

Gar Benn

Nutrition Troubleshooting, Diet Evaluations & Effective Programming

SIGMA
NUTRITION
RADIO

Episode 142



Danny Lennon:

Hello and welcome to Sigma Nutrition Radio, the podcast that brings you evidence-based discussions with the world's leading researchers and practitioners in fields related to nutrition and performance. I am your host, Danny Lennon, and you are listening to Episode 142. And before we get into today's show, I'd just like to remind you that my buddies over at Shredded by Science have opened the doors to the prestigious SBS Academy and have just a few spots remaining on that. So from the foundations of coaching right through the most intricate details of physique and strength sports, which are taught by Eric Helms and Mike Zourdos, up to a masterclass in setting up a personal training business, SBS Academy covers all of that. So if you're interested, head on over to shreddedbyscience.com/academy. So that's shreddedbyscience.com/academy.

And on to today's episode. Really, behind the scenes here at Sigma Nutrition Radio over the past year probably in particular, we've been working really, really hard on developing a comprehensive coaching service that really rivals and probably surpasses many of the other services that are out there, and that was the main goal because we just felt there could be something much more comprehensive and detailed that we could help people with. And while it's something that's constantly evolving and developing, I'm super-proud right now of the quality of the coaching service that we provide and just the results people have been able to get

from it. And as part of our regular team meetings as coaches, we discuss different client case studies, new ideas, share philosophies on how to get effectively better results. And so for today's podcast, I thought it would be cool to have a conversation on some of those topics and that hopefully helps you listeners out there whether you're thinking about changing your nutrition, some different strategies that might work, what type of metrics you might want to look at, how we do things and how we think about things with clients.

And so I'm delighted to have Sigma Nutrition coach Gar Benn on as my guest today. And Gar has been doing some amazing work with his clients on the Sigma coaching program, and so I'm sure there are going to be a lot of insightful things that you can take from this. Gar also happens to be a very close friend of mine. He does all my own programming for my training as well, which is probably an indicator of just how much I trust his coaching abilities. And outside of his work with Sigma, Gar owns his own strength facility in Limerick, Ireland called CityGym, which caters for all sorts of people by just getting them stronger and healthier as well as having a powerlifting team that's developing at quite a phenomenal rate at the moment.

The show notes to this episode are going to be at SigmaNutrition.com/episode142. So also, if you haven't done so already, if you just sign up there you can get a transcript to this episode as well as all the previous ones if you so wish. So without any further ado, let's get into the show.

Hello Gar, welcome to my humble show.

Gar Benn: What is up, Danny? Thank you for having me on, brother. It's an absolute honor.

Danny Lennon: It's good to have you on finally because I know we've been talking about this for quite a while, and I think now is a good point because of some of the stuff we've been discussing in some of our recent coaches' meetings and stuff like that. I think some of those topics are quite interesting, and so it's probably going to be good timing for people to hear some of that. But first, before we get into any of it, just let people know who exactly you are, a bit around your background and a general introduction to yourself.

Gar Benn: Perfect, man. We'll get straight into it. If we were to talk kind of pivoting points within my own life, initially I was doing electronic engineering in college, which I found out did not suit me whatsoever, and the kind of

turning point for me was I had a couple of collapsed lungs, so something if anyone out there is familiar with a spontaneous pneumothorax, which is a collapsed lung which happens for no apparent reason except for the fact that you're a tall thin male with fair-colored hair and light-colored eyes, which is a weird description, but that's actually what's in the medical textbook a doctor showed me and everything because I didn't believe him. So I had three collapsed lungs in total, two on the right, one on the left, and that was over the stage of my leaving cert and my first years in college. So what ended up happening was after I came back from my second...sorry, my third bout, I ended up owing a lot of fees to the college if I wanted to redo the same year again. So that kind of put me in this conundrum whether I should...it was three years into university, should I continue on and pay the fees even though I didn't like it or should I go down the road of following something that I was really interested in, which was like performance and nutrition?

So I took a long time to think about it. The last decision came when I had a collapsed lung in-hospital. I was there, I was like, "Okay, if I go out with the surgery, if I'm going to die, I'm going out my way. I'm going to quit here and now." So with that [00:06:31] and sent in my resignation to college then and there. So when I came out I was a free man, so to speak.

