother, their life apart from kickboxing interests me as well. And we discuss these frequently. I’m also talking about putting kickboxing in the right perspective. What happens when you get completely injured? Sometimes I also view myself as a life coach. I don’t force anything upon them, but I do alert my athletes to a reality they sometimes overlook. I encourage my athletes to think about the future. We discuss matters unrelated to kickboxing very often.

“I train en coach with a passion”

Obviously, a fighter comes to the right place when he comes to you? “With my specialized medical training I also offer advice on injuries and treatment. Thanks to my network, I can quickly get them to specialists, sports doctors and the like. I coach all my athletes with incredible passion and they know I need nothing from them. From those I give my time to, I expect total commitment to achieve top results. I run my company (ReAT bv) with that same top sports mentality. Whoever wants to train or work with me will have to put in tremendous labor and must produce results. I don’t accept a job half-done. Even if they’re paying me, I decide who I want to work with or not. That’s a luxury I can afford. However, this always goes with mutual respect and I suspect my athletes do appreciate this.”

“Nowadays there is more cooperation when carrying athletes to a higher level”

Apart from strength training, nutrition and mental coaching, you are also knowledgeable when it comes to general training, talent development, top sports

coaching, taping and the like. In short, fields of expertise belonging to a fighter's own coach. Doesn't that cause conflicts? "I have worked with and am still working with the greatest coaches national and international from several sports branches. I haven't had one conflict with any coach about my activities or field of expertise. Coaches know my reputation and they know that I always guide their athletes in an honest and professional way. Coaches regularly call me to seek advice on my field of expertise when they know I am better informed than they are. It is important to respect each other's occupation. Nowadays, there is a lot more cooperation when it comes to carrying athletes to a higher level.

About Mohammad Ali, Anton Geesink, Willem Ruska, Jesse Owens, Usain Bolt...

About mental coaching. Sports psychology is a hot topic. Many top athletes consult a sports psychologist. I even remember a sports psychologist: Ferdi Oyen and lately also Bram Bakker. Top athletes like Anton Geesink, Willem Ruska, Henk Grol and many others have managed and still manage just fine without a psychologist. Henk Grol doesn't want anything to do with sports psychologists and the like. They have an intellectual relationship with, for example, their coach. Mohammad Ali, and all of his predecessors, knew nothing about mental coaching. Do you think the number of mental coaches has exploded? "I can certainly not judge whether there's an explosive growth in mental coaching. Not everyone needs mental coaching. Some athletes know by nature or through experience how to prepare their bodies and minds in order to peak during the moment supreme. Maybe Mohammed Ali was such a person. We are talking about athletes with very exceptional qualities here. Those exceptional athletes can't be our bench-mark. The same goes for, say, a sprinter like Jesse Owens from the thirties or Usain Bolt these days. But given the latest developments in the science of mental coaching, such as neuro-feedback, it would be a waste for a serious top athlete not to profit from it. I think it's a matter of time before mental coaching will become just as common as having a physiotherapist and a strength- and fitness trainer. A Dutch top athlete is not quite ready for the idea of mental coaching."

"You'll have to overload"

A lot is going on in the world of coaching. Only this week I spoke to Chris Dolman. No pretense, but down right hard labor in the ring, in the cage, on the mat or on the tatami.

Back to basics. The world champion of boxing, Jack Dempsey: “jog a little, chop some wood and spar, spar, spar”. Isn’t there a risk that all kinds of people will meddle with issues they are not trained for? (Of course that doesn’t apply to you; you obviously have the right papers). “I don’t mean to antagonize anyone, but I definitely would like to elaborate on my view. Sparring is very important to a fighter, but it would be a waste if they didn’t do anything else. Just sprinting doesn’t make you sprint faster, only high-jumping doesn’t make you jump higher and solely kicking a ball may enhance your technique, but it will certainly not improve your strength. If you want to become stronger, there aren’t many physiological possibilities, you’ll have to ‘overload’. Do a little more than you actually can”. And it doesn’t matter how you do it, with a log or a barbell in your neck. Merely thrusting and kicking will eventually lead you to your limits and it will not make you stronger. I’m sorry - I didn’t invent the laws of nature. And of course, it’s about inducing the precise exercise stimuli that an athlete needs for continually becoming stronger and faster.”

How do you compare fighters to other athletes?

Which fighters have you coached and which ones do you still train? Do these fighters differ from soccer players, golfers, athletes, swimmers, et cetera? “When it comes to training there are more fighters than I can name. I don’t want to deprive the others, but at the moment the best-known are Tyrone Spong, Andy Souwer, Hesdy Gerges, Henry van Opstall, Jerome Le Banner, Melvin Manhoef, and Marino Schouten. Last year, also Andy Ristie, Ismael Lont, Braddock da Silva and Marco Pique. I am also called on regularly by athletes who occasionally train in the Netherlands. The other day UFC-champion Jose Aldo came to see me. Tyrone Spong often brings his ‘elite troops’ along to work with me. What’s interesting is that the difference between athletes is not the sports discipline, but rather the explosiveness and speed of sports performance. For instance, there are many similar personality- and behavioral traits between sprinters (100m en 200m), fighters and ‘explosive’ soccer players. They are pretty much occupied with their physical appearance and muscular strength, they have trouble planning and trouble controlling their impulses; they are impatient types and everything has to be done quickly and it has to be done today. These types need a special approach. You can’t tell them to ‘sit down, shut up and listen’. Extensive research can be found on personality delineation for athletes. Golfers, long-distance runners or midfield soccer players who run a lot are usually more patient, less impulsive, and more thoughtful.

Sometimes I think testosterone levels also have an impact. More testosterone means a cockier attitude.

Doping in martial arts, In the long run, it is only the dealer who profits from doping...”

Given your experience with fighters, what do you think the martial arts need in order to increase safety? For example, the way things are arranged through boxing unions. A rest phase is mandatory after a knock-out and so are regular brain scans ?. “I think the current regulations provide sufficient safety. But what I do worry about is the fact that those regulations are often ignored. A fighter who has been ‘out’ for a moment during a sparring session is nevertheless pitted by his coach the week after. That’s where the dangers lie. So, not abiding by the regulations sometimes turns the game irresponsible.” **Doping appears to be a structural problem during top sports matches. This includes the martial arts (consider the positively tested fighters at the UFC). To what extent does the use of doping (hormonal substances in particular) influence the strength training program and the nutritional regime?** “I don’t know. I have done considerable research but, because there is no credible scientific evidence, I can’t say anything sensible about it. But I can give you my personal opinion on the use of doping. I dare say that the majority of fighters who dope are consulted by dealers without medical training. Thus, athletes follow their own experience and advise others on the basis of that experience. The grave danger is that not everyone reacts the same way to doping and the side effects are left unchecked. Not to mention the checks on liver- and kidney function. Most perpetrators dope because of their own insecurity, because they suspect their opponent does the same. So it’s mostly all in their mind. I am certain that doping does not make you a better fighter. Maybe, with the right regime, you can build more strength or muscle mass, but the question remains whether that can be translated to a better performance inside the boxing ring. And what skills do you sacrifice for this? I am convinced that in the long run doping rather leads to greater health damage – hormonal imbalance and other side effects – than to greater sports benefits. In the long run, it is only the dealer who profits from doping...”