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Leah Anderson: I crossed the finish line and the cameraman who was videotaping the winner of the heat had bent down in front of me and his crack was out. And I was writhing in so much anger because the disrespect you give to the other athletes who were also in the race, but all the attention on the winner, so I promised myself from that day, staring at this man's butt, "You're never going to see me on the ground again."

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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 Becs Gentry from Peloton is with me fresh off of a race this past weekend. Becs, how did it go? Tell folks about the race.

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Becs Gentry: Well, let's be honest. We're pre-recording this, Rob. We're pre-recording it.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: We are. We don't know how it went, but I wonder what was the race that you ran?

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Becs Gentry: I really wish I could fake it and just be that confident of like, "Dude, it went so well. I crushed it. It was epic."

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Rob Simmelkjaer: What was the race though? What was the actual race since we're talking past tense now?

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Becs Gentry: So the race. Yeah, you guys, this is wild. The race, it's called Speedgoat and it is exactly what it says on the tin. It is a mountainous race set out at Snowbird Ski Resort in Salt Lake City. So if you know the area, you know it's a tough skiing. It's very tough skiing out there. And Becs and I don't know how many others, a few thousand others have decided that it would be great to go and run this stupid thing. So essentially, I'm heading out to run 50 kilometers, 32 miles over the beautiful, beautiful terrain of Salt Lake City and up in Snowbird Resort. We've got 11,800 meters of descent. Oh, no, sorry, of ascent and 12,000-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Say that again. How many?

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Becs Gentry: 11,800 feet-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Oh my God.

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Becs Gentry: ... of climbing up and 12,000 of coming down. So it's a pretty gruesome race. A lot of people are like, "Well, it's not downhill," and you're like, "Well, you must be a roadrunner if you're thinking a bit like that because my quads will not be thinking of it in that way." So that's Saturday, Rob. It's Tuesday today. I am getting more and more nervous and apprehensive day by day. I haven't had the strongest of training runs. Life is life and my coach is telling me to treat it as an adventure. I'm lucky enough that I've got a couple of friends running it. We're going out together and we've all had a lot of life going on. And I think we're all just packing our bags, packing our packs onto us and we're just going to go out for a good day.

And I've come to realize that I'm at peace if this is my first DNF of a race, which I think is incredible to say at 40 years old that this potentially could be the first time I don't finish a race, but I'm at peace with it ahead of time, which I personally think is, for me, a huge deal because I've struggled and I've pushed myself through things in the past because I did not want DNF next to my name. And there's nothing wrong with that. And I'm so happy that now I realize that. And if I feel I can't continue because I do have my big, big race in four weeks' time, I'm cool with stopping. I'm cool with getting that bus back to the start.

But I'm going to have a good go. I'm in the midst of packing my bag. So it's like a picnic on the move. That's all I'm thinking. I'm trying to think of the fun things of like, "I'm going to have this yummy bar at this point," and make the fun of it.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: All right. Well, hopefully, we can grab a few minutes maybe next week to talk about how it actually did go.

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Becs Gentry: Fingers crossed.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I'm excited for you, this new phase-

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Becs Gentry: Thank you.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... of your running career. And I'm also looking to do a little trail running because I think it's so much fun and it brings me back to my high school cross country days. You may have seen actually New York Road Runners members all received an email a little earlier this summer offering them a discount to some races out in New Jersey, the Palisades Park. There's a half marathon and also I believe an 8K trail run happening right across the George Washington Bridge and there's discounts available for Road Runners members. I think I'm going to go out and do that trail run much shorter than anything you're doing, but just to have the feeling of being out there in the woods, on a trail, it's just such a good time. So I'm-

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Becs Gentry: Getting that human four- by- four rolling, hands on knees, powering up the hill. It's a very different form of accomplishment-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely. Good for you.

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Becs Gentry: ... so add that variety, people.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely. Well, speaking of accomplishment, Becs, we're going to have a follow-up episode this week too, a conversation I had with a very accomplished young woman, Mary Cain, who I spoke with last week and she told us her story, an incredible story, a difficult to hear story at times about her career as a professional runner. She was the fastest girl in America at 17 years old, but she signed a contract to join a running project, the Nike Run Project and it just didn't turn out the way she had hoped. She had challenges with her coach, Alberto Salazar during those days. She had teammates who watched her crying and just kept running, right?