So yeah, no, that's pretty much the background as to why I got into the nutrition and performance side of it. Then, trying to find a way around kind of getting into what I love, I ended up going on with...talking a lot with Ciaran O'Regan, who you had on in Episode 100, who is a good friend of both of ours. Ciaran kind of put me down the right path. He said I should probably go back as a mature student to university to do some sort of either sport and exercise science or masters in sports performance but in the meantime become a trainer, tune into very intelligent people like Danny Lennon of Sigma Nutrition, and [chuckles]...

Danny Lennon: Best thing he ever said to you.

Gar Benn: Yes, best thing he ever said to me, legitimately. I know we're joking right now but it's one of the best things he ever said to me, and of course both of us didn't know you at the time. And that's kind of the background of how I got into things.

Danny Lennon: Sweet. So what are you currently doing now in terms of your own coaching, your own facility, and other things of that nature?

Gar Benn:

Yeah, so basically what I did was worked for a couple of years. We had a couple of like really dominant gyms in Limerick, like public gyms. Worked for all the bigger ones while having my own coaching service, so as a little bit of a freelancing coach, and kind of built up a client base from that. People seemed to kind of take to the methods that I was using. Because at the time when I started doing strength training, was like a bit of a crazy move, and I don't know why but that's going back a good few years back. People didn't look at strength training as a way to change body comp or to improve general everyday health and well-being, but that trend has kind of taken off a lot, more so recently. So I was training people through strength training, made sure they were mobile in the right areas so that they wouldn't end up breaking their back if they picked up their kid and using methods that I would hear about, again, through the likes of yourself, Danny, your podcast, Eric Helms, or anything I could get my hands on at the time. And after a couple of years of coaching different people, opened up the facility where we base our work out of, which is CityGym Limerick. And that's been open now, we're into our third year at the moment, and we are absolutely stacked out the door and I couldn't be more thankful for the route that we went and for the people that have come in through the doors of CityGym. It's amazing.

Danny Lennon:

Probably just that experience of having coached so many people both before you had the facility and then obviously since you had the gym itself, and just the amount of people you've coached both as one-to-one and then in larger groups, which I know you cater for, and then obviously in recent times as people probably have seen you've been coaching for Sigma Nutrition as well, which again is another thing we'll touch on probably later in the show, but I think one of the interesting things I wanted to get into was around during that coaching process of how to tailor things towards an individual, because I think a good example is probably maybe if we take me, for example, because for those listening who are probably unfamiliar, Gar does all my powerlifting programming and has been doing so for the last number of months. And so within the context of, say, since I put my programming over to you, how do you go about that kind of initial process of deciding what might work well for a given individual versus what might not work for them but could work for someone else? And then, second to that, like how do you then go about modifying things based on how someone responds over time? So really, the whole process of, how do we start thinking about things to make training programming or nutritional programming individual to someone as opposed to just a kind of a stock, generic cookie cutter for everyone?

Gar Benn:

Yeah, man, that's a really good question. It's something that I know me and you both work very hard on with Sigma and in CityGym. But basically, like the idea of coaching an individual, our people say like, "We'll make a personal program for you." That kind of really...I know we say it, but it gets me when people say it and then they don't do it. So a lot of times I hear about someone who might have previously been at another coach—and I won't diss anyone, like I'll just talk straight—and they might say, "Oh, we tried Sigma because we heard Danny's podcast. There are awesome blogs. There are some videos or something, and it seems like really good information. Like how would you personally tailor something for me?" We're going to take you in, we're going to look at everything that you've previously done, because there's no point to me, just for example if we're talking about powerlifting or something like that, Danny, you know I look through all of your previous volumes and programs and stuff like that what you would have done. So if we make it real simple and just say that someone squats, benches and deadlifts one time per week, right? If they come to you and all of a sudden you say to them, "Oh, it'll be great now if they could bench and squat four times a week and deadlift twice a week," if you initially throw that volume at them without ever looking at what they have done or what they're capable of, chances are you're going to break them pretty soon. So they're going to end up just accumulating all this fatigue all the time, their body's going to be riddled with it day in and day out, and the chances of them staying with you as a coach are very, very slim to none.

So I think like a good buy-in for someone when they first come to you is that like you tell them that you're going to make some progress. It's not going to be very, very rapid to begin with until you've kind of both felt out the common ground of where you can be and where you can perform. So like where you're coming from and what you can do, once you find that out, so after maybe like the first block of like three or four weeks, you really get a feel for who someone is.

