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Rob Simmelkjaer: Hey everybody, and welcome to Set the Pace, the official podcast of New York Road Runners, presented by Peloton. I'm your host, Rob Simmelkjaer, the CEO of New York Road Runners. June is a sneaky busy month for us at New York Road Runners. People think that it's all about November here sometimes, but actually the month of June is intense. We had a lot of races, as you know if you've been running them. And we finished the month of June with two of our most celebrated races on back to back days, the Front Runners New York, LGBT Pride Run on Saturday, June 28th and the Achilles Hope & Possibility 4-Miler Presented by TD Bank. That was on Sunday, June 29th.

That brings us to today, Thursday, July 3rd. And as this episode goes live, many of you are hopefully enjoying some well-deserved time off, some time at the beach or the pool or wherever you like to spend your summer holidays. Each summer we close at New York Road Runners for the entire 4th of July week to give everybody here a break. So to make all that work, we recorded this episode a little bit early. And as luck would have it, when we sat down to tape it, my wonderful co-host Peloton instructor Becs Gentry, she was away on her own summer vacation.

But just because the office is quiet doesn't mean exciting things aren't happening at New York Road Runners. In fact, this summer marks the launch of something brand new for our organization, a new leap into storytelling with the debut of our new in-house content studio called East 89th St Productions. Just a few weeks ago, we kicked it all off with the premiere of our first documentary short called Final Finishers at the Tribeca Festival. This was an awesome night, not just for New York Road Runners, for our team and for our brand new studio, but also for our partners at Tribeca Studios for the cast and crew of the movie and for New York Road Runners Foundation partner, New Balance, who sponsored the after party.

And it was a great after party and a great event. We had Olympians there, Beverly Ramos, Connor Mantz, and Clayton Young who are all a big, big part of the New York Road Runners family. And of course it wouldn't be a Road Runners party without our Olympic medalist and former TCS New York City Marathon champ, Meb Keflezighi who was there not in his workout gear, but looking very dapper in a two-piece blue

suit.

So with that awesome night in mind and with all of our races pause for the 4th of July holiday, we're taking you behind the scenes of that documentary, Final Finishers, with an interview with the film's director Rudy Valdez. Then Meb will be here with today's Member Moment featuring devoted New York Road Runners member and a big supporter of the Final Finishers project, Anne Giovanoni. And finally on this 4th of July, as the country recovers from a week-long heat dome, we want to remind you to be hydrated and get your warm weather acclimation skills up and ready to go. So today's Meb Minute will feature Meb's best tips on how to beat the heat.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Our guest today is an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker whose work brings heart, urgency, and humanity to every frame. Rudy Valdez is known for powerful documentaries like The Sentence, and We Are: The Brooklyn Saints. And now he's partnered with us at New York Road Runners to direct Final Finishers, our debut in the documentary film space that is premiering at the Tribeca Film Festival. It's a look at and a tribute to the runners who finish at the very tail end of Marathon Race Day and what their stories reveal about grit, purpose, and why we all run at all.

Rudy, it's so great to have you. I have to tell you, I was so thrilled when I heard that you were going to be directing this film that we're partnering with Tribeca on because your work is so compelling and so inspiring. So it's great to have you working with us on this and great to have you on Set the Pace.

00:05:03

Rudy Valdez: No, thank you so much for having me here. And also, I'm completely humbled and flattered that they would even ask me to be a part of this film. I'm very grateful for the

opportunity.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: So tell me about the experience. And for those who haven't had a chance to see it, and we're recording this a week and change before the premiere, it's going to come out a little later, but talk about Final Finishers and what that story's all about.

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Rudy Valdez: I mean it's this interesting story that is for me and I think for people who watch it who aren't necessarily lifelong runners, it's such a metaphor for life. It's this idea of all of these journeys and all these goals we have in life start with a single step. And there are always going to be people who say, "You can't do this," or, "You shouldn't do this," or, "That's impossible." And the only person who can take that first step is you.

And I think that we do focus on the running and we focus on the race in this, but in the back of my mind, the entire time we were filming and the entire time we were editing, that was the thing going on in the back of my mind. It's like it's right there in front of you. Here's this perfect metaphor of you cannot do this, and it's like, well, the only person who's going to let me know whether or not I can do this or not is myself, and I'm going to take that first step.

I will say the only downside for me personally of making this film is that meeting the people in our film, editing it and putting it out in the world has really inspired me to start running and training for a marathon. And that is tough, it's very tough.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: First of all, I am so thrilled to hear you say that because I was going to ask, you're making this film about running what you're running experience yourself has been, and whether this process of putting this film together was inspiring you at all to run. So tell me about that.