And a medical system that took her eight years to really diagnose what was wrong with her body. A condition called RED- S that she was suffering from. And so that was last week. And Becs, this week, you have another phase of that conversation with a different group of runners.

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Becs Gentry: We do. We do. When Mary was able to essentially

get out of this awful situation she was in, she went on to build something truly, truly inspirational at Atalanta NYC. Four women in New York creating a team designed as the antithesis of everything the old system taught Mary. Everything that pulled her apart. Everything that, in the guise of trying to make her stronger, actually made her weaker and took from her in ways that it never should have done. So today, we're going to have a lovely insight from these incredible women in New York here of what actually it looks like for these women runners as part of the Atalanta team.

What is different? What makes it so special? Does it change anything for the girls that they now coach too because of what they've gone through in the past and how they deliver their coaching now? How extremely different is that to watch to what Salazar coached? And we'll hear about how it's working. Is it working? What can be done in the future? And all of these incredible questions that all four of them are so eloquently able to answer.

00:07:34

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, I think it's great that something positive came from Mary's experience. She started it and we'll hear more about Atalanta, Becs, and your conversation coming right up. If you haven't heard episode one, the last interview with Mary, it's a good place to start for this one. So I recommend you go back, listen to that one, then follow up with this one. We'll actually weave a few of Mary's own words back through today's episode. And then one more quick note before we get into this episode, this conversation doesn't cover quite as much sensitive territory as last week's, but there is one moment where the team mentions the death of an athlete's father. So just heads up that there are some heavy topics, a little bit in this one as well, but, Becs, I'm looking forward to it.

00:08:17

Becs Gentry: Yeah. Planning a trip to NYC for the marathon? Well, plan it with Get Your Guide because we know this city like you know your training plan. We've got authentic neighborhood experiences with expert guides in all five boroughs. And if you're not sure what to pick, you can browse millions of reviews from travelers just like you. Plus if your plans change, stay spontaneous with free cancellation. Book your tours, tickets and activities in the Get Your Guide app now, the official travel experiences partner of the TCS New York City Marathon.

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Audio: Mary Cain: I think sports is set up to portray

publicly a team experience when it's not one. As a young person, I really thought these people will be my teammates. My teammates just witnessed all of it and honestly either egged it on or just didn't do anything. At best, they were silent bystanders, and at worst, they treated me really cruelly.

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Becs Gentry: There are four women in the room today. Devon Martin runs the team. Emily Richards runs the 800. Susan Aneno runs the 800 too for Uganda. Leah Anderson runs the 400 for Jamaica. Between them, five world championship appearances, a Jamaican national record, a Ugandan national record, an all-American NCAA Division III and a sub two-minute 800. They coach high school girls in East Harlem and the Bronx every week. Let's see what Mary Cain has built.

All right team, I am so honored to welcome this room full of very inspirational females here today. We are having a conversation with the Atlanta team, and I'm very happy to say welcome to Set the Pace. Mary told us that at the Oregon Project, teammates either egged cruelty on or on the other side of it were either completely silent bystanders. She often spent time crying in the bathroom whilst they kept running. And before that, even when she was profiled in Runners World, the visibility that she had of being so fast made her a target. So I know that you each individually have had different points in your career where I'm sure probably many points in your career and also as women where you've been pushed to levels that you are ready to almost close that door, go into that bathroom and just either quit it, let go, let it out, whatever it is, but have just pushed you to a place that is quite frankly unfair and unnecessary.

So Emily, I heard that when you were a freshman at Ohio Northern, you specifically had a point where you almost quit. And you've mentioned to us that being fast is part of what isolated you, even though you were performing to a super high level and pushed other girls further in what you were doing. But to you, almost your speed almost cost you your place on the Team 18. Can you just talk us through that and how that felt and how you overcame that?

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Emily Richards: Yeah. So I was a division three athlete at Ohio Northern. And first off, I love Ohio Northern. I have nothing bad to say about them. Love the program, love the ... Still have friends there. But what you're referring to is basically a snapshot of me as a 19-year-old freshman trying to figure out who I was as a runner. I just moved up from the sprints to distance, so this was completely new territory

for me. Obviously, running in college was new territory for me as a freshman and just not feeling celebrated by particularly some of my older peers when I was young and when I was having success.

