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Carrie Tollefson: Hey everybody. I'm Olympian Carrie Tollefson alongside Kyle Merber, and we are so excited to have the post-race interviews on Set the Pace Podcast. And also today we're just celebrating this awesome event that we had. The United Airlines NYC have 30,000 people through the streets of New York. Kyle, you live right here. You know how big of a deal it is.

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Kyle Merber: I mean, if you're going to come up and get early in the morning, you might as well have a shutdown Time Square to run through.

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Carrie Tollefson: Exactly.

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Kyle Merber: That's the best way to do it.

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Carrie Tollefson: Go over Brooklyn Bridge, do all the cool things.

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Kyle Merber: I mean, the thing I just love about this course and this version of it is you really just see the whole city. And everyone's out watching. We had, I would say solid weather today. We could deal with it. Some fans out there. There was no rain, which I think in March in New York we're going to take as a big win.

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah, it was chilly. There was some wind. A lot of people said the FDR, there was wind, but they were pretty pleased with it. I think a lot of people were wondering if Harry Styles was out there like incognito, but we didn't see him.

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Kyle Merber: Yeah. I mean, he might've been in that front pack. It sounds like things are going quite well with his training these days. But no, I mean, it was really great races. And the thing that I love about the New York Half and the New York Full is it's racing. It is not about the clock here. It is about beating the other people on the course. And I think particularly in that men's race, we saw that it was a true race.

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah, huge pack all the way until we saw Adriaan Wildschutt. We're going to figure out exactly how to say his name. I say Wildschutt, but you don't.

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Kyle Merber: I say Wildschutt, but he's going to correct us.

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah, exactly. We can't wait, but what an awesome race there. Then an event record by Hellen Obiri. She's in the house. But we're going to kick off the podcast with our two wheelchair champions. So let's bring on in Daniel Romanchuk.

00:01:46

Kyle Merber: A huge welcome back to the scene. We believe that this is your third title now, Daniel. So congratulations. We're only a few hours after the race. How's it feel?

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Daniel Romanchuk: Oh, thank you. It's great to be here. Really great to be back in New York. Actually, both my sister and brother-in-law also ran today. So it's just amazing to be back on the start line because about six months ago I had an injury that I didn't know whether I would be back on the start line at all.

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Kyle Merber: Yeah. I guess for those who maybe aren't familiar with the story, can you give a brief oversight of what exactly happened? And I guess, does that change your perspective now when you're racing again?

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Daniel Romanchuk: Certainly. Again, just thankful to be back on the start line again. And so yeah, I was in the Sydney Marathon and a pedestrian crossed the course right in front of me. I ended up crashing, dislocating and fracturing my shoulder. But again, really just thankful to be back.

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Carrie Tollefson: Daniel, before we get into your post-race interview, which was quite emotional, and you could see being away from the sport has been hard, and it is for all of us athletes. But walk us through your race a little bit, because you weren't off the line first. There were quite a few of you in the very beginning stages, but man, you won by a large margin and looked so good. So tell us about your race.

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Daniel Romanchuk: Yeah. So beautiful weather conditions this morning, nice and dry.

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah.

00:03:26

Daniel Romanchuk: And so getting off the start's a pretty big pack of us. It's a pretty big downhill at first. And really that we stayed as a pretty big pack all the way up Flatbush, back down Flatbush, into Prospect Park. And then during one of the climbs in Prospect Park, I decided to try and break away a little bit and wasn't sure whether that would be my final breakaway or if I'd get back into the pack or not. But I created a little bit of distance and said, "I'll see... How long can I hold this?" And just was able to hold it the whole way, thankfully.

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Kyle Merber: Given the break, did that play into your mindset today from a strategy standpoint? Let's start out a little bit more conservative, see what we're like? How's the fitness, I guess, in training been? And how has that played into the way that you actually attack the race?

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Daniel Romanchuk: Yeah. Here at the United Airlines NYC Half is really one of our first races of the season. And so it's a really great way to kind of see how winter training went. And so I've been on rollers all winter except for the last month. I've been down in Florida getting some road time in before the season, but I was all alone. And so I really wasn't sure what to expect.

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Carrie Tollefson: What do you think is different though? I mean, coming back from an injury, we're always a little bit different. So what did you do while you were rehabbing that maybe has now made you an even better athlete?

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Daniel Romanchuk: Oh, hard to say. It's really hard to say. I think just a general mindset of while I've been through things is just to try to focus on things one day at a time, not get worked up with trying to look at the big picture and just focus on one thing at a time, one day, what can I do today to build towards the future?

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Kyle Merber: Now, coming a few hours after the race, how does the body feel after that sort of effort? Are you recovering well? And what do you do between now and the next one to really get ready? What do you take away with it?

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Daniel Romanchuk: Yes, certainly I'm heading back home to Champaign, Illinois and going to start training with the team again. And so really just rest and fuel to recover. Yeah, get ready for the next race.