00:07:05

Rudy Valdez: I ran quite a bit when I was younger, never on a team and never for a school, but I loved to just go out and run in high school and college. And I moved to New York City shortly after college and was very fortunate enough to live in various parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn throughout the 20 years I was there, always kind of near the route of the New York Marathon. So every year was this constant reminder of this amazing thing that happens, this amazing melting pot that New York City is, how communities come

together. It was always this really inspiring thing for me. And every year I would watch it and say, "Oh, that would be amazing to be able to run this race. That would be really, really amazing."

And of course work and life gets in the way and I never got around to it. Then I got injured in 2013, '14, I hurt my knee pretty bad. And that kind of set me back and always in the back of my mind, though. And then this project comes up and I'm watching the people who are in front of my camera and who are telling me these amazing stories and I'm like, "Wow, it's now or never." So I'm trying, I'm trying.

00:08:17

Rob Simmelkjaer: I love it. Well, we'll definitely get back to that because maybe that'll be the sequel is Rudy Valdez finishes the TCS New York City Marathon. So talk a bit, Rudy, about the people you followed. We at Road Runners, we talk a lot about inclusion in the sport of running and how anybody can be a runner and how the marathon can be for anyone. And that's really what this film's about is these people with these stories of setback and challenges and then triumph who find their way to the finish line of the marathon. Just tell a little bit about the folks that you've had a chance to spend time with and why people should be interested in their stories.

00:09:05

Rudy Valdez: It's interesting. When this project first came about, I have a good friend of mine, Tim O'Hare, who is a lifelong runner, and he's the person that I would always turn to whenever I was like, "Maybe I want to run, maybe I don't." And I told him what this film was and what it was about, and the first thing he said was, "Have you ever talked to Martinus?" And I was like, "Actually, he's on our list." He knew right away. Even though Tim was an elite runner and ran in college and did all these things, he immediately knew Martinus's story and he was like, "This is why people run. This is the amazing part of running that you don't always get to see." And right then I was like-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: This is Martinus, the founder I think of the Slow AF Run Club and one of the runners that you profile.

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Rudy Valdez: Yeah. And so immediately I was like, "Oh, there's something here. It's not just this tiny little factor of people that nobody knows about. Runners know about them and cheer them on." And I was like, "Wow, what a heartwarming

idea that everybody is included in this thing."

And so we profiled Martinus who has an amazing story and was basically told by a doctor, not only should he not run, but he would probably die if he did. And he said, " You know what? I'm going to run a marathon." It's amazing how he said, " One day I got up and I ran for 15 seconds." And he's like, " That's all I could do. And the next day I ran for 30." And you realize that while some people can get up and run a mile or 10 miles, some people have to start with 15 seconds and some people have to build up to that. But in the grand scheme of things, they're all running the same race. They're all running the same marathon, the same road, the same track.

And so Martinus is one of them. Michael, who is another person that we profile who runs for Achilles, he's got a fascinating story because he was a runner in high school and was one of these people who ran the marathon many, many times and then had a sickness come over him and he had to sort of relearn to walk, relearn to use a fork, relearn to do all these things. And in the back of his mind, what he was always looking to return to was, " Can I run a marathon again?" And he does, and it's fascinating to see how these little realizations. It started with him learning to walk with a walker in his hallway of his apartment building in New York, and he said, " Wow, I just walked a mile." He's like, " That's one mile towards a marathon." And you just see them slowly build.

And Janelle is another person who we profile in this, and she is somebody who volunteered for many years at the New York Marathon and loved being that final person who handed the medals out at the very end and cheering for the people who were doing these amazing things. And she finally said to herself, " I love being a volunteer and I love handing out these medals, but I have the heart of a runner and I want to be one of these people receiving the medals."

It's just watching the journeys of the people that we were fortunate enough to profile, it's so inspiring. And I'm sorry to the New York Marathon because you're probably going to get a big influx of people wanting to run this, and I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. But hopefully this inspires people to get up and chase this thing if they always wanted to do it.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: And that's really, Rudy, what this is all about. You kind of said it, why we're doing this, why we think that creating content and it's telling stories like this is part of our mission at New York Road Runners to create healthier lives and stronger communities through the transformative power of running. It really is all about

getting everybody to see themselves as a potential runner, as someone who could take on the challenge of whether it's running the marathon or a half-marathon or any distance. Do you think that that's something that people will come away with? What do you hope they'll come away with when they watch this film?