And this is why it's very important for us that if someone does come here to Sigma or to CityGym that kind of they're not looking to go, "Oh, hey, I've got something in three weeks and I need to be peaked for that," or "I need to be in shape for that" or whatever kind of way they want to look at it, we don't need people that need goals in three weeks. We need someone who says, "Hey, I've got this thing coming up in six months' time or 12 months' time and I need to plan properly for this." And then for us, what that's going to help us do is kind of get a really educated guess to where

you're at at the moment. And that's the way I like to phrase it because even if we look back over what you've done, even if we look over videos of your training, how things looked if we look over your nutrition and how you've kind of structured yourself and tracked for the last couple of weeks, that's still not going to be a real representation of where you're at. And the reason I say that is because oftentimes no matter how much of an educated guess you put forward, you'll always see that the programs need to be tweaked. And do you find the exact same with people, Danny?

Danny Lennon:

Yeah, I mean even for myself, we mentioned my example of since you took my programming, one of the biggest things that we had that I've found a huge benefit was having modifications done on a weekly basis. So having like a general idea of where we're going but week to week how I was responding to that, we'd make changes and decide on what next week was going to look like, as opposed to just getting something to do, "Oh, follow this program for the next three months and then come back and we'll see where we're at." And I think that's what we've probably tried hard to really reinforce with people through the coaching at Sigma, is having a weekly coaching program where it's not just a one-off program that we give people, it's we start this process of week-to-week checking in that during that time changes and modifications are made as people are going through it. And it's really like you said, the benefit only comes once those weeks start to stack on top of each other, and more of those that start to get accumulated the kind of the better the end result.

And it reminded me when you were talking there of one thing in particular, that since you've been coaching with Sigma Nutrition the retention rate for your clients is just insanely high and I would say probably vastly higher than a lot of other places, I am presuming, and not only does that show like you're doing a good job but I think that it's showing that the clients that typically come to Sigma Nutrition probably have an awareness of the value of that relationship being built up over a long period of time. Do you notice how much more you can achieve with someone once they've got into the mindset of seeing this whole process as a long-term relationship with a coach versus them just trying to get something out of it as soon as possible, chasing a result as opposed to seeing it as an actual relationship, if that makes sense?

Gar Benn:

No, it makes a load of sense, man, and you're spot on again. So basically, like just to touch back on the personalized programming, like the week-to-week tweaks, right? That's tough to get out. The week-to-week tweaks, they are extremely important and I think that's why people keep saying

like...a lot of people would even say, "Hey, I want to take up coaching for maybe like three or four months because I got a meet coming up." The reason that they end up staying is a number of reasons. One, we end up becoming friends. Everyone knows that. Everyone that's listening to this today that is currently being coached with me at Sigma, they know that on a week-to-week basis that we do have good chats whether it be over email or Skype or something like that, or over the dynamic tracking tool which, Danny, we'll come back to that in a while, but basically the amount of interaction that we have helps people get a result on a weekly basis.

And then the idea of building it over time, something that everyone can relate to, is if you miss, well, just say we have someone who's programmed for a top set or something like that in a particular lift, and they might miss that just one day, just kind of they might be feeling off or something like that, maybe they didn't have enough caffeine, they had a terrible sleep the night before, they weren't able to eat correctly for two days in a row, and they go in and they miss their top set on that particular day, now if you put a timeframe of like four weeks on something, that missed set or that day that kind of gets a little bit messed up in terms of a four-week program, that can have a huge effect. But if you kind of look over a monthly...if we're month upon month and week upon week, that one top set that's missed has no relevance there at all. We can tweak that program for the next week coming and all of a sudden you leave the gym that day feeling terrible that you missed something and there's all this pressure on you, but if you know at the end of the day that you put that into your dynamic tracking tool for Sigma and you know that I'm going to flag that straight away and kind of get on to say, "Hey, what happened here? Do we need to change the overall volume of the session? Or was it something external? Like, was it your sleep? Was it possibly...do you have kids where you were up with them late that night? What exactly...what got to you that day?" If we can find the exact reason that something happened and it's external, well, then we don't necessarily have to tweak the program. We just need to get you into a better mind frame for the next time you're in there. Or, if it's a program variable, we can change that then and there for the next week coming so that you know when you go back into it next week and then you notice yourself when you go back into something maybe after missing a rep, you know if we bring down the overall volume in the session or change that work and wait for the week after that you can hit it with confidence and then come back in a more confident state the week after, you know the wonders that that will do for your headspace alone is just outrageous.

Danny Lennon:

Yeah. I mean, I think that's the whole benefit to the modification, is that it's just modifying something to allow further progression week on week as opposed to just trying to get to an endpoint as soon as possible, and when you can continue that progression is where we're seeing real benefit.