So I won't try to compare anything I went through to what Mary has gone through, but there was a specific instance I remember feeling really hurt by. And it was, when at the end of my freshman year, I had qualified for the outdoor national meet as a freshman. I became an all-American, which was something I've been working really hard at all year. And unfortunately, the national championships happens after everybody goes home for summer break. So you spend those couple of weeks completely alone, training and getting ready. And I remember coming home super excited about my accomplishment and just thinking it was going to be special, but nobody congratulated me or said anything. And not nobody, but a lot of my teammates didn't and I was really hurt by that.

It was like everybody forgetting your birthday and not texting you or something like that. And it was because I didn't build connections with a lot of those women throughout the year. Part of me didn't feel like I fit in because I still identified as a sprinter and moving up to the distance running. It was tough transition-wise for me. And I wouldn't say that they were cruel to me, but I don't think a lot of them went out of their way to be nice either. And so I think that was really tough. And I remember sending a message to my coach the summer after freshman year saying that I felt like I had a really good year and nobody celebrated that with me and it was going to be really hard for me to continue on not feeling like I had a community behind me.

And he put the focus back on running because he knew that was a priority for me and he knew that that was important. And I came back and decided that running was my priority over maybe social life. So it ended up being a situation where I decided running was my priority. If you were cool with that, you were my friend. If you weren't cool with that, you weren't. And it carried me a really long way. I had a really good career in running. And now as a pro, I've made a lot of really meaningful relationships with other female pros that I couldn't see myself having similar relationships in college.

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Becs Gentry: Oh, I love that. It turned out all right, but it definitely taught you the lessons along the way. Thank you for sharing that. Susan, as you say, you're from Uganda.

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Susan Aneno: Yeah.

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Becs Gentry: And for you, being, full stop, a fast runner doesn't automatically buy you respect, especially when you go back home. I think you've said before, when you go home, you're often asked about like, "When are you going to stop running? When are you going to get married? When are you going to have kids?" something a lot of women in this day and age still get asked a lot of the time by elders for sure. So I heard there was a story about a boda-boda driver and there's some other conversations. Just talk us through how that feels to you as somebody who is so celebrated here for what you do and having that juxtaposition.

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Susan Aneno: So generally, I think where we are at as a country for Uganda, we've come a long way and we still have a very long way to go. I remember I started running when I was in primary school, which is an equivalent of middle school in the US. And at that time, everybody's running and you have so many girls actually who are running at such a young age. And then I went off to high school. My first high school was an all-girls high school. So I really, really enjoyed running. And I remember I came home, my dad said, "Why are you running?" when I told him that I was running, I was on the team, I was supposed to go for national. He knew that I ran, but it's supposed to be fun.

And I think, generally as a country, I think at the time, culturally, we are very conservative. We see certain things and sport is one of those things that he's seen as something that's meant for the boys, for the men. And a lot of girls are expected to be at home, doing chores and helping their mom and doing things around the house and not necessarily being out in the field playing like, "Why are you out there?" It seemed like something that's only meant for boys. So I really love running and I just kept doing it. I explained to him why I wanted to run and he thought running was really a waste of time.

And I remember him telling me this story about one of our former athletes who ran in the '70s. She went to all-Africans. She was very decorated. But the whole story about her was how she didn't focus on school and did not get a good education. And when she retired from running, she had nothing to fall back on. She got married, had children and died really, really poor, in a very poor and bad living conditions. So he didn't want me being that example. He wanted me to just focus on school and school was the most important thing. This sport thing is not going to take me anywhere.

So when I started running in school, I used to just run at school. We would go in town, and every time we went out of the school to run, it was a boarding school. Mostly men would just talk like, sorry for my language, but bad words like, "Oh, why are you guys running?" And there were so many young girls who were way, way talented. I wasn't the most talented athlete in my school, but as I got older, a lot of girls dropped out because they didn't want their body to change. Because when you're an athlete, let's say you're a soccer player, you're a runner, your calves will look different. You have your biceps and muscles. Maybe your boobs won't grow. And that wasn't really particularly seen as a womanly-looking way. Girls wanted to look womanly. That meant you wanted the big boobs, you wanted the long stringy legs and not the bulky legs and the bulky arms. Yeah. But I really enjoyed running.