00:13:18

Rudy Valdez: I hope so. Yeah, definitely. I mean, I think that that is a big part. Again, we're using this as a metaphor for all of the things. I mean in order sometimes to be it, you have to see it. And I think when people Google runners or Google the New York Marathon or any marathon for that matter, you are generally met with a certain body type or a certain type of person who you relate to that. And I think this does a wonderful job of saying, even in the film, yes, there are these elite runners, there are these people who are going to run, I don't even know, insane times that I probably can't even drive that fast, the 26.2 miles.

But for the most part, there are other people running too who look a lot like, I wouldn't say you, but maybe me and I guess other people, all the body types. And I think that's a thing that I think people will need to see and need to experience in order to realize they are a part of this community as well, and they can be, especially with things like Slow AF Run Club. The whole purpose of that is to say, "We can all do this." If you have the heart of a runner like Janelle, you can also do this. And I think that's so important for everyone to realize. I was somebody who was fairly athletic growing up and kept in pretty good shape for quite a while, and I even thought, I'm not a runner. Even though I ran in high school in college, I even thought I'm not a runner. And I think this has been a real eye-opener for me that I can get back up and I can start doing this again.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Rudy, I'm curious about the way you go about telling these stories. It's such an interesting art form, documentary filmmaking. You've got real people, not actors you're dealing with. There's no script, there's no kind of preordained storyline that you as a director are trying to follow. You're kind of meeting these people and finding the best way to tell all of their stories in one pretty short film. This is a short documentary, so less than 30 minutes. How do you do that? What's the process of going and trying to tease out the best and the most inspiring and most interesting of all of these stories and then weaving it all together into one film?

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Rudy Valdez: I think it's a delicate balance of really understanding the people that you're going to work with, film with, the sort of overall concept of what you're there to do, and try to know from every angle what that means. But at the same time, approaching the people, approaching the event, approaching your questions, approaching the way you speak to people as if you know nothing. Because I don't want to come into not only this film, but any film and pretend like I'm the expert and I'm the one who's going to tell you what this story means. I'm not the expert on Janelle, I'm not the expert on Martinus. And if I come in saying, "Here are the things that I need you to say," in the back of my mind, I'm thinking, "What are all the things that they need to say or want to say or should be saying that I am not, that I have blind spots for?"

So it's that combination of understanding that you have to put together a story and you have a beginning, middle, and end here, but really it needs to be led by the people who are wonderful enough to allow you to tell their story and really respecting that. And so that's not always great when you're pitching a film and they're like, "What are you going to do?" And you're like, "I don't know. I'm going to go in and find it." People don't always have a lot of faith in that. But I think you do it enough times, people start to understand that there is a level of really going in there with your head on a swivel, asking questions, but more importantly, listening to answers and letting that navigate you to the next stage of telling somebody's story.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, it's so interesting to me. I mean, you can have maybe kind of a plan coming in, but probably not too much of a plan because you really need to go where the story takes you. I guess editing must be a huge part of that process, right? You get the conversations, you get the material, but ultimately, is it really the choices you make in the editing room that determine how the story flows?

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Rudy Valdez: I think it's a combination of a lot of things. Certainly the editor plays a huge part in this, and I think that for me, I'm fortunate enough to work on a lot of projects, and people always ask me, "How are you making so many things at once?" And the answer to that is, I have a wonderful team of people that I work with fairly often that all are experts in what they do. My producer, Meghan Schale on this, and my editor Claire for this, they're amazing filmmakers and storytellers in their own right.

And I think that I approach the film in the present

because I shoot my own films and I go in there and I gather the footage. And I have this idea when we're done shooting kind of what this is, but I don't necessarily fully dictate that to my producer or my editor. The next step is them watching the footage and experiencing the footage and us talking about here's what we're trying to make. And I don't want to say to my editor, Claire, "I shot this scene and this is the thing that starts the film, and this is how I felt on the day," because that doesn't always one-to-one match the footage that I got on camera versus how I was feeling in the day.

So I want my editor, my producer and my story producers, my composers to look at the footage and find their version of that as well. So it becomes this real collaborative process of everyone knowing what the end goal is, what that finish line is, but reaching it in our own ways and allowing everyone to collaborate and contribute creatively to that process.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Well, it's a great team you've got. It's a really beautiful film. I've had a chance to peek at it a couple of times already before we've even officially premiered it as we speak here. But it's beautifully done, and I know lots of people on the New York Road Runners' community are really excited to see it. I want to talk about you a little bit, Rudy. How did you get into this business? How did you become a filmmaker? What was that path like?