And you mentioned the dynamic tracking tool that we have and maybe just to kind of let people in on what we're talking about, because I think this really relates to an important topic that we'll hopefully discuss of the importance of collecting sufficient and correct data with people, so we spend an enormous amount of effort trying to get a hold of really good-quality data in quite a comprehensive manner. So the dynamic tracking tool that we use with clients will collect all sorts of metrics – body weight, macros, sleep, fatigue, training, stress, etc., etc., and we have automatic calculations for those to get weekly averages that we can then compare week to week.

One of the cool things about it I think is that it's also viewable by myself and Gar and our coaching team in real time. So we can monitor things clients are inputting into their tracking tool on a daily basis and then just add comments there if needed. So that kind of brings around this whole issue of getting the right types of data to allow us to make important changes, well, because I think often people get hung up with different things. So for example, people love getting their body fat measurements taken but they'll just take them at random times every five or six weeks or something and they just compare to different measurements. So that's not really all that useful in informing day-to-day what they're doing. So maybe if you even start by letting people know what types of stuff you typically get people to track and then what you're looking for in those trends and how you might modify what they do nutritionally, for example, with them based on those.

Gar Benn:

What I would look for for most people is to be really, really rigid for the first like four weeks, like I mean super-rigid, and the only reason being is, one, that'll show that you're dedicated to the process that we're putting forward because like coaching is a two-way street that we can only give as much as we get back in. So if you're tracking daily and really kind of getting into the whole coaching process of keeping continuous talking between you and your coach, that gives us a lot to work with. Like for example, if you only track twice a week in that tracker, I don't get a really good picture of where you're at; but if you log your morning daily body weight for the whole week and then we get a weekly average and we look at that over four weeks—and just for example if you're trying to lose some

weight that we see week one, you came in and averaged at 88 kilos, week two, even though there was one or two days where you might have had a family outing or you just felt starving after training so you went up a little bit but maintained an average caloric intake over the whole week, you still end up at like 87.5 kilos the week after so you're down a half a kilo. So what we can basically look at, even though we're looking at body weight, calories and macronutrients on a daily basis, we can look at the averages and kind of get those to suit what coaching we put forward.

So again, that will kind of jump into then if we're putting something forward like calorie ranges or macro ranges for people, not being super-rigid in that. And so basically if someone is...or just say, for example, coming up towards a comp or something like that they need to dial things in a little bit more, but if you're in your offseason like Danny you are at the moment, we can be a little bit more flexible, allow for more variety within your calorie ranges and stuff like that, and I think that that suits a lot more people, if that makes sense.

Danny Lennon:

Yeah, for sure. It's one of the things that I think most people tend to report of being a big realization for them or something that allows them to, like you say, both I suppose be rigid in some manner in that we do tend to put quite precise targets for many of our clients just because a lot of them tend to be quite focused on a specific training goal or already at a point where they're really trying to dial things in so maybe their overall targets are quite precise, but what the beauty of looking at weekly averages does is that we then, like you say, there's a flexibility for them on a certain day to increase their, say, intake above that targeted intake and then just subtract that from different a day, essentially taking calories from one day and allotting them to the next just so we get that weekly average. And that can go for all sorts of things in terms of how we might break up their intake base and what their training looks like for the coming week if they want to partition more of those calories towards a certain training day, for example. Alright, so I think that's the perfect blend of it's flexible to allow for someone's real-day practical lifestyle and how we need to be able to change things, but at the same time it's still rigid or, I suppose, strict in the manner that they still have targets to adhere to over the week and it's still going to allow them to progress and it's still quite precise and comprehensive, right?

Gar Benn:

That's spot on. Exactly, man.

Danny Lennon: So with that in mind, I think as I just mentioned a lot of our typical clients in the coaching program tend to be those who are coming with quite a decent amount of nutritional and training knowledge already. Like you say, a lot of them would come through having listened to a podcast, have already got a ton of the basics and that even more kind of advanced stuff down nutrition, really know what needs to be done but still find value in that coaching due to just having some external coach that they trust be able to objectively tell them what to do, tell them what needs to be done and then keep them accountable to that. How much of that do you find with your current set of clients in that a lot of the benefit they're getting is just being able to have someone external to themselves who can objectively make decisions for them?