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Carrie Tollefson: We know you said you had family here, your wife's here, your mom and dad are here, your sister, brother-in-law, but there was emotion. And I want to talk a little bit about that because Sam Ryan was with you on ABC and I mean, it was really, really cool to see how much you missed it. And I think Kyle and I miss it a lot. We're old and slow now. So tell us a little bit about that and then getting ready for Boston next.

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Daniel Romanchuk: Yeah. And so certainly just with the injury and the uncertainty of how racing would go in the future, there's been a lot of uncertainty and really, again, just thankful to God for the opportunity to line back up on the start line with all the other racers that I've gotten to know over the years of racing and you're really thankful to have a large amount of family here as well to watch.

00:07:05

Carrie Tollefson: Do you go party? Do you go do anything fun tonight, Daniel?

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Daniel Romanchuk: We'll see. I don't know yet.

00:07:11

Carrie Tollefson: Well, we really appreciate it and we're so excited. I was equally as emotional. I said off the front, of the top of the show this morning, we can't root for anybody in the media. But I said, I am so thankful to see the guy in red back and we are really excited for you and good luck in Boston and beyond.

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Daniel Romanchuk: Thank you.

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Kyle Merber: Thanks so much.

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Carrie Tollefson: All right. So now we are going to bring in our women's wheelchair athlete, but I mean, isn't Daniel just awesome? He's still right by us but you know?

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Kyle Merber: I have so many questions that I wanted to ask about-

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Carrie Tollefson: I know.

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Kyle Merber: - I guess the unknown, the technical side of the sport. And I guess, fortunately we have another athlete that we can pick her brain-

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah. But also I think what is interesting about with Daniel is when they were racing in Sydney, for him to have that collision with someone from the sidelines, that's a huge thing that he went through to... It wasn't him that caused the injury. It was someone else and just a kind of a happenstance situation.

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Kyle Merber: It always makes you appreciate every start line that you make it to, but then after something like that, a little bit extra.

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah, for sure. Okay. Well, we have our women's champion today from the United Airlines NYC Half, Eden Rainbow-Cooper. Welcome.

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Thank you so much. Thank you for having me.

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Carrie Tollefson: I mean, congratulations. This is a big win.

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Yeah, I'm over the moon with it. I'm so excited to have won here.

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah. You've had such a phenomenal 2025. I mean, I went on air today, I went through all of your stats

and it was like second year, fourth year, fifth year, whatever. I mean, just boom, boom, boom, right there. And you said you went home and after 2025, which wasn't too far ago, too far too long ago, you said, "I need to do something different. I need to put myself in a different situation." And today you did. So tell us about your race.

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Yeah. I mean, I was up against Tatiana and she is an absolute beast. So I knew from the gun that my way to get away is go fast downhill. That's my strength and hope that I can get a lead and maintain a lead. And yeah, I was able to do that and I really, really surprised myself today. This is a hard course and it's not always about the time, but 54 minutes here in a women's race, that's a pretty fast time. So yeah, I'm over the moon with it.

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Kyle Merber: You ended up winning by six minutes, at which point...

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Carrie Tollefson: Six minutes.

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Kyle Merber: At which point in there, did you find a shortcut? No. At what point in that race did you go, "Oh, I'm going to win this?" When did you know?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: When I saw the finish line.

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Kyle Merber: That late into the race?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Yeah. It's really difficult in wheelchair racing to see who's behind you. And I was mixed up with some of the men. So every time I looked around, there was someone lurking and I never know if that's a man or a woman or a hand bike or anything. So every race I go to, it's only when I get across the finish that I can really go, wow, okay, now I can take in where I am and I can accept it. I had a moment around halfway. I thought, maybe I can do this, but for me, it's really important to shut that down and not get complacent with where I am.

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Carrie Tollefson: Tell us a little bit about your training and

maybe it hasn't changed. Maybe it's just the mindset that has changed, but what makes you now believe that you deserve to be the one breaking the tape, not just being close to it, but breaking it?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: I think it's a strange feeling for me because I have spent the last three years racing against these incredible women that have been my idols since I first started wheelchair racing. And I still have those little fan girl moments and sort of go, "Oh my gosh, I'm on the stand. It's Tatiana..." And it's only this year that I kind of feel like I can really compete with them. And most of that is just experience, maybe sort of getting a little bit older, just taking it as it comes. But in terms of training, not much has changed. I've just got this newfound sort of confidence in myself and yeah, I'm ready to go and push the limits and find out what I can do.

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Carrie Tollefson: Was it 2024 Boston that you won? And I remember afterwards you didn't have a sponsor at the time. Tell us the status of that now and has life changed since Boston?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: No, not really.

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Carrie Tollefson: Oh, come on.

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: I'm still unsponsored. I'm lucky that I have a wonderful charity that's been supporting me, Get Kids Going! So I've had some help from them, but I'm still working, I'm still training and doing it all myself. Yeah. So yeah.