00:19:50

Rudy Valdez: I moved to New York after college to pursue a career in writing and acting and comedy, and I was doing that and acting in plays. I wrote a play that traveled the country for a little while, and then something happened in my personal life that made me think, "Here's a story that I'd love to tell and something that I'd love to sort of shine a light on." And so I quit everything. I quit acting. I was coaching basketball, I was teaching theater, I was doing all these things, and I quit it all to figure out how to become a filmmaker so that I could tell the story.

So for about 10 years, I went from an intern to a PA, to a sound mixer, to an editor, to a producer, to an additional photographer, eventually to becoming a cinematographer, doing all of those jobs, working one man band, working for other directors, working for people like Robert De Niro and Whoopi Goldberg, Sam Pollard, Geeta Gandbhir, Sebastian Junger, all of these filmmakers while I was secretly making my own film on the side that was sort of my passion project. And that film after nine and a half, almost 10 years, was finally finished. And I was fortunate

enough to get into the Sundance Film Festival and won the audience award there. It was purchased by HBO, and I ended up winning a Primetime Emmy for that. And that was in 2018.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Is that film The Sentence, Rudy?

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Rudy Valdez: That's The Sentence. So that was my first film about my family, and it was really my realization that all of this work that I'd done as an actor, as a writer, as a comedian, as all these other things, as a teacher, all of the tools that I was able to sharpen and really harness during that process really translated to filmmaking in a wonderful way. And I loved it, and I don't want to call it my calling or anything like that, but it's a place where I feel very comfortable in life, and that's highlighting other people's stories and figuring out a way to platform other people.

So it was a long road. It was that classic overnight thing takes 10 years to be able to do something. But I've been very fortunate since then to, I think, direct something like 13, 14 other films and a couple of TV series and just continue to tell stories that I think mean something to at least myself and hopefully to the people who watch it.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: The Sentence, your breakout film, was obviously really personal, really powerful. To those who haven't seen it, I saw it some years ago, I think when it was first coming out. I went back and looked at the trailer just to re-familiarize myself with it before chatting with you. It's a story about a mother who gets caught up in the criminal justice system, and it's due to very tangential involvement with some people who are in the drug business. She wasn't really actively participating, but ends up with a really severe sentence. I think it was 15 years, or something like that, in prison, and because of that is separated from her children, they're growing up. And just a tragic tale about our society, our criminal justice system, and the things that can happen to people. Can you talk about that, your family too, and how it all related to you?

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Rudy Valdez: You had a pretty great summary of it. The person, the main character who is serving the prison center, that is my sister. And so it was truly a film and a story told from the inside out. And I think for me, the process of that was very eyeopening and I learned throughout the process of making that film how to become a filmmaker. I

think most importantly, I wanted to go forth and tell that story about my sister, not in the sense of saying, here's somebody who is innocent and I'm going to prove her innocence and all these things. Because in the grand scheme of things like in black and white, my sister was not innocent.

However, I wanted to show people that even though she wasn't innocent, that her sentence was unjust. And I honestly, when that first happened to her, I thought, "Oh, this was a clerical error. They're going to figure something out and they're going to say, 'Oh, she shouldn't have gone away for that long,' and they're going to fix this." And just peeling back the curtain just a little bit, I realized that not only did it happen to my sister, but it was happening to tens of thousands of people across our country.

And so I immediately thought, "Well, I can use this little story, the story of my sister and her daughters and our family and tell this little story in a way that can be emblematic of the larger problem, the larger scope of this." And I don't know, I think I was lucky in my approach. I don't know that I was like, "I'm such a genius and I figured out how to do this." I was very lucky because that little story, this little story about my sister and her daughters and our family really struck a chord and I think really hit during a zeitgeist of criminal justice reform and caught wings and got some air behind it and really affected a lot of people.

We were quoted in a news article, I think in the Washington Post. They said, "This little known film is helping reform the criminal justice system." And we were a big part of the First Step Act and really changing the lives of tens of thousands of people by helping to get that passed through Congress. So it was really this film school for myself of here's how you can do it and here's how you learn, but also here's the effect that stories and our own stories and our small stories can have on the larger population.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That is something about documentary filmmaking especially that really it can have an impact because you're not seeing something fictional where the drama's made up. I mean, this is real life. This is actually happening. That was really happening to your family. I hope it's okay if I ask about your sister where she is now. I don't know, so I'm asking cold. Tell me about your sister, her daughters. What's the situation with your family now?