Gar Benn: Exactly. A lot of the people that would come in, they keep really up-to-date with the research, Danny, that you would put forward and other people in the field, so like they're really, really in the know, but a lot of time what I find with people like that is they have so much knowledge that we have to bring them back to basics to get an outline of a nutritional structure just because they end up going a little bit haywire. But what we end up looking at then is, as you talked about, you need someone who will objectively look at you from the outside, they can look at your goal of where you want to go, and then they can see, "Okay, you are here, you need to get here, this is the route you should take," and then kind of taken your mind off all that stress of, "Jesus, am I doing this right? Am I doing this right?" and all that second-guessing. With all that stress gone and with a straightforward path and, as we talked about, the weekly tweaks even if we do go slight askew, that kind of tends to get people to where they want to go a lot quicker.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, for sure. And so with that in mind, say we've taken someone in, they've got a pretty good idea of nutrition overall but they just need generally some good-quality structure from a source they trust and start implementing and putting that stuff in place. So after that process has kind of started, how do—because I'm just interested, again, because we've touched on this in some of our meetings and we kind of vary in some of the ways that we kind of typically approach it while sticking to the same type of principles. So if we're talking about what you're looking out for as people go through maybe those first few weeks of coaching and they start implementing stuff, what is it that you're looking to hear from them, say, during their check-in or any of the emails they send you that you're

looking out for that might kind of flag something that you need to kind of address with them?

Gar Benn:

Yeah. So the big one for me, obviously adherence is the way forward with everyone, that they have to consistently do what's asked of them as a client to get where they need to go to. So what we have to look at is when I check in with someone, what I want them to tell me, "That was easy." If I hear that phrase, and everyone will be laughing that I'm currently coaching because they know that that's exactly what I want to hear, then I say to them, "How did you get on with this week of coaching?" We implemented two, for want of a better word, two habits, or maybe we've implemented two things that I wanted someone to do that week and I ask them, "How did you get on with those two particular or that one particular thing I wanted you to do?" and they say to me, "It was almost too easy," and that's what I like to hear because, again, this coaching process is over a long time. So if we can build all these weekly habits or implement one thing at a time as we go through or two things at a time as we go through multiple weeks, you end up with this really solid foundation of what you're trying to do. You know yourself that, "Okay, for this week I have to look at my calories have been chronically low for what I'm trying to do," or "They've been way too high for what I'm trying to get at." If I say to you, "We need to reduce or increase and that's the only thing we're going to work on this week, is I want you to hit those targets day in and day out for me, and we'll set a really achievable thing," even if people are busy, I don't want them having the excuse that "I was too busy not to hit these targets." So I want to make it so easy that I say to them, "Hit this for me, this for the next five to seven days." And when I call them again I say to them, "How did you get on?" They go, "It was almost too easy." I'm laughing as a coach. I'm saying, "That's absolutely brilliant. Now let's make it a little bit tougher, and a little bit tougher." So the easier something is the more someone will adhere, and hands down that's the one thing I look for on a weekly basis. No matter how someone is trying to get somewhere, I want to make it easy for someone. That's the way to go.

Danny Lennon:

Yeah, I think the big value there is also focusing on, like you say, one to two things. And I think that works particularly well for our typical clients because, again, they're not typically people who need a complete overhaul of their whole diet. They're generally eating relatively decently or at least they come thinking that their diet is pretty good overall, so they either don't understand why they're not making progress or they just need to maybe fine-tune some things. So it's not like they need to dramatically

change everything, and maybe even if they did it would probably be maybe a bad way to go in general, but really it's changing those things and making those tweaks week by week so that becomes incorporated into the overall process. Yeah, I've found that's worked particularly well with my coaching clients as well, and so it's something we try and work on probably as a group of coaches in general.

One thing that has been interesting is as we've accumulated more of the data that people have been logging and been able to check through this stuff, I think the true value in that is being able to weed out kind of different interesting things that might not be obvious on the front end, so things that maybe take a bit of time to work out that some people probably wouldn't have been able to work out on their own. It's only when they have collected this data and have someone else, again, objectively look at it that we can start weeding out some kind of interesting things. Are there any case studies, for lack of a better term, of particular client issues that you found anytime recently that were kind of maybe something out of the normal or just kind of an interesting case study that people listening might find interesting to hear about?

