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Justin Britt: The hardest thing for me trying to get through my mental struggles was finding community. I didn't start running to find community, but what I found is the running community is just massive. If you're struggling, go for a run and sign up for a 5K.

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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, and with me, my cohost, Peloton instructor, Becs Gentry. Becs coming off of a great stint in the broadcast booth for United Airlines NYC Half. And it was a great broadcast, Becs.

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Becs Gentry: Thank you.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: It was a great, great day for 30, 229 runners.

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Becs Gentry: Wow, official number there. Ring that bell. That is huge. Oh my goodness. It was a beautiful day. So much to talk about. We were reeling in the broadcast booth. There was just so many different vibes going on through all four of the professional races and then into the everyday runners. It was beautiful. It was one of those true runners races. Seeing Agnes Ngetich, who everybody was like, "Oh, is she going to come and dominate at this race? She's feeling really good. She started so strong." And then seeing or hearing Carrie the Olympian and so much experience of running herself, but also watching through commentating of how people are performing. She's like, "She's cold. She's cold. She's not used to this. She's cold."

And the powerhouse or the caged animal, as Carrie described her, or Hellen Obiri's coach actually described her as this energy that I'm sure Hellen just felt in that moment, Agnes just dropped maybe a couple of seconds off the pace and Hellen went for it. And I think something similar happened in the men's race. For both wheelchair races, there was quite a distinctive lead for the winners there, but it was still so magnificent. And each of those runners came over the finish line, taking their claim on the race this year with the biggest smiles on their faces. It really felt like it meant so much to each of them in a very different way. And we got event record, which is huge.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yes, it was absolutely huge. The event record in this event, because the course has changed a lot, gets set more often than one might think, but Hellen Obiri-

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Becs Gentry: Yeah, should we clarify that? Because I think that was a big question that we actually had. And I've been asked such a few times what it means.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, event record covers all the courses.

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Becs Gentry: Exactly, not a course record.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: So, it's not a course record, it's an event record. So, all the different times this race has been run, Hellen Obiri now holds the event record with a time of 106:33, so that counts for all of the history of this event. Obviously, the course changes year to year. This year we had... Second year we had it over the Brooklyn Bridge, a little less elevation, but nonetheless, it's a record setting performance for Hellen Obiri, who, let's face it, is now truly the queen of New York City distance running.

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Becs Gentry: The queen. (inaudible) .

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Rob Simmelkjaer: She just has a vibe here. She comes here. She has the confidence. She really handles a variety of conditions so well.

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Becs Gentry: She does.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: She has run races and won in cold conditions, in warm conditions, in variable conditions. She just has a way of adjusting to whatever the weather is. And it was cold. For the pro runners, they never got above 40 degrees in their run. They were running in the 30s. She handled it well. And you're right, whether it was Agnes, whether it was Sharon Lokedi, who when she got to the finish line on Sunday, I was there to greet her and she was cold. Even at the 13.1 mile mark, they were cold, so that definitely was a factor for some of them. But tremendous day for Hellen. Five American women, by the way, finishing in the top 10 on

Sunday, so a great day.

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Becs Gentry: All kind of together too, which was really lovely to see from Emily Sisson coming in sixth, and then we had sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth. It was really cool.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yes. It was awesome to see. So, a good day for them as well. And just a great day on the women's side. On the men's side, it was exciting to see a new face who really none of us really knew. Our professional team knows, Sam Grotewold and Dorian know the pro runners, but for someone like me who kind of dips in and out of following, to see Adrian Wildschutt, I think I'm pronouncing it right-

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Becs Gentry: (inaudible) .

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... from South Africa, come across in 59:30, the first ever South African champion of this event. And it was just fun to see a new face do well. And he was so excited and felt really good about his finish in what must have been, Becs, a very exciting men's race to broadcast because there were so many of them together for so long.

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Becs Gentry: The pack was gigantic. They stayed together so long. Patrick Kiprop led the way for the vast majority of the race. And it was very, very... It almost felt planned when Adrian just took off because yes, okay, we had Peter Lynch, Irish guy who we were joking like... Of course he took the lead for a little while, we're like, "He's used to the cold. Come on, no matter where he trains, he's Irish in his blood. He knows the cold weather well." And then he kind of stepped back and then Patrick Dever, Patrick Kiprop together at the front. And yeah, there was a lot of changing of the guards, coming and going, but nobody took a big dive forward. We had Zouhair Talbi, he also took the chance to step forward, but it really wasn't until just over the 10 mile marker that Adrian changed gear.

He fully changed gear, and he said that was his plan. He stuck with his coach's plan, was to run 10 miles strong and then start really racing at 10 miles. And he said he felt good. And he's been training in South Africa recently, so he's just coming off of summer, which a lot of the professional athletes have actually gone, even if they are based in the likes of Flagstaff, Boulder, et cetera, and in the US to train, they may have gone home after the end of

the fall season here, as we call it, to warmer climates, to be with family, to spend time in different training environments like Iten. And coming off South African winter, Adrian was saying it was warm. He's used to training in 80, 90 degrees... Celsius? Fahrenheit, Fahrenheit.