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Carrie Tollefson: When you say working, what are you doing?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: I'm a digital marketer for a big construction company in the UK. So I wake up, I train, go to work, train again, then repeat every day.

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Kyle Merber: Does that give you a little bit of balance that you're not only competing and training and having something else in life?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: For sure. I think I'm only 24, so it's really important for me to not put everything into sport. I think just from a mental health perspective, to have something that I can come away from for a few hours and go, "Okay, this is a completely different world," is really, really helpful to me.

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Carrie Tollefson: Eden, do you feel like you're just getting started? I mean, we've seen you now for the last few years, but you look at your shipper who was, again, in this race and did great and he's won this race twice. He's my age. He's like 49 years old. Just told the whole world how old I'm getting, but he's still in it and you're just starting. So do you feel like you have a long time still to get going here and to hopefully crack some more tapes?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Absolutely. I think what we're learning about wheelchair racing, especially in the road races, with age comes a lot more experience and a lot more speed. We've got so many people breaking records everywhere that are sort of in their late 30s, 40s. So yeah, for me, I really hope that my career can span another 20 years, but just will take it as it comes.

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Kyle Merber: We know that you obviously have the speed. Talk about that half distance. What do you take away from the half? Is it your favorite distance right now? What do you take away from the experience and what are you learning from today?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Yeah, I really like a half. For me in my head, I go, "Ooh, a half's not too long. It's only an hour." So I can really just push my body to the absolute limit, like max heart rate the whole way. Yeah. And today out there, I felt really, really good. And I thought, "Do you know what? I'm happy to push as hard as I can. And if I die at 20K and everyone overtakes me, so be it. I just want to find out what's possible." And the half is a really good place to do that.

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Carrie Tollefson: So we talk so much about times with us, runners that are in the half-marathon, but I don't see that you guys talk a lot about times in the wheelchair event. So

do you have metrics that you wear? Are you comparing that or is it just straight up like, which I love, all about the win?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: It depends on your goal, but I will say that for us, our times depends so much on the weather. There could be the difference in a half of 10 minutes from year to year. So I think for a lot of us, time isn't the only indicator of how well a race is going. It can be so many different things. For me today, my only goal was to have some good uphill. So that for me was like my main thing. And other people, it might be to improve their cornering, but yeah, I think times for us don't mean as much maybe as they do to months.

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Daniel Romanchuk: Do you fuel in a half?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Yeah, it depends, but so I tend to do a lot of pre-fueling, so I take like a pickle shot before-

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Carrie Tollefson: Oh, okay.

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Kyle Merber: Not a pickle backshot.

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Carrie Tollefson: Maybe after.

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Because for me, that really helps with hydration and cramping. And then during the race, just carbs, carb drink. It's difficult though because we have to carry everything ourselves. And if we drop something like that, that's gone, we can't get it back. So it's really important that we make sure we have enough fluid, but we're not taking too much because of extra weight. So yeah, it's a little bit more complicated for us than it seems.

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Kyle Merber: I feel very fortunate to have this opportunity to ask some questions. Can I nerd out a little bit?

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Carrie Tollefson: Yes.

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Kyle Merber: What is your warmup like for you? How do you get to the start line? What's going on beforehand besides just drinking pickle juice?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: I'm going to be known for that now.

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Kyle Merber: Yeah.

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Carrie Tollefson: I know.

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: So for me, I do a lot of stretching beforehand, just because we are condensed in those chairs. I don't know if you've ever tried kneeling and putting your back down for an hour or two hours, but it's not comfortable. So that's a big part for me. And then I like to have a long warmup. So I like to do like five, six, seven kilometers. Really get myself moving, get comfortable in the chair and stuff like that.

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Carrie Tollefson: So you go out to the start line and then you're doing your 5, 6, 7K?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: So a lot of it is beforehand, but it's just trying to get the body ready to go faster. Yeah.

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Kyle Merber: Do you do strides in the same way that runners would, like hit it really fast beforehand to prep the body or is it such a momentum, especially the way, I mean you close out, how warm are you on the start line?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: I mean, today we were pretty cold, I'll be honest. Today was pretty cold. So we sort of try and warm up as much as possible, but whereas some of the runners can sort of run on the sport, jump up and down, once we're on the start line, we're on the start line.

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Kyle Merber: You don't want to get held.

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. But we can't move, we can't do anything. So it's important that you know sort of

what your limit is beforehand. For me, I don't tend to do sort of much stride stuff. It's just consistent pushing, my warm-up heart rate, just getting the body moving, getting it loose. But I know that so many people will do. Yeah, there's so many different things.

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Carrie Tollefson: But lots of gear. I mean, you guys have 3D printed gloves, some of you, some of you wear, I don't know the actual term, but like the plastic medical, like what the nurses wear and stuff. Yeah, you wear those kind of gloves. You have sandpaper sometimes. There is a whole thing that goes into it.