Gar Benn:

Yeah. So if we're talking kind of out of the norm, there's a few that pop up but one that really, really strikes me as a win for both parties involved as client and coach. That was this girl I'm coaching and she is Irish. She's just absolutely awesome. She has done everything I've asked of her from day one. So basically what we looked at was her energy was absolutely zapped every single day. So we kind of looked at the normal things that you would look at. How's your sleep? Her sleep was good. How's your stress? Stress was like minimal. How's your diet? Let's look over the overall calories, food quality. Everything looked good. So we started making tweaks here, there and everywhere and things were looking better on a week-to-week basis. Everything was just looking better. Her energy scores were consistently scoring better. Of course they're self-rated and she was saying that every single day she woke up she's feeling a little bit better. But the one thing that was getting me, she was saying that every day at 4 o'clock—her office is kind of down in the basement or something she said that she'd have to go up a flight of stairs at the end of the day and the thought of the flight of the stairs at the end of the day used to zap her of all of her energy, and when she got home all she wanted to do was just throw herself on the couch. For me, as a coach, that doesn't cut it. So the more we talked over on a daily basis just shooting emails back and forth, we jumped in a call one day because we were just both getting so frustrated

with the idea that it was under our nose and we couldn't quite pinpoint what it was, whatever way she was talking, she said to me something like, “Blah, blah, blah, coffee something, and I'll have three of those and then kind of quickly jump off it.” So I said to her, “Can we just retract back to the coffee statement?” and it basically kind of came in that she was taking an enormous amount of coffee, probably like someone’s daily dosage of coffee within an hour to an hour and a half in the morning. The more we talked about this, and Danny I'm going to get you to chime in in a second, but the more we talked about this like the feeling she would get of when she had a coffee versus kind of coming down off the caffeine buzz reminded me of...Danny, who did you have on the talk about the stimulus of caffeine and how different people respond different to caffeine?

Danny Lennon: So there's been a few. As far as I know, Dan Pardi probably mentioned that the first time he was on in relation to sleep.

Gar Benn: Mm-hmm.

Danny Lennon: Possibly John Berardi maybe as well because I know PN, I've actually done some articles on that as well.

Gar Benn: Yeah, it was definitely one of the two and it was just so interesting that what we looked at is that obviously if you have a huge intake of caffeine, no matter what, the come-down is going to be awful. You're not going to feel to good coming off like six shots of espresso within an hour. No one’s going to feel good coming off of that. So what we even looked at was how to come back down off that load of caffeine, how to spread it out evenly throughout the day, whatever load we did have left over, and it was absolutely amazing that I got an email one night, maybe about the second week after we changed things around—everything else nutrition, sleep-wise and stress-wise, they're the exact same, all we changed was the caffeine load and when it was coming in throughout the day—and it was the most amazing email ever. When I opened it, all it read was that at the end of the day she bounced up the stairs. Once she got home, she cleaned the entire apartment, which she would never do, and then afterwards even had the energy to call her friends. She said that this was just nonexistent at the time. She called her friends, called over to her house, and they were almost shocked to see her up and about, running to and fro in the house with a nice energy vibe around her again, like she said that would have been there in previous years but in the last couple of months before she contacted us just wasn’t there and she was dead every single day come the afternoon. So like as far as coaching goes there's a lot of things we can do

to tweak physique, make people stronger, but if you impact someone's daily life on that level, like for me that just feels absolutely amazing.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, I think that brings up kind of an interesting point because it's something that I tend to notice quite a lot with people that I've worked with for a significant period of time in that typically, when people first come for nutrition coaching, the goals are generally the same or you can at least allocate them to like three or four main things that people come as their kind of initial goal and typically people will have the same things in mind of that's what they want to achieve from it, and I'm just wondering how you've found this as well in terms of after you've worked with someone for a longer period of time. Have there been clients reporting to you that what they got out of the coaching experience and the coaching process, in the end they got something out of it that they either weren't expecting at all and that was maybe different to the initial thing that they wanted or probably more likely on top of that? So yeah, they achieved their goal whether that's body comp or strength or whatever, but they also learnt so many other things that were things they weren't expecting that had an impact on their life in a wider scale.

Gar Benn: Yeah. No, for sure, man. Some of the big things that kind of, like as you said, everyone comes in for either strength or body comp or something in and around those lines, but the big things that people always take away is, one, just sleep in general. People, when they're looking at their sleep, they always think they either have...like everyone thinks they're hitting the sweet spot. But the more that we look at things, the more that we look at kind of how people perform when they're in the gym on a daily basis or when they're kind of just even in around their office or at home, we talk them like, "How is the sleep? How do you feel on a daily basis?" and people are always like, "Oh," at the start, "I feel grand, I feel grand." And the more you get into it, people actually open up to you. Again, this goes back to how valuable coaching is on a bigger scale like when it's over weeks and months. Once people open to you and they say, "Hey, you know what? Today I had a terrible day," and you talk to them and say, "What happened today?" and they start talking about this and, "I just felt terrible all day, like really lethargic, and I just need something to change that." So even though your main goal might stay at body comp or some sort of performance issue, like it always comes back to how people feel on a daily basis. And what I find is that when we start changing people's sleep or when they're eating, what they're eating and how their stress is in their life and kind of giving them tools to equip themselves with tools to