And to come here, as you say, you're racing in the 30s, but I said on the broadcast, one minute he had this gigantic hat on that was almost covering his eyes and it looked so warm and wonderful, and then all of a sudden it came off and I said to Carrie and Ryan, " Oh, the hat's off. He means business now." And then within, he was gone. He was off on his way. So, I do think a lot of these races were very well executed from a coaching and a runner perspective over the weekend, and proof's in the pudding in those times. He was incredibly close to the event record for the men's side too.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Super impressive. Congratulations to him. In the wheelchair races, it was your country woman, Eden Rainbow Cooper, winning the women's wheelchair race in a time of 54:27 from the UK.

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Becs Gentry: Fantastic.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: And another really positive story on the men's side, Daniel Romanchuk, coming back from the injury he suffered in the crash that he was involved in in the Sydney Marathon, comes back and wins his third United Airlines NYC Half title as well.

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Becs Gentry: So good to see.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Was great to see that win as well. You could tell it meant a lot to him.

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Becs Gentry: It really did. And it was such an unfortunate incident at Sydney when a spectator just came onto the course and it tipped Daniel over and he took an injury to his, I believe, shoulder and collarbone area quite badly. So, he spent the last six months or so recovering, rebuilding. He also has just come from Florida, so he was also in the warmth and training on the roads down there in Florida before this race. So, it was so great to see him. He also mentioned his... I think it was his sister and brother-in-

law also ran the race today, so really, truly a family affair of celebration for the Romanchuk crew this weekend.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, it was really great to see. On the other side, the nonprofessional side, we had our fourth Commissioner's Cup. This, of course, is a competition among the various agencies of the City of New York, all the folks that we work with year in and year out to help put on this race and the marathon and many others. And the NYPD, the police continued their dominance in the Commissioner's Cup.

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Becs Gentry: They've won so many of them.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yep. They won their fourth straight, defeating the six other agencies, including the Mayor's Office, so congrats again to the NYPD on retaining that Commissioner's Cup. These other agencies are going to have to start recruiting for speed because-

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Becs Gentry: They are.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... yeah, the NYPD, they are on it. They are really a great group of athletes.

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Becs Gentry: They truly... There was a lot of MYPD runners coming over that line early on, I will say. And I know they get the VIP start as well, so they do start earlier, but still, there's nothing to take away from the time and the effort and the energy that they put in to run those fast splits on Sunday, so congratulations to them.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely.

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Becs Gentry: And then the kids race. We had the beautiful Brittany Bell covering that on the broadcast team with over 1500 little... Well, not so little. It's two through...

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Two to 18, yes.

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Becs Gentry: 18, yeah.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: So, we got a nice broad spectrum of youth. The older kids from 12 to 18, they run a mile-

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Becs Gentry: A full mile, yeah.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... out and back on 7th Avenue right in the middle of Times Square. And then the little ones run, could be as little as like a 50-yard dash, but it's adorable. It's a great event. And it's just tremendous to shut down Times Square for both the adult runners coming through, the kids doing their thing. And then that moment where you've got the leaders and the adults in the first wave running right alongside the kids in Times Square, one of the things that really makes this event special. So, congratulations to all finishers, adults and child. It was a great, great day at the United Airlines NYC Half. Well, Becs, as we just mentioned, five American women finished in the top 10 on Sunday, including today's guest, 10th place finisher, Emily Venters.

But Emily had another role on race day as well. She was coaching former NFL player Justin Britt through this very same race. That's right. They became a coach student pair a little while ago. In just a minute, we're going to talk with both of them about their partnership, how it came about, and what happens when a football player learns endurance running from a professional distance runner.

00:11:14

Becs Gentry: Peloton is taking running and race tech to the next level with the new Peloton cross training series, Tread+, powered by Peloton IQ. Built for runners who want top tier performance, the Tread+ helps you train smarter and get race ready with precision. Peloton IQ offers personalized insights that evolve as you progress, so you can fine-tune your pacing and peak at the right moment. And with strength workouts, designed to build the muscle you need to support every mile, your training goes beyond the run. Plus, pace target classes designed to build consistency, boost speed, and improve your splits. Every single run supports your full training cycle, from recovery miles to challenging race pace intervals. Experience our most advanced tread yet at onepeloton.com. Peloton, the official digital fitness partner of New York Road Runners.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Former NFL center Justin Britt spent most of his career with the Seattle Seahawks where he started on the offensive line. These days, his competition looks a little bit different. This past weekend, Justin ran the United Airlines NYC Half in 131:11. And he was coached by a professional distance runner, Emily Venters, who finished the race herself in 109:46, placing 10th in the women's field. This is an unusual partnership, a former NFL player learning endurance running from a younger professional athlete who is very much in her prime. For Justin, running became an antidote after football. For Emily, the relationship with running is more complicated because it's not just something she loves, it's also how she makes her living. Today, we're talking with both of them about that dynamic and what running can mean at very different stages of an athlete's life. Justin and Emily, congratulations to both of you for outstanding efforts on Sunday.

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Justin Britt: I appreciate it. Thank you.

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Emily Venters: Thank you.

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Becs Gentry: You were both amazing to watch. It was so exciting. The whole race was an incredibly exciting race from the sidelines from where Rob and I were sitting. And I can't wait to dive into how it was for both of you as runners on the day and experiencing the magnetic vibe that is road racing in New York City with New York Road Runners. So, let's jump in. Emily, I want to know about your incredible finish; 109, top 10. You are so incredibly well-versed in this sport. What did it feel like for you on that morning, lining up on the start line in Brooklyn with your training behind you and that day ahead?