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Yeah. I think there's so much more that goes in than what people may realize. So a lot of people don't realize that we actually kind of punch the push rim rather than grab it. So it's protecting our hands and you say the plastic gloves, yeah, we have 3D printed gloves. Some people don't. So there's so many different things, the chairs and wheels and tires. It's like you have a car that you're trying to prep for a race as well.

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah.

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Kyle Merber: Coming out of the race now a few hours later, I'm thinking about tomorrow, what hurts the most? I guess is it your back? Is it your arms? Is it the hands? Are you just exhausted? What does tomorrow feel like?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: For me, it's actually my legs. So I have full feeling in my legs, which a lot of people don't, but I (inaudible) when I could feel that and that's pretty painful for me. So if I didn't have full feeling in my legs, I'd probably do the ultras and stuff like that.

But yeah, normally tomorrow I'll be a little bit battered, but for me a half is like not a training run, but it's not so hard, so it's not too bad. But yeah, everything hurts after a marathon.

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Carrie Tollefson: So we're going to see you in Boston?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Absolutely.

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Carrie Tollefson: And then what's after that?

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: London, six days later.

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Carrie Tollefson: Oh my gosh.

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Kyle Merber: Oh, it's a tough-

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Carrie Tollefson: Here we go. Here we go. Oh, well, good luck to you. Congratulations. It was so fun to watch you race today.

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Eden Rainbow-Cooper: Thank you so much.

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Carrie Tollefson: All right. Well, now we move on to the men's winner of the United Airlines NYC Half. And I'm excited to see if we are saying this right or if we're not. I said it the whole broadcast today.

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Kyle Merber: Based off the way that I think I heard some noise from when I said my version.

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Carrie Tollefson: They laughed?

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Kyle Merber: That it was not.

00:18:50

Carrie Tollefson: Well, I don't care how we said it. This guy performed awesome today. He sat for quite a ways. Then he pushed, when I asked him beforehand what he wanted to do, he said podium. And then afterwards he said, "I just wanted to win." So he didn't quite tell me that he wanted the win. He just said podium.

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Kyle Merber: Of course he wants to win.

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Carrie Tollefson: I know. I figured.

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Kyle Merber: Now he knows what he's doing in a half.

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Carrie Tollefson: Okay. All right. This is a winner. We want to hear exactly how to say your name, Adriaan.

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Adriaan Wildschutt.

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Carrie Tollefson: Okay. So the W is...

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Like how we would say wilderness.

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Carrie Tollefson: I thought it was like...

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Kyle Merber: Okay. There's no V.

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Carrie Tollefson: Sorry, Adriaan. I said Wildschutt and I thought I was sounding so good.

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Kyle Merber: So Adriaan, you like the half now, huh? I mean, you're two for two on having some really good ones. Did you feel now like with some experience on your belt coming into today, did you have a different mindset because you knew what you're getting into?

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Yeah, I guess it definitely helped to have run a half before and I knew exactly where I started hurting last time.

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Kyle Merber: Where was that?

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Last three miles.

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Kyle Merber: Okay.

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Adriaan Wildschutt : But this time around, I wanted to make sure that I conserve as much energy as possible. And since the course is not recognizable, it was all about the way.

And so I wanted to make sure that I'm really strong. Coach and I decided that the person that was going to win this race, the strongest last night, so it's what we were focusing on.

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Carrie Tollefson: Well, 59.13 is the PR that you had coming in and is still your PR. But that was run this last fall?

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Yes. I ran it in October in Valencia.

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Carrie Tollefson: So this is only your second half. And I mean, you ran so smart today, so calm and confident. Tell us about your race too, because it was a huge pack and there were so many names that they brought in this time.

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Yeah, it was obviously a very deep field and there were so many people for a long time and I was getting antsy a little bit, but I wanted to be sure to conserve as much energy as possible. And I made that mistake so many times, especially on the track too. And I learned to be much more technically still on the track. And I think that definitely helped me a lot today, understanding when to make a move and when to just relax and when to tuck in behind when it's a headwind.

But yeah, the first nine miles was fit and I was just trying to stay in myself and then really push the last 5K.

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Kyle Merber: There were a lot of hard surges and it seemed like for the first half of the race you were sitting back. Is it tempting to respond to every single surge like that? And I guess how much more difficult does that make a race as opposed to when you're on the track now with pace lights and it's just clicking off. Now today was a real race. And so yeah, how did you respond to all those moves that were happening?

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Yeah, of course that makes it a lot more harder because you never really know when somebody's going to make a move and just keep on going. But it is very helpful to have such a stake feel then you know if people... Because I mean, you go off your instinct as well. And I was going off of Grant Fisher. I knew that he would know when to make moves. And since he's been very good tactically over the years and I made so many mistakes like prior and I was just walking off of (inaudible) I see he was stalking him and I

was just like relaxing a bit. And then about towards 10 miles or 9 miles, I could see, I felt really good and I was like, "At some point, I'm going to just want to get up the bridge and then make a big surge down the hill." And then because after the down, you get one hill again and so I wanted to keep pushing up that hill. So yeah, that helped a lot, but I was definitely working off Grant Fisher because I can understand (inaudible) .