tackle these issues, it almost becomes people looking to perform better at their daily life, like how energetic they are at work and how energetic they are with their family or their girlfriend, boyfriend, etc. And when people kind of are doing better on a daily basis, they kind of carry that to their number goal with their performance and the energy, they kind of go into each session, gym session, or go into each day looking at nutrition differently and they're kind of like, "Okay, I can attack this at a different angle, they end up just kind of feeling really good and positive about everything they're doing. And for me, again, as I said a while ago, we will always get the number one goal of the body comp or if someone wants to improve their strength or maybe they're doing CrossFit or powerlifting, whatever they're doing, that's the easy stuff for us as a coach. Would you agree with that, Danny?"

Danny Lennon: Yeah, I think for me it's that people are most impressed with not just that they got their goal or are progressing continually towards their goal, it's more the fact, the manner that they did it, and then like you said the skill set really that they've learned during that time that they now have a set of skills that they can use for the rest of their life that they know how to navigate their nutrition to change it to whatever goal they have or to suit their social situation or to be able to go and just live life normally and still progress in all the things they want as opposed to having gone through like a short period of time of just doing a certain diet that got them in a certain body composition because, really, people can look at any sort of terrible fad diet or silly bro diet that can get people shredded up or that can get people to lose weight but it doesn't have any real impact afterwards because it hasn't taught them any skills that they can use in different situations. And I think the usually two big words are like flexibility and freedom that people mention quite a lot in that they now know how to essentially navigate anything for the rest of their life with their nutrition, how to change it and what to tweak, and understand what things are important, and then they don't stress about the things that are not important. So I think it's more the mental freedom and the educational piece that people really enjoy.

Gar Benn: That's so true, man. We have so many people that are very, very shocked when I would say to them like something like, "Oh, on a daily basis we might go down to our local gelato shop and get a tub of gelato or maybe even just like a small cake or something," and people almost lose their shit every time and they're like, "What? You go down and get like 'bad food?'" And then you kind of talk to them a bit more about like what is

bad food and like, can you be a little bit more like as you said free in your day of these mental hang-ups? Like one thing I actually found very funny when I met you, Danny, for the first time was that I noticed that you would often Snapchat anytime that you might have had like a bit of gelato or a beer or something like that just for the sake of showing people that it's not all chicken, broccoli and rice. It's like you have the freedom if you understand what's going on rather than just adhering to some like Internet diet that you found which says eat a thousand calories a day and make sure you do 12 sessions a week. Yeah, of course you're going to get ripped in that on that program. You're just in the most massive calorie deficit ever. But if you understand what's going on, like you can have this freedom on a daily basis to go off and have just a little bit of what you want or you can have like a beer here and there and like it doesn't have a big impact on the big picture.

Danny Lennon: Mm-hmm, yeah. And I think it's even to the opposite end of that has a benefit in that, sure, on one end the flexibility and freedom we want people is seeing that you don't just hit specific foods, that you can enjoy other things like beer and gelato and you can find ways to fit those in, but even people who are coming probably knowing that stuff, so a lot of people will have done stuff before with tracking macros or worked with someone who's a "macro coach" or whatever, have got prescribed numbers and have heard about "if it fits your macros," and they're kind of shock is more at when we see the flexibility you can have of that actually no, you can still progress without having to be super-specific with hitting the exact same numbers every single day, you don't have to exactly hit 77 grams of fat every single day, that there are these wider ranges that you can fit in, and on certain days there is way more wiggle room than people realize and you can set up the diet in so many different ways to suit all the different potential scenarios that can crop up in life and still have really the exact same result. And so it's interesting on both of those ends of just when you, again we pull it back to the main principles that we want people to hit, there's usually way more flexibility to do that. And I don't want people to conflate that with that, oh, you can kind of do anything with this. It's still quite meticulous and quite precise just because of the types of results people that come to us are looking for and it does take quite a lot of attention, but at the same time it's something that is completely doable in a long-term and is not super-mentally stressful at least most of the time.