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Emily Venters: I was just super excited. Like I said, I really enjoy racing in New York. NYRR always puts on amazing events for us and hosts us so well, and so I feel like every time I come... Or I haven't come that many times yet. I'm still young in my career, but when I've come, it's always fun and I feel excited. And I had never been in a race here where we started in Brooklyn, so it's always been started in New York City. And yeah, it was just awesome. The sun was starting to rise as we were on the start line, and kind of I just felt like no fear and no anxiety going into it. And I was... I just knew it was going to be a good day because I felt so calm within myself and just

excited to see what I was going to do on the day.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Emily, did you have a goal coming in? You've had good finishes in New York before. You finished second in the Abbott Dash to the Finish a couple years ago. What were your goals walking to the starting line on Sunday?

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Emily Venters: Like I said, I didn't really have a specific goal in mind. I just wanted to run within myself and I wanted to run feeling strong the whole way. I didn't want to go out too fast and I wanted to, like I said, stay within myself and just kind of slowly chase people and feel good and finish feeling strong, and I did that. And I said, I think that's probably the best race I've had in over a year. Just the way that I felt finishing, it was a feeling of like I could have kept going if I wanted to.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That's great.

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Emily Venters: And I think that that's exciting for me.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, that's really great. Now, Justin, you and I first met, I was saying before the podcast started, in Chicago in the pre-start tent where you were running the Chicago Marathon, and you had a good day there. Came to New York. I believe this was your first time running the United Airlines NYC Half, is that right?

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Justin Britt: Correct, correct.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: All right. So, help us understand how a former NFL lineman... You weren't like a wide receiver or a defensive back where running a lot is part of the job. You were an offensive lineman where you basically are moving in like a 10 yard area most of the time and your job is basically just to hit guys, right, hit guys, push guys around, just basically be like a brick wall. How does that transition work from that to running long distance races?

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Justin Britt: Well, half my job, I was moving backwards also. It took me... My brain was like, "Wait, we got to go forward." No, but I would always say, "Look, if I'm running

40 yards, then that's a really good football play, so why are we doing a hundred yard sprints, guys?" But I never saw myself entering this world of running. I think whenever I went on my first run, it was just kind of to challenge myself and to experience something different because at that time I was so into cycling on my Peloton that I was like, "I need something new, something that's going to help me keep growing mentally," because I was kind of trying to come past this mental health struggle that kind of led me to retire from the NFL. And running just continues to check the box for me.

And I'm taking this week off, and I know I'm going to have to keep myself busy because if I sit at home and don't get my run in, it's just going to sit in my head and it's going to drive me crazy, but I know I need to let the body rest, Emily, Coach Venters. But it's been a blessing. It's been amazing. I say that standing in the corral of the races is as close mentally as I can get to standing in the tunnel of a football game. And so I told the road runners after the race, I said, "Standing in this corral gave me a bigger energetic boost than standing in the tunnel at MetLife."

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Becs Gentry: Wow. That is huge, and also really amazing to hear, having... You had a wonderful career on the field, and now having this personal elevation of you continuing in sport is really, really cool to see. And I'm sure a lot of that is coming from incredible coaching too. I know it takes a great coach to bring out a really good sports person as well. So, let's talk about your training for it, Justin. You just finished in 131:11. Thank you for the drop-in of Peloton on your bike, but I am also now really happy that you're a Peloton... Hello, baby. And now you're a Peloton Tread runner as well. We've had one or two interactions, and I'm honored that you've taken a few of my classes. But what was it like being in New York? You ran with a pretty big New York running legend, Rob Dalto, here. As the two of you traversed your way from Brooklyn to Manhattan, what was the journey like for you?

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Justin Britt: Well, getting to spend the morning with Rob was pretty special. And you see his Instagram and all his interviews and you're like, "Wow, he's such a good person and his energy's what you want." And so he was clearly the celebrity of the race between us two. And any corner we turned, I would just say in my head, "My name's Rob." And so there you're like, "Let's go, Rob." I was Rob that day. So, it was cool getting to know him, but we have our

connection through WOLACO, the running tights, so I've known him for a while. And actually the first time I met Rob, it was like mile 22 in Chicago. I'm over there dying, trying not to cramp, and here comes Rob with his fiance.

He's like, "Hey, Justin." And I'm like, "What are you doing?" And I was like, "What pace am I at?" And he tells me right on the dot. And I was like, "Okay, I got this." So, he's just the type of person... I never had to grab a water on Sunday. He would speed up, grab two and bring him to me. I was like, "The best pacer forever."

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Becs Gentry: He got them all for you? That's just the kind of guy he is.

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Justin Britt: Like Emily was saying though, she had no fear in the corral. I showed up highly confident, and it's like I knew it was going to be a beautiful day.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. That's awesome. Emily, how did this coaching relationship between you and Justin first start?

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Emily Venters: So, we were at a race, Bloomsday in Washington, Spokane. And my agent, Josh Cox, is also his agent now. And so Josh had texted me like, "Hey, look out for this big tall dude, all tatted up. We work with him."