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Carrie Tollefson: When you say, were you holding back then a little bit? I mean, that's a really tough thing to do when there's so many athletes in the group as well. How do you calm yourself to just be able to be confident in those later stages?

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Yeah, I think around seven mile, there was a big move down the hill and I follow. I was making sure that I'm not going to let, because there was four people making that move and I was like, "Okay, I need to go." It's not just one person. But yeah, I think it's difficult to explain because you understand when you're in the moment, you know exactly what to do and I wanted to make sure that I stay there's very good athletes, like I said, and they won't just leave somebody running away from the field. And if they stay behind, it means I probably should just be calm and they'd help a lot to work off of other athletes. But yeah, like I said, you wouldn't exactly... I was holding back a lot and I guess that's good and I felt really good going up the hills. And so I knew I was going to be in a very good spot towards the last three hours because it's a little more handy.

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Kyle Merber: There was a moment, I think you were like cornering 42nd where it seemed you almost went down. Was it a twisted ankle? Did you hit a pothole? What happened there? And what did that do to you?

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Yeah, I don't know. I guess I didn't expect it to be so soft to turn and I guess I might have stepped on something, but luckily it wasn't too bad and I gained my balance very quickly after that. But yeah, I saw it after I was like, " Oh boy."

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Carrie Tollefson: I know. I didn't see it live on television until the replay. You were back home in South Africa running

a little bit, but you train in Flagstaff. Talk a little bit about your situation. Your coach, Jack, is sitting right here and one quote that he gave me before one of your other races earlier this year is that you are just full of love of life and your team. You really love that team. Your brother has been over to Flagstaff. You guys got a lot going on there and a really good atmosphere right now.

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Yeah, we have a great dynamic. We have one class that he's on the team and that goes what I would say. We have a very, very good coach and I think that you can see that in our performances and even in the recent weeks, getting off of the US half-terms and now this race as well and the cross country as well earlier this year. So clearly we have a very good coach and a very good team and having world-class athletes makes it a little bit easier. And I was in South Africa, escaped the cold a little bit and then that's why I was a little concerned about the weather today, but I guess it worked out well.

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Kyle Merber: So you're now on the roads twice. Are we done with the track or are we going to go back and forth or is the marathon calling? Where are you at mentally?

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Yeah. I mean, like this is my thing. I just take it one day at a time. I don't get ahead of myself. Of course, it's so fleeting sometimes. You get one thing done and you want to jump straight right into the next thing. And for me, I want to enjoy my running career and that means being grateful and celebrating the moments that you do well and just living the moment. I don't know what the future holds. I'm not focusing on the track this year because there's no world championships. And so that's why we wanted to explore and do a little bit more role. And today was the big focus for the first half of the year and that's done and I'm very happy about that. And so yeah, I don't quite know.

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Carrie Tollefson: There's something big coming though. We haven't talked about the book.

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Adriaan Wildschutt : Yeah, that's coming.

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Carrie Tollefson: That's coming.

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Adriaan Wildschutt : That's in the pipeline.

00:26:16

Carrie Tollefson: Yeah, you put it out there and I've mentioned it a few times on the broadcast. So when do you expect that to happen?

00:26:23

Adriaan Wildschutt : The book is being published in May, later May. The exact date needs to be confirmed, but I think it's probably going to be around May 9th and May 26th. Yeah, that's something that I've been writing for the last two years. And I am very happy that it's approaching the end now. I can just relax because that's the thing, like coming out of college, you do NCAAAs and you're in school, you're always busy and it's a pro. You get done with training and you're just like laying around. And that's not never really my nature. So I always try to find things to do. I remember like one of our marketing managers say, I always ask, is there no... I asked him if there's no internship I think to open. I feel like (inaudible) .

And he was like, " Bro, we're paying you to run." So yeah, no, I like to keep busy and it was great for me, especially from a South African standpoint. I think the book is, people can find a lot of... In that it's not just about running. I like to run my life how we all want different kinds of things, and the book is one of those things. And so I feel like a lot of people can gain from that.

00:27:31

Kyle Merber: So now what is going to keep you busy after this book? Is there a sequel coming already?

00:27:35

Carrie Tollefson: Maybe.

00:27:36

Adriaan Wildschutt : Yeah. You know what? I think I always find things to do. I have started a business with one, three other friends of mine in Florida, it's a electrolyte brand. It's called Hybrid WTR. And so we are working on that always. And I guess I will keep myself busy with that until I find something more to do.

00:27:55

Carrie Tollefson: Always hungry for something next. Well, congratulations on today. And wow, we're excited to see where you go, whether it's the track, cross country, 13th at the World Cross Country Championships, just in January, now

winning the United Airlines NYC Half. Bravo, man. Way to go.

00:28:09

Kyle Merber: Congratulations.

00:28:10

Adriaan Wildschutt : Appreciate it.