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Rudy Valdez: She's doing really well. She actually was

remarried a couple of years ago to a really wonderful man. It's interesting because when my film first came out, a lot of people asked me, "How are the girls, her daughters?" And it was interesting because they were still so close to it and so in it still because the film came out very, very close to everything happening. And I would say to them, "Right now, they're great, but time will tell. Time will tell what this truly has, the effects it has." And to be honest, I think that it was a very bumpy road after the film came out for her daughters. They were still young and still figuring out who they were.

But I'm happy to say that those bumpy roads have seemed to smooth out and they're doing really well. They're spending a lot of time with their mom, and they're now becoming young adults and going out into the world. And I think with this added knowledge that their story matters and that their place in this world matters because they have proof of that. And so they're doing great, and I'm always happy to report that everyone's doing really well.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That's great. For anyone who hasn't watched it, it's worth a go back and look at that film, The Sentence, because there's still a lot that is quite relevant about that film and what it taught us about the criminal justice system. Who are your idols? Who are the filmmakers who influenced you? You mentioned having a chance to work with people like Robert De Niro and others. You had some amazing people you were fortunate enough to be exposed to at a young age in this business. Who do you think has been the most influential to you?

00:28:30

Rudy Valdez: I mean, I think one-to-one, one of the people who has really, I don't want to say mentored me, but really fostered me as a filmmaker and helped me in many ways as Geeta Gandbhir, who is one of my favorite people on this planet, but just also this amazing filmmaker. She actually directed the Robert De Niro film that I shot about Robert De Niro's father. It was a documentary. So she's somebody who has really shown me the ropes in this business, but as a storyteller and as a filmmaker.

But when I go back to what has truly inspired me, I think about people like John Leguizamo. He's somebody who, before I moved to New York, I was able to get this bootleg copy of a show, Freak, on VHS that a friend of mine gave me. And I remember watching that and seeing him tell this story from his POV, his personal story, and have people in the palm of their hands and sharing all these experiences that you don't normally get to see and watch it affect people.

And I think most importantly for me to see somebody who looked like me doing that, commanding a stage and telling that story, and that was my real inspiration to even come to New York City. Not that I ever thought that I could go and do any of the things that John Leguizamo was doing, but at the very least I saw that it was possible. And I wanted to see what I could do if I went and challenged myself and said, "I'm going to go and try and do this and really go to the center of it, New York City, and see where I stand in all of these things."

And so my inspirations come from a lot of different things, but I think they always at their core are from people who are digging deep and telling personal stories and making a difference with small stories that feel like they could be not very significant to people, but when told in a beautiful way and told with the idea of allowing people to lean in and see themselves, I'm very inspired by that.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I love it. And that's exactly what Final Finishers is all about as well. Any parallels you can draw between the filmmaking process and running a marathon now that you've had a chance to be up close and personal, you haven't done the running a marathon part yet. We're going to talk about that in a second. But just in terms of watching your characters here go through it, do you see any parallels?

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Rudy Valdez: Yeah, I mean, I think that when you're making a film, there's a beginning, a middle, and an end, and they're all kind of intertwined within each other. And I think with this, our characters, they know where that finish line is. Kind of like when I'm making a film, I know when that deadline is and when I have to turn in my rough cut and my final cut and all those things. But I think what is important is that middle and how you handle yourself within that.

And there's certainly parallels to pacing. There's certainly parallels to taking care of yourself, nutrition throughout those things, whether that's creatively or physically. Because I just worked on a film a couple of weeks ago where we shot for five straight days, 16 hour days. And you think about a marathon of just waking up at 6:00 in the morning, going to bed at 1:00 in the morning and getting up and doing it again and doing it again. And you're so excited about what you're filming and what you're doing that you have to sometimes remind yourself, slow down, take care of yourself. You're not going to be able to get up that next day. You're not going to be able to keep going.

And so I think pacing and understanding all the things, this film is such a metaphor for so many things in life. I could take this film and be like, "Oh, you have a journey? You have something in front of you that feels impossible? Here's how you do it." Watch this little film and say, "This is how you finish this." And I think Janelle says it perfectly where she says, "People call the marathon race." She's like, "But it's a journey." And it's so true. And it's all about your journey and how you finish your race. I could literally take that metaphor and put it to finishing a book, to writing a poem, to anything you want, because it all starts with getting up, believing in yourself, knowing that you can do it and putting one foot in front of the other.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, you say it beautifully. And I talk about that at the starting line of the marathon every year I've been here. What I do actually, Rudy, is at the starting line when I give a speech, I say congratulations to the runners at the starting line. And I say, "Maybe you're wondering why would I be congratulating you at the start of the race? You haven't run it yet." But you've seen what I always say, which is the hardest part about running a marathon is getting to the starting line. And what happens after that is all a celebration, and you really are documenting that in a big way with Final Finishers.