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Rob Simmelkjaer: He's not hard to spot. Not hard to spot in the corrals of a long distance race. Wearing his Seahawks jersey most of the time too, so pretty easy to spot.

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Emily Venters: Yeah, pretty conspicuous. Yeah. And I was like, "Okay, I'll try and look out for him." And I ended up seeing him at the dinner the night before the race and we chatted. A bunch of my teammates were there too, and we kind of just hit it off. And then he told me that he lived in Kansas and I was like, "Wait, that's crazy. I'm from Kansas. My family still lives there." And you don't expect many people to say that they're from Kansas, so that was an instant connection for me too. And he said he didn't have a coach, and I was like, "What? Let me coach you. I coach people and that'd be awesome." I love bringing on or starting to coach people who I can tell have a really big passion for it. And I'm like, "It's awesome that you have that background already in this sport you know... or in a different sport,

but also have that competitive drive and know how to work hard, and just let me teach you kind of how to train." Because I don't think he really understood training.

And I'm still trying to teach him a little bit, but I think that's fun for me to watch him grow and continue to learn running and the training behind it and why we do things. And his progress has just been amazing. In the last year, it's crazy. I don't think he could have run 131 or sub-131 or, yeah, sub-130 like he did in Houston six, seven months ago even. So, he just continues to make progress and it's really awesome to watch.

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Becs Gentry: That's so cool. Okay, can we dive into that just a little bit? Because, A, to humor me, I still after nearly nine years compare NFL to rugby in England. So, to me, I'm like you are center prop sort of vibe in rugby. And as you were saying, the change from running 40 yards to a marathon is absolutely huge. So, talk us through, Justin, you first, why? Why for you did you think, "I'm going to take this on," as this... not just a one-time thing? You have done multiple races. And then for Emily, how did you put it to, let's say paper, the training for somebody who has spent so many years training in one way for one sport, to flip it and run a really long way, potentially a lot faster? I know you're probably accelerating really quickly on the field, Justin, but sustained energy is so different. So, let's just talk about that.

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Justin Britt: I think for me, I went out for my first run and the football in me was like, "Go for it, go, go, go," and so I couldn't even complete a mile, I ran out and I had to walk home. And so that kind of infuriated me, and it challenged me internally, and I was like, "I'm going to make this easy." And what I meant by that was just making that first mile easy. And then whenever I did that and I was running a mile every day, and then I was like, "Okay, let's add another. Let's add another." And then my mistake was I signed up for a 5K and I had the most fun ever. And so I went home from that and I was like, "What race can I do next?" And at the time I was living in Houston, and I was like, "I'm going to sign up for the half marathon in January."

And that kind of became the goal, but I think it was like summertime, so we had a long stretch to just run a bunch of 5Ks. And before I met Emily, my training was just go out and we're going to run a 5K and our body will tell us what speed we're going to go. And that was just kind of the amateur in me, but why do I do it? I think I

genuinely have the most fun just out there running with the other crowd of people. And it's like in football, you show up on game day and everyone's mentally locked in. You're like, "I know they did the work."

And so you step in the corral, you're surrounded by a lot of people who now are trying to run a sub-90 with me and it's like they're locked in, you know they put in the work, they've done the speed work, and they avoided the big injuries and we're here together to have a really good day, and you just feel the energy and it's just real contagious. And it's hard to explain what it's like crossing the finish line in Central Park at the United NYC Half after you just ran through the streets. You know what I mean?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah.

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Justin Britt: It's hard to put it into words, but you can feel the emotion. And so it's like that's what I feel like I'm addicted to. And I'm only going to get older, and I started late, so I'm like, "Let's see how far we can take it before we need to slow down." So, that's where I'm at.

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Emily Venters: Wonderful.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: It's great. It's so great. Emily, I don't recall speaking before to an active professional runner who's also actively coaching other people. Maybe it's more common than I know, but I think it's fantastic. And I'm just wondering, what do you find that you get out of it? You're obviously really focused on your own running, you're competing, this is what you do for a living. What do you gain from coaching other people while you're in the midst of your own professional running career?

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Emily Venters: Well, running is a very selfish job, and I tell that to everybody. My job is... Yeah, it's all about me and the focus is on me. And so when I have started to coach other people now, I have probably 15 people that I coach, it feels rewarding to be able to give back to running in a way and share my knowledge with other people who are just so passionate about it as well. And lining up on the start line with Justin there too, knowing that I've coached him, he's going through the same thing that I'm about to go through. And it's cool. And watching other people's success and them start to flourish and develop. And

like I said, Justin has shown so much progress in the past year. And for me, it's just really cool to see that and see his passion for it. And he is so driven.

I think he might be more obsessed with running than me. He just wants to do race after race after race, and that's so awesome. And to coach those people who are just so into it is so fun for me, and it helps me find a greater love for this sport as well. So, it's just... Yeah, it's a circle and it helps me and it helps them, so it's great. And the running community is something that I just love about running as well. I think everybody that I've met over my 12 or so years has made a huge impact on my life, and they're the best people I've ever met as well.

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Becs Gentry: That's awesome.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That's great.

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Becs Gentry: Without talking about your other clients, maintaining their privacy, is Justin your most unusual client coming from-

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Emily Venters: For sure.

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Becs Gentry: What was your first vibe when you were like, "Okay, dude, we got to chill on doing the 5Ks every weekend at whatever pace you fancy."? How did you talk him into more of a structured running... traditional running program?