Gar Benn: Yeah, and if I can just jump in with a point. Like you brought up about the macros coaches, because that's not at all...when I talk about like beer and

gelato, that's not at all what I want people to take away, is that, "Oh, this fellow is going to prescribe some numbers and I just run off and it for a month and then check in and get a new set of macros for the month after." It's not at all like that. Like the real coaching isn't just the numbers. The real coaching is keeping in consistent with your coach on hopefully a daily basis for most people so that they can actually get some proper results. And it's not all about like, "Oh, I'll see how much junk I can fit in my diet," or something like that. That's completely off the point. So just to clarify that in case anyone out there got the wrong impression.

Danny Lennon: Yeah, and I think that's the big thing. It's not us prescribing macronutrients as the coaching. So yeah, like we do that for most of the clients who are going to track stuff and we will show them how we'd like to set up in an ideal world, "Here are some targets that we think would be suitable for your goal to at least start and progress with," but like you said, the real coaching is not just telling someone, "Go hit these numbers," it's actually teaching people the skills that they can actually implement that and do that, right? If someone just tells you, "Hit these numbers," then how do you know about going to do that and how would you navigate that based on your training and your work schedule, etc., etc., and then how would you be able to get questions answered on a more practical level day-to-day, which is what we try and do in terms of like managing things like stress and fatigue and training, etc.? So I think there's a lot to that.

Let people know where they can find you on Instagram, Snapchat, stuff like that, and then if they're interested in maybe contacting you or Sigma Nutrition in general about coaching, what your availability is currently like first of all, I suppose, and where they can track you down.

Gar Benn: [Chuckles] Yeah. Well, hopefully we have maybe one or two spots left over because I know we had to take Arthur on recently, another coach again, to the Sigma crew. But if you want, guys, you can contact me at gar@sigmanutrition.com. That's my email. Of course, you can also just check out the SigmaNutrition.com website and all of my info is on there as well as Danny's as well as Arthur's. So all of our info is up there. Me personally, on Instagram I am garbenn_cg. Gar Benn is a real name spelled G-A-R, B-E-N-N, underscore, C-G for CityGym. Or, just check out anything CityGym LK. If you google that, Instagram it, you'll see all of our gym content on there.

Danny Lennon: Perfect. I'll link up to all of that in the show notes for anyone listening, so go check all that stuff out. Gar, we're at the final question—I'm sure you

know what's coming—and it's the question that we always end the show on, and it's if you could advise people to do one thing each day that would improve their life in some aspect, what would that one thing be?

Gar Benn: Oh man, the pressure. The pressure. I was thinking about this all the time. [Laughs]

Danny Lennon: Get right.

Gar Benn: [Laughs] Yeah, get right, yeah. [Laughs] No, if I could give one thing, it's too many people kind of take up things and give it up very, very shortly because they don't see like world record or world amazing results in a short period of time. If you think something is for you, take it up and do it consistently and on a daily basis just get up and focus on that and just absolutely smash it every day. I'm not trying to sound like Gary Vaynerchuk or anything here, but like you got to just give wholeheartedly everything to something you love and that's what's important.

Danny Lennon: I love it. Man, this has been awesome. This is great to have a chat because, like I mentioned at the start of the show, we get to talk about some of the school stuff in relation to what we do with the coaching program quite frequently when we have our team meetings and checking about how people are doing, so I just think it'll be of value to people to hear just some our general thought process on some of the stuff and maybe hear a couple of kind of case studies. So, appreciate you taking the time out of your day. I know Tuesday's a pretty hectic day for you, so thank you for doing that, buddy, and I'll be talking to you again soon.

Gar Benn: Man, thank you so much. I'll see you soon, buddy.

Danny Lennon: And there we go. That is our episode for this week. The show notes are going to be over at SigmaNutrition.com/episode142. And for anyone interested in the comprehensive personalized online coaching for performance nutrition or for strength and conditioning or powerlifting programming, then check out details of the Sigma Nutrition and Performance Online Coaching program. If you just go over to SigmaNutrition.com, you can click on the Online Coaching tab up the top of the site. I'll also pop a link directly to the online coaching page in the show notes to this episode and, yeah, check that stuff out. If it sounds like something that you would benefit from, then there is an application process to go through and we'll be in contact based on your application and if we feel that we're a good fit and we can do something really good for you. So if that's for you, just go over to SigmaNutrition.com and you

will see in the menu bar there is a tab for online coaching. Just click that and you'll get all the details there.

And that brings this episode to a close for this week. I hope you got something from it and you got some useful information and it might have highlighted some things that we tend to think about. And if you did, I'd be extremely grateful if you share this on social media or tag a friend in it if you see the post, or if you just leave a review for us on iTunes. All of that makes a huge difference. So that is our episode and I will talk to you in the next one.