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Rudy Valdez: Rob, even you just saying that there gave me goosebumps. I want to be at that starting line and hopefully at the finish line, but I do want to be at that starting line.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: All right, so let's talk about that. What is the farthest you've ever run Rudy in one run?

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Rudy Valdez: You know what's interesting is when I was in college, I was kind of an insomniac and I had tons and tons of energy. And so running was literally something I would just get up and go and do. And I had this route that I would run. There were two. There was one that I would run when I just had so much energy and I needed to get it out of me or I would go nuts, but I never knew how far that was. It was just something that I did. I never did it for time. I never did it for distance. It was just these mile markers that I would do.

And so I was back in my hometown right around the time

that we started making Final Finishers, and I was like, " I wonder how far that was that I used to ..." I wasn't going to run it, so I drove that route to see how far it was. And from point A to point B was 6.2 miles.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: 10 K.

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Rudy Valdez: Yeah, and then I came back from that.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Oh, well done. Okay, so you're running half-marathons almost.

00:35:05

Rudy Valdez: I was running a half-marathon and I had no idea. But I can't tell you the time I ran it in. I would literally just go, and I'm sure I walked a bit and I would do that thing, but it was just something that I would get up and go. But that was also, I was 20 years old, you know what I mean? That was quite a while ago, but I recently started running again to try and figure out if I can do this. And I just ran a pretty good five miles in a pretty good pace. And I was like, " Okay."

But it was funny, I did two and a half one way and I was coming back two and a half and I was getting back to my place at two and a half, and I remember feeling like, " I can do this. Wait, I can do this." And I was like, " Well, unfortunately I'm back at my place, so I'm going to stop running." But I was like, " I could maybe go another mile or two."

But the thing that is my hiccup right now is that I'm much older than I was when I was 20 and I have this tendency to really just go after it. And now my body's like, " You need to ease into this." My knees were a little achy, and so I have to learn to again, pace myself and take care of myself so that I can make that longer run.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: It's all about, we talk about this on the show all the time, gradually building up for your body, especially when you're not 20. Your body's not going to just flip the switch from running zero miles a week to 40 miles a week. It's too much for the body to adjust to. So you got to ramp it up 10 miles a week, 15, 20. And the longer you have to ramp up, the longer your body has to adjust. And along the way, you'll feel pains and you'll feel things and you can dial it back a little, then go back. So it really is a process. I don't know what your goal is. Do

you have a goal in mind in terms of when, Rudy, you'd like to run a marathon?

00:37:09

Rudy Valdez: November.

00:37:11

Rob Simmelkjaer: Of this year? I like it. I like it. Now there's going to be some work. So if we're going to do this, we're going to have to talk and get a plan going for you. It's doable. We're sitting here in early June. It's definitely doable. We've seen people do it much closer in than that. So all right, we're going to see if we can make this happen, Rudy. I like the sound of this. We got the Final Finishers sequel on tap when Rudy finishes the marathon.

00:37:38

Rudy Valdez: I'm sitting here thinking, did I just literally say that on a podcast now? So now I have to do it.

00:37:42

Rob Simmelkjaer: Not just a podcast, the New York Road Runners podcast.

00:37:45

Rudy Valdez: I know. I'm going to be the enemy of every runner who's like, "Hey, you were on the New York Road Runners podcast saying you're going to run and here you are standing next to the race." No, I have to do it now. I have to do it.

00:37:59

Rob Simmelkjaer: All right, it's out there. It has been put into the universe. So we are going to follow up on this and see if we can get-

00:38:04

Rudy Valdez: Oh, no. Great. Perfect. Great.

00:38:05

Rob Simmelkjaer: ... Rudy Valdez to the starting line of the 2025 TCS New York City Marathon. Listen, what better story, if we make a film to inspire people to run, the director gets inspired and runs themselves? I can't think of a more fitting post-script to a film than that.

00:38:25

Rudy Valdez: Even more pressure, Rob. Now I have to run and be a part of a great story.