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Emily Venters: Just based off of the conversation we had, I could tell he didn't know how to train really, but that he was so into it-

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Becs Gentry: Train running.

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Emily Venters: Yeah. Yeah, but he was so into it. And I was like, "I got to. This is a fun challenge for me too. I want to see how fast I can get him to go," because I know that he will love that too. But I'm like, "We're going to be going to see how fast we can get in. We're not done." So, yeah, I take it on as a challenge as well. It's like how he does is I want him to do just as well as he wants to

do.

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Becs Gentry: Of course.

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Emily Venters: It's cool.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: So, Justin, how fast do you think you can go? Now that you've been working with Emily for a little while, do you think you have a sense of your kind of ceiling yet or you still got a lot of upside, do you think?

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Justin Britt: Yeah, no, I think we're still tapping into the speed run. I think we're just entering that. We showed up the Bloomsday, and we're sitting there eating dinner, and she was asking me about my running journey, and she was like, "How many miles are you putting in a week?" I was like, "About 30." She's like, "That's not enough." And I was like, "That's the first time anyone ever told me that." But now right at this minute, I'm like, "I understand it." And it's like leading up to the New York Half, the United NYC Half, we were putting in 50 miles a week and it felt strong and it felt good. And so I think I want I want to go to my next race and beat my Chicago time. I'd love to run Chicago again and go down there and chase three. I think there's plenty of time to grow to that, and that seems like a fun challenge. I've ran basically two hour and a half half-marathons back to back, so my confidence is pretty high right now. And I think there's a lot more that I can do.

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Becs Gentry: Absolutely. We think that too. What are your favorite kind of workouts to do?

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Justin Britt: The easy runs.

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Becs Gentry: Really? Wow. I was really thinking you were going to say the speed workout, going back to that hardcore-

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Justin Britt: I love... Go ahead, Rob.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Did you see Emily's reaction, by the way?

Emily's like, " Yeah, yeah. Of course it's the easy runs." I think Emily wants to push your speed a little more. Emily, is that right?

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Emily Venters: Yeah. I'm like, " Dude, the workouts are key. We can't skip the workouts. I know that they're not fun always, but that's how we get better."

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Justin Britt: It's weird. Something always pops up.

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Emily Venters: (inaudible) threshold, the more you run up...

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Becs Gentry: You find something to get you out of doing the speed workout?

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Justin Britt: No. It's just how it works. Sometimes though, I do have to be like, " Emily, I'm 34. I'll do half of this."

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Emily Venters: No excuses.

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Becs Gentry: No.

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Emily Venters: No excuses. That is young.

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Becs Gentry: No.

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Emily Venters: That is so young.

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Justin Britt: But no, in all honesty, there's not a run that I-

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Emily Venters: It'll be worth it when you run the sub-three.

00:31:35

Justin Britt: Yeah. Well, it was worth it whenever we went down to Houston and I got done running a sub-90, and I was like, " I could easily run five more miles." And so it pays off. And the hard thing about training for a January,

for a February, March race is you've got to train through the winters in the Midwest, so trying to balance that. Sometimes the speed days fall on the ice day and you just kind of have to work with your coach a little bit, but she's done a fantastic job. And it's been good. There hasn't been a run that I've hated. Some of the runs seem daunting, but then you get at it and you get in the flow of it, and by the end of it, you're like, "I'm glad I did that."

00:32:22

Becs Gentry: You have a giant machine right behind you that I'm pretty sure Emily could pop the speed workouts on to that to avoid you going ice skating outside.

00:32:33

Justin Britt: It gets used.

00:32:35

Rob Simmelkjaer: That's a treadmill for those listening, yes, a pretty good size treadmill right behind Justin as we speak on video.

00:32:39

Becs Gentry: A Peloton treadmill. Thank you, Rob.

00:32:41

Rob Simmelkjaer: Thank you. I couldn't tell. Thank you very much. Perfect. Justin, you said... When we first started talking about your love of running and how you got into this, you talked a lot about the mental health challenge post-football. And we know how common it is for professional athletes to have that struggle after they've finished competing in their sport. We also know for those of us who follow football that there are some specific challenges a lot of the time for former NFL players, especially folks who play positions like the ones that you play, offensive line, centers. There's a prevalence of CTE for a lot of those runners, a lot of those athletes, I should say. Can you talk about on the mental side how you feel running has really helped you post football? And do you have a message to other... there's so many guys every year who are coming out of the NFL and trying to figure out what to do next, in terms of what running could potentially do to some of those athletes who are trying to make that transition?

00:33:48

Justin Britt: Sure, sure. For me, whenever I stepped away, it was suddenly after week one, something felt off. I didn't feel right. Things just kind of spiraled real quickly. And stepping away, trying to find what was the issue and solve

myself through therapy, ultimately it led to me making the decision to step away, kind of remove myself to better myself or save myself. But when I did that, I have a wife, I have four kids, but it's like things got so quiet because, for me, I wake up whenever I was playing at 5:00 or 6:00 AM and I'm one of the first ones in the building, one of the last ones to leave. And so you're just around hundreds of people all day that become family, brothers, and then the second that's not your profession, you don't see them. And you know they're busy, so you stop talking so much because you would talk in-person, not through text and all that.