00:28:11

Carrie Tollefson: All right, now we have one more.

00:28:14

Kyle Merber: Yeah. I mean, we've been in the presence of greatness after greatness. And now-

00:28:17

Carrie Tollefson: I mean, just keeps coming.

00:28:17

Kyle Merber: Yeah. The heavy hitter.

00:28:20

Carrie Tollefson: The heavy hitter. Ms. Hellen Obiri. And she has her pizza.

00:28:26

Kyle Merber: Yeah, good choice. Emmy Squared. Great spot.

00:28:28

Hellen Obiri: Thank you.

00:28:30

Kyle Merber: When in New York, what's your favorite thing to do? I mean, you come to New York now similarly all the time. What's your favorite thing to do besides win races when you're here?

00:28:38

Hellen Obiri: Besides what I do after the race, I can touch up my business.

00:28:41

Carrie Tollefson: Yes. When you say New York is like your second home?

00:28:46

Hellen Obiri: It's been my second several times, so I can just go back. It's nice to get home.

00:28:51

Carrie Tollefson: Yeah. Today was an interesting race, wasn't it? I mean, for the first half, you had company and then all of a sudden you didn't. So was that the point of the race today or were you surprised as well?

00:29:07

Hellen Obiri: I was surprised because we have the strong there. Agnes was there with me and they knew Agnes, she's very strong. When you cross country, you can, and she likes to go the hard place. So I was ready for the hard place, but I wasn't thinking like she (inaudible). But for me, it was like, just let me just try to push myself as hard and see how far I can go because I've been preparing for the marathon. I've not changed anything, so I will see up to see how my level of my business.

00:29:43

Carrie Tollefson: Sure.

00:29:43

Kyle Merber: Yeah, of course. I mean, the London Marathon coming up, it's going to be one of the great fields that we've ever seen. What did you take from today and what did you learn about your fitness here?

00:29:57

Hellen Obiri: So far I can say like I'm (inaudible) because I have six weeks of training and the quarters were here. So they have seen what I've done. And so far I've seen what I've done because I'm not 100% of my fitness because we still have time. So I can say I'm in a very good place if you can just train that seven weeks. So in preparation to go as we felt to go and everything from life, so we do hope we see each other in London Marathon.

00:30:32

Carrie Tollefson: You have run so well over 26.2, but we've seen you run well over the 1500, even 800 meters, cross country, all of it. You've done it all. But this past year, you really have done quite a few 10Ks. You've done some different distances. Is that just to keep you excited about the sport or is there an actual reason to drop down and get the legs going? I mean, what is your best distance? Nobody knows.

00:31:01

Hellen Obiri: I can say all are the best of my distances because I know I love doing 10Ks. I love doing half-marathons and I've been doing track for a while. So last year I would say I need to get my speed back. I need to get my legs back towards the marathon. So we decided to do 10Ks so the new 10Ks, it

can get me in speed. And because I was paying for the emeritus, so this is the right time, it's the right moment to be set up to see how far my skill is. And so now we are ready because I was training with a track register. They were helping me to push me with the speed. And then they said, now, even if I do that, I think I did four, three, 10 case last year because I remember the half number I did was 2023. So having to have how much you can do like half-marathon. So if you have a speed, you can just to do all the distances for following. Some trust about yourself and used to trust about what you're doing.

00:32:07

Carrie Tollefson: Yeah. But not going back to the track.

00:32:10

Hellen Obiri: Because even back to. I don't say I can go and run 5K and 10Ks because my age and my time will allow me to go now.

00:32:22

Carrie Tollefson: Bite you tongue, you're young.

00:32:23

Kyle Merber: Hell, something I've always really appreciated about you is it's not about chasing times. It's about winning races. And I mean, you wouldn't necessarily know it based off of the time today, but it's not known for being a fast course here. You made it one. But when you're out there, are you looking at the clock with the time? Are you just feeding off of the other athletes and ultimately waiting to make your move? I mean, you were following Agnes for so long and then when you moved it just really did open up so quickly. So what is your mindset in those moments?

00:32:55

Hellen Obiri: For me, the first thing I knew when it comes to Agnes, first is doing the (inaudible) from them. In New York, you can say I want to run this time because hard goes with (inaudible) so what it was in my mind to do this. And from there, just the times, but you can't just like I want to do... I didn't have the targets. The time I want to run is this one and this one. So I said if I win, the time will come. And probably because Agnes was there. So when you started, the place was so big. So I knew inside the post record.

00:33:26

Carrie Tollefson: Yeah, it was awesome. You heard people saying though, you're going to run 66 minutes, right? You heard someone yell that at you?

00:33:42

Hellen Obiri: Yeah. When I was at the 20 days, some (inaudible) say like that's why I realized I'm on the course record base because Agnes broke up. So me, it wasn't like my place also broken down. So I was thinking like I'm 67, something like that. But then no, I was so close to 66. So when somebody told me there are six places, so I tried to get it.