00:38:27

Rob Simmelkjaer: Oh, I love it. I love it. Well, no pressure, no pressure. People try and try again. So no pressure at all, but love the desire. So okay, we're going to talk offline about that. Rudy, it's been awesome to talk to you about this and talk about Final Finishers. I've already gotten members of Road Runners who are hearing about it, texting me, calling me, saying they really want to see the film. So we can't wait to see it. It'll be available in ways to be announced for everybody to check it out. Rudy, thank you so much for helping us tell these stories and we're going to see you down the road.

00:39:07

Rudy Valdez: Yeah, no, thank you for having me on. And truly, again, thank you for having me be a part of telling this story. I'm very humbled by it.

00:39:26

Rob Simmelkjaer: New York Road Runners is a nonprofit organization with a vision to build healthier lives and stronger communities through the transformative power of running. The support of members and donors like you helps us achieve our mission to transform the health and well-being of our communities through inclusive and accessible running experiences, empowering all to achieve their potential. Learn more and contribute at nyrr.org/donate.

Anne Giovanoni has spent more than two decades at the biotech company, Alkermes, but outside of work, running is her passion. She's finished 15 Boston Marathons, is a TCS New York City Marathon Streaker with 16 marathons under her belt, and she was even a three-time finisher of the New York Road Runners 60 K Ultra Marathon that we used to do in Central Park. That was 37 miles. We got to spend time with Anne at the premiere of Final Finishers a few weeks ago because Anne's love of running has also inspired her to become a big supporter of New York Road Runners and our new production studio, East 89th St Productions. She spent time with Meb.

00:40:32

Meb Keflezighi: Thanks, Rob. Anne, welcome to the Set the Pace show. How's it going today?

00:40:37

Anne Giovanoni: It's going great. I'm so excited to be here, Meb. You're one of my heroes, so this is a really unique and wonderful opportunity for me.

00:40:45

Meb Keflezighi: Wow. Very, very, very kind of you, but I'm so thrilled to be here with you on Set the Pace, but let's get to it. How did you first start running Anne? Did you start running when you were young or did it come later on?

00:40:59

Anne Giovanoni: I definitely came to running when I was a little bit older. I think as a kid, I'm not even sure I knew what cross-country or track and field was. But after college, one of my sisters was running the Tufts 10 K and I thought, "Well, if she could do it, I must be able to do it too." And so I decided to jump in and learned my first very important running lesson in that race, which is the proper running shoes or you will end up with black toenails.

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Meb Keflezighi: Absolutely. Running is a very simple, but yet, you have to learn your education one-on-one running from whether siblings or other mentors. But you have a big job as a senior lawyer at a big biotech company. How do you find time to train for a marathon with such a busy career? And also what parallel do you see between your career and marathoning?

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Anne Giovanoni: Sure. I think I probably couldn't do my job if I didn't have running. I actually started running marathons when I was in law school and I went to law school and worked at my company at the same time. And running to me became that period of time where no one could bother me, where I could think about what I wanted to think about versus thinking about school or thinking about work.

And so over the years, running marathons has really helped me find that right balance between work and my job and my career. Many times, I've found that I do a lot of problem solving when I'm out on a long run where not purposely, I don't go on the run thinking I want to do something, but as I'm running the answer to a kind of vexing problem comes to mind. And so I don't think I could be a lawyer without running nowadays.

00:42:50

Meb Keflezighi: Incredible. No, running is a great forum to be able to just find solutions and see now you will see something and come out a completely different person. So you have run Boston many times to raise money for charity, including the charities, Casa Myrna and the Dimock Center. Why is it important for you to run for a cause and not just for yourself?

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Anne Giovanoni: So growing up, my parents really instilled in me the value of being of service to others. And as an adult, I've had many opportunities to do that in different ways, but the way I found it to be the most meaningful is running the Boston Marathon for charity. And those two particular nonprofits you mentioned have been very important to me in my adult life. And Casa Myrna provides services to survivors of domestic violence. And the Dimock Center is a health center, community health center in the Roxbury community in Boston, both of whom serve underserved populations in a variety of different ways.

And I just really have connected with both of those causes in that they provide services in a way to serve the whole person, just like I think running serves a whole person physically and mentally. And so it's been meaningful for me and I will say, every time I have the opportunity to cross that finish line, wearing a singlet for an organization I feel really passionate about, it makes the race all that more special. You're doing it not for you but for someone else. And just every year they come back and say, "Do you want to run again?" And I think, "I don't know, isn't 13 enough? Isn't 14 enough?" But that passion to support them just comes back and I say yes again.

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Meb Keflezighi: Wow, that's amazing, great work and thank you for running for a cause and a passion that you have. It doesn't only stop there as you've been a professional, but you also have a few ultra marathons under your belt. How is running ultra marathon different from a regular marathon for you?