You know what I mean? So, the hardest thing for me trying to get through my mental struggles was finding community and brotherhood and the relationships outside of the house. And so whenever I got myself to start going to a public gym, I actually ran into a former NFL player in Houston, and we became friends and then I made a couple other friends. And so I was excited to go to the gym. Spent way too much time there on a daily, but I was excited to go there. And so I didn't start running to find community, but what I found is the running community is just massive. And I went and met up with Rob Dalto after the race and I got to meet some of his friends. And they weren't... It wasn't awkward. We all just ran the United NYC Half and we were just like, "What's your time? Wow, that's awesome. Congratulations." And it's just like, "Sit down. Let's get to know each other."

And so that's just what I've seen in the running community throughout. In Kansas City, no matter where I go, Seattle, it's just always been that way. So, for those who are stepping away from any career path, and if you've been there long enough, it becomes your identity and then you don't have it, then you're kind of stuck in the mud, and you're like, "What do I do next?" And if you don't find an outlet or something to do, then I think that's whenever people start to really spiral. So, for the athletes who might see this or throw it out there in the air, if you're struggling, go for a run and sign up for a 5K, and you'll see that you'll have a lot of fun, and you'll just see the amount of people that could be there for you.

00:36:59

Becs Gentry: Yeah, beautifully said. That's one of the biggest strengths I think of the running community, in the kindest way, it strips all other accolades from people and you are whoever you are that day as you are running. There is no presumption, assumption about a person. And it is one of the most uniting, positively uniting sports I think I've ever had the pleasure of being involved in because you can show up, you can be on having your worst day ever or you could be

the CEO of one of the biggest companies in the world, you show up to run, you're a runner, doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all, and it just brings so much joy to people. So, it's really wonderful to hear you talk in such a warming light about this sport and the people involved in it because you have come from such a different career.

We've had Tiki Barber on the show, and he also has fallen madly in love with running, and has brought him an insane amount of joy since his football career ended. And I think you've obviously got a professional runner right by your side and your coach, Emily here. What, Emily, do you tell Justin when it comes to paving these horrible workouts for him to do for these upcoming races? How do you coach him through these, like, "Okay, this might be a harder workout or a harder day per se."? What's your mental approach to running for him?

00:38:43

Emily Venters: I think if I can teach him and he starts to understand why we're doing the workouts, he'll have a greater appreciation for them, and then he'll want to do them more. So, I actually... I've been thinking about that of like, "Maybe I should end the notes explain more of the reasoning behind why we do this workout." Because for me, when I started to learn about training and really learn about it in college, that helped me a lot was when my coach started to actually explain why we were doing this workout. What was the benefit of it? And so I think if I can start kind of telling him week by week what the purpose of it is, he'll see that and then he'll be like, "Okay, I'll do that because it's going to help me here or with this part of the race."

And so I enjoy that aspect of coaching because, yeah, it's something that he doesn't know and something that I can share with him and that will help his running. But also I'm like, "You got to do these because it will help the race." If you want to run sub-three, it'll be worth it. Trust me, I do hard workouts and running isn't easy. It is a sport that is hard. And if you want to be good at it is painful, unfortunately at times, but it's always worth it. And the runner's high that you get after any workout or race is unlike any other sport, I think, and I think he can agree with that as well. But at the same time, I also just tell him that consistency over time is the key to success and just staying healthy and staying with it. And he is super consistent. Even when he has a small injury come up, he's on top of it, trying to heal it as quickly as possible to get back. And it's great to have someone like that to work with.

00:40:26

Becs Gentry: And I was going to say, I saw that the week leading up or maybe was it two weeks leading up to the race, you, Justin, had something, some sort of mild injury, and you put it on social, but you were like, "It's not going to get in the way. We're going to do everything we can to show up as strong as we can." And you kind of showed the leg up sort of situation, and then a nice easy run the next day. And I think... Do you ever think about the different people now that you're inspiring as a runner, as a celebrity runner, as opposed to a celebrity football player in those moments?

00:41:02

Justin Britt: Yeah. Well, my fans on social media aspired but never see themselves being an NFL player, but it's a lot easier to see yourself getting out there and running. So, I was kind of bored and was recording my workouts, and then when I got into running, I was like, "Well, we're out here. We might as well record it, and make some content because we're having fun." And then it started to build a community. And Run the Race became a thing and yada, yada, yada, but now it's like people will send me their runs and they're like, "I just did this. I just PR'd in distance. I just did this because of you and you inspired me. You make it look so fun, this and that." And they're like, "I can't wait to see you in the corral." And I try to respond to most of them because if I do see them in the corral, then we're all... like you said, we're all runners, and we're all there for one common goal and that's the finish.

And so I've learned that running is kind of selfish, but it's like the community allows you to get your selflessness out and help others and just be there. And so it's been inspiring, and I feel like I'm able to reach a whole different dynamic or demographic, I should say, than maybe Emily, just because of my kind of background to get to this point. And so it's like Kipchoge said, "Get the world running," so I'm just trying to do my part and play my role.