00:34:09

Carrie Tollefson: Well, let's talk a little bit about the spring. So this is a little bit of a different spring. Normally we see you either here in New York or in Boston, but now you're making the trip across the pond to London and it's a flat fast course. It's different than what you've been running lately. Even the Olympic Games was super hilly. Boston's hilly. New York's hilly. So what's your prep like for London? Has it been different or about the same?

00:34:32

Hellen Obiri: I think I made the right choice to go to London Marathon because sometimes you need to change your mind and sometimes you need to change your training and sometimes you need to see how far your legs can go into the faster course. So I said, now this is the right time, this right moment to do London Marathon with the partnerings there. Of course I love Boston Marathon, New York Marathon, and I like to do what they want to do. None of them told this might pass. So I say like, I'm not one there to target. I want to do this time and this time is to see how far my list I'm doing and how far I'm going faster because we love women base makers. I haven't done (inaudible) without the best matter. So it will be for me my opportunity and to learn the new experience or fun with the faster class.

00:35:24

Carrie Tollefson: It's going to be fun.

00:35:24

Kyle Merber: Do you have to change things in training for what will likely be a quicker cadence and tempo? Especially I feel like in New York the last few years, it's really about how well you close. It ultimately was a sit and kick race. Whereas London, you almost know for certain that, I mean, that first half is not going to be slow by any means. So does that change anything you're doing on a day-to-day basis at crap?

00:35:59

Hellen Obiri: For now, we haven't changed anything because we say I'm doing New York Half. New York Half is tough. So we say for now we

don't need to change ending year. But for next week, we're going to start changing like I need to do faster process because I used to do the goals I did in Boston and New York. So we have to see faster process and do faster workouts because you have to change the trainings because I can train with Joe and Aya because I think they're doing awesome. So from next week we want to spend our workouts do the also program and the family learning program. So from next week, I'm going to focus about the (inaudible) .

00:36:34

Carrie Tollefson: Well, I think I got to know what kind of pizza did you get?

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Hellen Obiri: Mushrooms with onion.

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Carrie Tollefson: Mushrooms and onion?

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Hellen Obiri: Yeah.

00:36:43

Carrie Tollefson: Oh, okay.

00:36:45

Kyle Merber: When you're-

00:36:46

Carrie Tollefson: We're back to more technical questions. I wanted to know. Of course Hellen would say that. I was going to get into the color of her nails now, but we're sorry. That has to wait because we're still in the technical questions.

00:36:59

Kyle Merber: No, no, it's not too technical. It's not too technical.

00:37:00

Carrie Tollefson: Okay. Go.

00:37:00

Kyle Merber: All right. So when you're racing here with 30,000 people, you probably get approached a little bit and people ask for advice. Do you have any advice for people who are running the New York City half for in the future? Because now you've run it a couple times. You know what you're doing here. What's the key? This versus other races.

00:37:34

Hellen Obiri: What I can advise them to focus and to be disciplined about what you are doing and to follow the right thing, don't push yourself as, just control yourself and eat well while you're there and sleep well and make sure everything's in the right place. Or then we tell it about, I want to run this time or this time because your first time you should achieve to give the finish line to like, "I want to do this time out." So trust and focus.

00:37:57

Carrie Tollefson: We were on the broadcast today, Hellen. And Hellen and I go way back. We have some fun interviews and podcasts that we've done, but we were saying, "You are the fastest to ever run the half-marathon here. You are the fastest to ever run the marathon here in New York City." What in the world does that feel like? I mean, that is crazy. That's a crazy fact.

00:38:22

Hellen Obiri: It's awesome. It's an incredible moment.

00:38:24

Carrie Tollefson: Wait, put that mic right up to your mouth because we got to hear this.

00:38:27

Hellen Obiri: That was awesome moment for me and (inaudible) for me. Having the post record of a marathon and then after marathon, that seems like New York has a special space in my life because now I'm the only woman doing the post record 66.

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Carrie Tollefson: So fun.

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Hellen Obiri: For the marathon under 220..

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah, 219.

00:38:53

Hellen Obiri: 219. So that one's a was a moment for me. It gives you motivating me to work hard.

00:38:59

Carrie Tollefson: Yeah. And I know your daughter, Tanya, is probably making sure she's watching the clock too. She's on your shoulder, in your ear all the time, making sure you do everything right. Yeah. That's awesome.

00:39:14

Kyle Merber: You and Sharon now have this incredible rivalry. I mean, she finished second today. It seems like you guys just are always neck and neck at the end of races. What is that like? I mean, you guys keep each other honest. Is it a friendly rivalry? Are you warm enough together? What is the, I guess, atmosphere like when you two are on a start line? Because it's so often and it always delivers.

00:39:39

Hellen Obiri: Yeah, Sharon and I are very good friends. During warm up, "You can do it, girl." And as you can see, girl who was standing to start, we started to go and we stop. But when you come to competition, it's sports, but that shows us that there's no enmity in sports. It's all about plays. Sports can bring all the kids work. And that's why I used to share them from sports. So I do say it's a friendship. After sports, there's life. And after competition, we say that, "Congratulations, you made it." So that's why we say it's all about sports and we have to keep our friendship.