00:45:03

Anne Giovanoni: Very much longer, but I always enjoyed the ultra marathon experience because I find it very meditative and a real opportunity to just see how far you can challenge yourself both mentally and physically. Marathons provide that, but the ultra marathon distance, I think there's just this moment where you realize your mind takes over and you think about why you're out there and can I just get another 10 feet and then another 20 feet and then another half a mile. And finding that balance between mind and body and heart and soul to get to the finish line, I just found it so invigorating. And to be fair, the chicken soup and the flat coke at every loop was definitely a plus.

00:46:05

Meb Keflezighi: Amazing. People often ask me, "Do you do ultra

marathons?" And I'm scared of the distance, I'm not going to lie, but I tell them, "When the marathon's not going my way, it becomes an ultra either extra time." But the flat Coke is good and the soup to get nutrition to get you to that finish line. But you live in Boston, but we see you a lot at the NYRR events. You are even in support of the East 89th St Production first documentary, Final Finishers. As a Boston-based runner who has run the Boston Marathon 15 times, why was supporting the NYRR's Final Finishers documentary important to you?

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Anne Giovanoni: So for me, the New York City Marathon is just the best marathon in the world. There's so much excitement from the time you go over the bridge, all of the support through all the boroughs in New York. And then you get to that finish line and it just puts you on top of the world. You just think you can do anything. And the people who are supporting you there, it's a feeling like none other.

And so when I heard that the documentary was going to focus on that finish line experience, and especially for those final finishers of the marathon who have been out there 10, 12 hours and just the excitement that happens when they cross the finish line, I thought, "How can you not be part of that? How can you not be part of sharing that wonderfully unique experience to a broader audience, to people who have never experienced a marathon finish line or the New York City Marathon finish line?"

And then I heard more about the stories of the runners who were highlighted in the film and their perseverance, their grit, their courage, all of that just blew me away. And I thought, "Gosh, there's absolutely no reason to do this. This is just an amazing project." And then when I finally saw the film, oh, it brought me to tears. I just was so inspired by the runners who were documented in the film just totally inspired by it.

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Meb Keflezighi: I could not agree ... I was fortunate enough to be at the premiere and I was equally inspired by those great finishers. They have an amazing story. So many obstacles or challenges to overcome and the documentary did a great job to illustrate that. Thank you for being part of it. You are a true champion on the course and off the course, you've done a great job, Anne. And then keep up the great work you're doing. We're just so delighted to have you on the podcast.

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Anne Giovanoni: Thank you Meb, it was so great to talk to you

today. And as a Bostonian who ran the marathon the year of the bombing and afterward, you've always been inspiring to me. I can't tell you what it did for all of us in the city to see you win the year afterward. I still can't help the smile that comes on my face thinking about it.

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Meb Keflezighi: Appreciate it. And it gives me goosebumps just thinking about it because it was very monumental for all of us, not only for Boston, but for the people running. And what horrific was in that situation, 2013, to change it to something positive. And everybody, 36,000 people came that year to celebrate and do something positive and the runners and the spectators came to support. So it was my honor to be able to pull the victory for all of us.

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Anne Giovanoni: Well, thank you again for inviting me on today.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Thanks so much for joining us, Anne, and for all your support of New York Road Runners. It really means a lot to us. Now it's time for today's Meb Minute

00:49:45

Meb Keflezighi: Be the heat, hydration, acclimation. Summer is time to train. Summer is time to have fun, but don't go too much in the heat. You have to take care of yourself. So you have to be able to train early in the morning. But sometimes if you're getting ready for a hot weather race, it is always wise to run in the middle of the day just to acclimate the heat, get used to the sweat. But you have to begin your races also smart, where you have to drink fluid, electrolyte preferably about two to three hours before, about 16 ounce. And you also have to sip throughout the day because by the time you feel thirsty, your performance have hindered by about 25%.

So it is a wise decision to train smart, hydrate, but also practice the exact drinks that you will be drinking during race days or long runs. So you have to make wise decisions to be the best that you can to beat the heat. And you don't want to be melting away there, so you got to be able to just prepare beforehand.

00:50:49

Rob Simmelkjaer: All right, that does it for this 4th of July episode of Set the Pace. We want to thank our guests, Rudy Valdez and Anne Giovanoni. Hope you guys are all having a great 4th of July holiday, maybe getting some running in

when it's not too hot. Enjoy the miles, happy 4th, we'll
see you next week.