00:42:49

Rob Simmelkjaer: It's great. It's great. All right, Emily, let's talk about where you are in your career a little bit. You are a five-time NCAA All-American, you are a Pac-12 champion, ran at Utah. And I'm looking at your running resume and you have been successful at a lot of different distances, 5,000 meters, 10,000 meters, cross country at 6,000 and all over the place, all the way up to the half-marathon distance. Where do you think your sweet spot is right now, Emily, in terms of a distance and what are you

aspiring to? You're still quite young, you got a lot of runway ahead of you as a runner. Where do you want to see yourself in five years?

00:43:32

Emily Venters: Well, I hope in five years that, yeah, I'm still running and I hope that I'm in kind of the peak of my marathon career at that point, actually. I think I've been struggling in the past year, even right now still, to figure out where my sweet spot is. I feel like I'm at the hard age where I still want to cling to the shorter distances because I love them and they're really fun for me and I feel like I'm not done with them, but at the same time, I know within me that I am a true long distance road runner and that is my strength, but maybe not right now. I'm still trying to build the foundation for it.

And so I've talked with my coach and just other people around me and just that, "Let's focus this year on really just building the foundation for the years to come, and don't stress about the times right now. Just let's have good races, consistent races, and put in more miles and longer workouts just to have that really solid foundation under me so that the next two, three, four years after can set me up for more success in those longer distances." I obviously tried the marathon this past fall in Chicago and it did not go well. That was also due to some fueling problems that I have now worked through.

I was a little bit naive, I think, going into that and that it was just going to be... I was going to do great at it right away. And I think so much more goes into it than I realized, and it's kind of just changed my mindset of like I can't be naive. I'm like, "Let's really be strategic here." If I want to be successful at this, it's going to be in a couple of years, I think, is when I'll be getting closer to my peak at that. And so, yeah, just continuing to build and train as a half-marathon runner right now, run some 5Ks here and there and some 10Ks. And I am going to probably do a marathon again this summer. I'm not going to say which one right now, but I have a chip on my shoulder for it. And I'm excited for what I truly believe that I can do at that distance. It's just a matter of time. So, yeah, that's where my trajectory is going, I think. I do still feel really young in the sport.

00:45:47

Rob Simmelkjaer: You are. You're super young, 26 years old, I believe. And Becs, you and I have had these conversations with other runners who that pull and that draw toward the marathon is hard to resist. They are the biggest events in terms of how many people are there, the eyeballs that are

on them, the sponsorships, and all the things from both the commercial side, as well as just the excitement of being a part of these big races. And so it seems like so many people in Emily's shoes who are outstanding 5,000, 10,000 meter runners, when they get into their late 20s, the draw is there, and it just starts pulling them that way. And some of them don't necessarily want to go right out of the gate.

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Emily Venters: Yeah, it's true.

00:46:32

Becs Gentry: Yeah, it's really interesting.

00:46:34

Emily Venters: And I find that the road races are fun because there are so many people and it is just so exciting and so electric, lining up with 30,000 people. You don't get to do that in a track race. And then the amount of people on the streets, especially in cities like New York, it's just so cool. I love that. And I love thinking about when I'm hurting in a race, there's so many other people behind me that are going through this too, and we're all doing it together, like real runners. Yeah, it's really special.

00:47:03

Becs Gentry: Yeah. Your people you're coaching.

00:47:06

Emily Venters: Yeah.

00:47:07

Becs Gentry: Emily, has there been a standout race for you so far in your career, either a positive or a negative, that has kind of helped you shift your mentality in running?

00:47:19

Emily Venters: I'd say there've been a handful of them, yeah. A couple in college as well, and then I would say probably Houston half last year, it was my first half, kind of just opened my eyes to that I could be a really good long distance road runner. I fell at that race at the start, and I contemplated not even getting up and going because I was like, "What the heck?" I got knocked down super hard. Like, "What am I doing?" Everybody was gone. I couldn't see anybody in the distance, and then I got up and I was like, "No, just fucking go, Emily, go and chase them." And I just didn't look back after that. And I finished and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I love the half. I got to do it again." And that's kind of where I got the itch to keep doing road

races and pursuing that.

And I haven't had a perfect career so far at all, but I think that's also just running in general. It's very, very up and down, and you have to stick with it through the downs to have those highs. And, yeah, I know that for myself, it has not been perfect at all, but I think that that's what also makes it special. And just trying to focus on loving the process as you go as well. And if you love the training and you love the people that you're around, it's going to be worth it always.

00:48:41

Becs Gentry: Yeah. I'm curious, Emily, to ask you if you see at 20... You're 26, did you say?

00:48:47

Emily Venters: Mm- hmm.

00:48:48

Becs Gentry: So, you're talking about your peak in the future, and for the vast majority of female runners, we peak into our 30s, for sure. I hadn't even started running at 26, like semi-professionally. So, for me, I'm with you, my peak was definitely... Still going in it, but, no, jokes. But when you look at Justin of he had this huge peak in football. And at 34, Justin, right?

00:49:22

Justin Britt: Yeah.

00:49:22

Becs Gentry: He's now entering into a really fantastic age and peak for his career. How does that make you feel as you're coaching somebody and watching this, the duality of one peak done and then another one coming up ahead? How does that make you feel?