00:40:22

Carrie Tollefson: Well, congratulations. Another big win for you and so fun for us to be able to call your name across the line.

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Kyle Merber: Best of luck in training prep for London. We're going to be excited to see what you do there next.

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Hellen Obiri: Thank you.

00:40:34

Carrie Tollefson: Well, Kyle, that was pretty cool.

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Kyle Merber: Yeah. I mean, I always just like nerding out-

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Carrie Tollefson: I know.

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Kyle Merber: - opportunities.

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Carrie Tollefson: I mean, I wish we had all day with them. I could talk to them all day, but they got to get some stuff done.

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Kyle Merber: Yeah. It's funny, I feel like after a half, if you're a winner, you actually don't feel that terrible. I'm sure those who did not win don't feel quite as good. The winners after a half, they do still have a lot of life in them.

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah.

00:40:57

Kyle Merber: You can cool down after a marathon, there's no reason.

00:41:00

Carrie Tollefson: Well, and most of them are going to stay tonight and they'll run in Central Park tomorrow, get a good run in.

00:41:04

Kyle Merber: The competition out there, it was just some of the deepest fields I think we've ever seen. And Agnes strung it out early on the women's side, so you probably didn't have the full appreciation of the men, which was 14, 15 guys playing together through the streets the entire time. But it's just amazing how this is just such a standard spot on the calendar now for all the athletes. It's perfectly situated for a spring marathon in the buildup.

00:41:30

Carrie Tollefson: It really is, really is. And as you were saying, thinking about the men, that field was so deep. The women, they had a deep field too, but I would think the men had probably the deepest field that we've seen maybe ever here. And it did look like at times where we had a bunch of newbies and then a bunch of veterans. There weren't a lot of guys that have done five, 10. They're either their second or third half-marathon or their first like Grant Fisher or they were veterans. So it was really interesting. And I think I just heard some champagne get popped.

00:42:00

Kyle Merber: Yeah.

00:42:01

Carrie Tollefson: Did you hear that?

00:42:01

Kyle Merber: Rightfully so.

00:42:03

Carrie Tollefson: But yeah, Grant Fisher, let's just touch on him a little bit.

00:42:05

Kyle Merber: I mean, so Grant, I believe finished 14th today, was in that lead pack for the large majority of the race, sat back. We never really saw him upfront taking too much of the win, but it's a good learning experience. I know he didn't have the perfect buildup into this. And so for him to come out, get a feeler and learn, I do think that we often make this mistake of saying, "Well, you've run fast on the track, so it's a perfect translation." And even though Grant has run well in cross before, it's still a learning experience. And I think he probably comes away from today with a lot of lessons to take into the next future build.

00:42:46

Carrie Tollefson: Totally. So much respect for the distance and just great races all around. All four of the races in the 30,000 plus behind it was pretty cool.

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Kyle Merber: Yeah. I have such appreciation for people like Hellen and Adriaan who are of that mindset of just like, they'll race anything, anytime, anywhere, any surface. And to see someone who's historically been a track specialist like Grant, I don't think that you have to, when you taste the roads, commit, you can go back and forth with a half. And so we're seeing it more and more. It's a good way to spend the winter as well as you're running the big miles anyway. So you might as well put them to use.

00:43:21

Carrie Tollefson: Yeah, mix it up. And also to Daniel and Eden. I mean, for me, maybe the most fun was seeing how emotional Daniel was after to see him back. We love this sport. All of us, no matter if you're racing, part of the staff, whatever it is, there is a true family and I think that's what he missed the most. And that was pretty cool. And then Eden, just to see the fire and the determination she has to be on top, she has such a great resume already. She could go home today and retire and she'd be one of the best we've ever seen. But for her to say, "No, I want to win." And we need to get her a sponsor and we need to keep rooting for her because she is a bright hope in that wheelchair division.

00:44:01

Kyle Merber: Yeah. I think the thing that the wheelchair athletes

bring is those stories.

00:44:04

Carrie Tollefson: Yes.

00:44:04

Kyle Merber: And they're so motivating. They could be translated from their experiences when Daniel overcame to make it back to the start line to all of us. And we just don't appreciate as non-wheelchair athletes the technical side and how many things can go wrong. So just being able to make it to the finish line is an accomplishment in and of itself.

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Carrie Tollefson: It's for everyone.

00:44:26

Kyle Merber: Yeah.

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Carrie Tollefson: Yeah. Really cool day. Thank you for joining us.

00:44:29

Kyle Merber: Yeah, it's super fun.

00:44:30

Carrie Tollefson: Thanks for CITIUS MAG joining us and for the New York Roadrunners Set the Pace podcast. I'm Carrie Tollefson. This Kyle Merber. We had an awesome day at the 2026 United Airlines NYF Half. See you next year.