00:49:38

Emily Venters: Oh, I think he's got so much potential still. That's the exciting thing about starting into a new sport and also running just at a later age is that you haven't pounded your body in the same way as running. Obviously he's pounded it in different ways and he's hurt himself a lot, but in a new way, I think it's just cool because in those first few years that you start, you see so much progress. And then as you've been doing it for longer and longer, the progress is slower and minimal, but, yeah, I think for the next couple years, he's going to continue to see a lot more progress.

And he's already getting close to being able to run

probably sub-three in the marathon, and that's just crazy to me. You go from being in an NFL center to now almost running sub-three hours in the marathon. And sub-three is obviously a big milestone that a lot of people know in a marathon, and that's my goal for him is I cannot wait for him to go sub-three. And I know that's coming for him, and I think after that, it'll be even faster and faster. And, yeah, I don't know what his limit is, and it's cool to see that.

00:50:47

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, that's really cool. Okay, so Justin, I want you to picture the moment, envision the moment when you cross a finish line, maybe it's Chicago, maybe it's another race down the road like New York, and you see that time, sub-three. What would that mean to you versus some of the other things you've accomplished in your athletic career, playing in the Super Bowl with the Seahawks or being drafted or kind of some of those moments? How would you rank a moment like that in terms of what you've achieved as an athlete?

00:51:25

Justin Britt: Well, all that stuff is kind of already in the past. It's like I expected to get drafted, I expected to play football as a career. That's kind of what I grew up wanting to do, kind of like how Emily grew up wanting to become a professional runner. And what I didn't ever think I would do is what I'm doing. So, I was overwhelmed with emotions in New York Sunday. It was just... In my video that I posted, I'm just kind of like (inaudible) as soon as I cross, because it's like I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Because you think about all the early mornings, and trying to get your run in in between school drop offs and the whole day, and you're also trying to go to the gym, thank the Lord that I'm a retired person and I have all this time in the day to do it.

I don't know how people do it and have a job, so I commend them. But you just think about I ran almost 2,000 miles last year. That's crazy to me. And it took every one of those miles for me to run a sub-90 in Houston. And then to come up to New York and chase that same time, it's just a huge pat on your back. You're like, "Good job, me." And then you think about the actual ups and downs in a race, like whether it's a hill mentally or physically.

There was maybe a part on FDR where I wanted to be like, "Rob, let's just enjoy the second half. Let's just stop. I'm not feeling great right now," but then you made that left turn, you hear the band start playing, and then you see Times Square in the distance, and then you're hearing the

buzz of the crowd, and you're like, " No, this is why I'm here." I came here, for me, to heal. For me, I feel like each race kind of does something to me, like puts a piece of the puzzle back together. And if I do cross the line and see a sub-three, I'll for sure cry. I know I will because I'll be... Either I'll be real happy or I'll be like, " Awesome, I don't want to do that again." So, we'll find out-

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Becs Gentry: (inaudible) .

00:53:58

Justin Britt: ... but I'm hungry for it, and it's an awesome goal to chase. And why would I want to chase a 3:15? That'll be fun to get on the way to chasing a three. Like I said, let's see how far we can take it because, God willing, I'll be able to do this until I die, but I know at 70 I won't be able to run as fast as I am now. So, right now I'm just setting the standard for myself, and it always kind of resets, and I want that reset to be faster, so...

00:54:36

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, yeah. Well, this has been a great conversation. I love this partnership between the two of you. I'm going to keep following both of you. Justin, see how close you can get to your three hours. Emily, wishing you all the best as you continue to grow as a road runner and move up in those distances because I have a really good feeling we're going to be seeing a lot of you in top 10 finishing positions at some big, big races down the road, especially just because of the mentality that I hear you have about not being all about you, but giving back and the fuel that that adds for you. So, best of luck to both of you. Thank you for joining us.

00:55:17

Becs Gentry: Thank you, guys.

00:55:17

Rob Simmelkjaer: And congrats to both of you on awesome, awesome days in the United Airlines NYC Half on Sunday.

00:55:23

Emily Venters: Thank you. Hopefully both of us will be at New York Marathon someday in a couple years and, yeah, that'll be fun.

00:55:31

Rob Simmelkjaer: I like it.

00:55:32

Becs Gentry: We can't wait.

00:55:33

Rob Simmelkjaer: Let's make it happen. Manifest, baby. Let's manifest that. 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 wellbeing of our communities through inclusive and accessible running experiences, empowering all to achieve their potential. Learn more and contribute at nyrr.org/donate.

All right, that does it for another episode of Set the Pace. We want to thank our guests today, Justin Britt and Emily Venters. And by the way, during that conversation with Justin and Emily, we talked a lot about Rob Dalto, our friend, one of the co-founders of the Bronx Burners Run Club. Rob had a heart procedure done today, the day that we are hosting this podcast, Tuesday, the 17th. He's been very open about his heart condition and the obstacle it's created for him as a runner and just as a person in life, so we just want to wish Rob all the very best on his procedure, on his recovery. And we hope, Rob, to see you back out there in a raise competing very, very soon because you mean so much to so many people in the New York running community.

00:56:47

Becs Gentry: You do.

00:56:47

Rob Simmelkjaer: So, all the best to Rob.

00:56:49

Becs Gentry: (inaudible) . Yeah. Recover well, Rob.

00:56:50

Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely. If you liked this episode today, make sure you leave us a rating, a comment, so we can hear from you. This helps other people find the show as well. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next week. Enjoy the miles.