But luckily, I transferred and went to a different school, which was in another part of the country. And even at the moment, a lot of the people in that area felt very fascinated like, "Wow, you're a woman and you are that strong." And granted at that time, we only had one girl. Her name was Dorcus Inzikuru. She won a gold medal in the 3K Commonwealth and she was all over the news. And I remember I just inspired to be her at the time. So whenever I go back home, I wanted to train, but I didn't really like men, especially old boys talking trash at me. It's just like throwing birds. Not necessarily insulting you, but, "Oh, why are you running?"

And women, sometimes they would say, "Whose daughter is that? Doesn't she have a place to be ... Why is she dressed like that?" So I was very insecure about wearing tank tops or shorts because it's a very cultural, very conservative community. And people will call you out when you are dressing what they consider inappropriate. Whenever they can see your thighs out, that is very inappropriate. And I remember my mom told me last time I was home, "No, I don't care," I just dress up and my family say, "You dress appropriately. When you're going to church, dress accordingly, going to a meeting. Going to training, that's the only time you're allowed to dress like that."

So my mom was with a group of women and a lady told her, "I wonder whose daughter that is. Look at how dressed she is. I wonder who her parents are." And she just said ... She didn't even say anything, "Hmm, I'm curious too." She was telling me-

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Becs Gentry: No.

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Susan Aneno: ... later on. Yeah. And this particular incident about the boda-boda, boda-boda are like motorcyclists. They're quick means of transportation within Uganda, multiple on the streets. If you've ever been to Uganda or any other part of Africa, you'll experience them. So I wake up now in the morning, I go to do my run and this guy yells at me and say, "Hey, you girl, if you were to be my wife and I would want to beat you, I need to lock the door first. Because if I don't lock the door, you'll run away and you'll run so fast." Yeah. So I said, "Well, I'm lucky for you. You'll never have a chance of having a beautiful and a fast and a strong woman like myself. You stand no chance." And his colleague all busted into laughter. They laughed back at him.

When I was younger, I used to just avoid the place that had many people. I would just wake up very early in the morning before the sunrise and then I would go and rack on the back streets in the town. And then I made sure I avoid the places that had many people, but then I thought that I need to be able to change the narrative. I need to be able to be the change that I want to see. So now I wake up, and at 8:00 AM, that is when I go to do my run. And when people are talking to me, sometimes, "Is that a woman or a man?" "Oh, she didn't braid her hair. You wouldn't recognize that she's a woman," "Oh, she has no breasts." They say things like that, both men and women. And then I say, "Yeah, I'm an international athlete now. I represent Uganda." And then when I'm out there running, a lot of times the young girls keep running and they join me and I started training them. Whenever I finished my session, I also invite the young girls. I start training them. And I remember this one time, a little girl had a skirt on. Some of them came, they were wearing shorts because some family don't even want their girls wearing shorts. So the girls said, "Well, I don't have shorts and my dad doesn't want me to wear shorts. He says girls are not supposed to wear shirts. We can only wear skirts." So I told her, I said, "You're fine. Even with your skirts, you're fine. Let's go." I just invited her to be a part of the group.

So I think we still have a long way to go and I just need to be the change that I want to see. And hopefully, the story will be different in a few years from now.

00:21:38

Becs Gentry: Okay. Leah, let's flip it across the water. And so we've had Susan's life as a fast female runner in Uganda, but Jamaica has a totally and utterly different track culture. Sprinters are legendary icons in Jamaica. You're the most famous people out there. But being a fast woman in that world is still very much its own thing. So talk us

through how that looks like, how you are noticed in Jamaica for your speed.

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Leah Anderson: Well, if you're a famous sprinter in Jamaica, you're basically a celebrity. You're basically one of the most talked about person in the country. But from what I've witnessed and noticed as I've gone to Jamaica several times, you have to be fast. If you run anything more than the four, you're not known, you're not given that much respect. So me being just a 400-meter runner, just a 400-meter runner, it's like I have to be top three. If you're not top three, you're not really talked about. You're not first pick on teams. And that's just the political environment of Jamaica.

Jamaica is a small country compared to the US who has millions of runners who are all ... They're fast, but they have more opportunity. But when it comes to Jamaica, Usain Bolt, obviously everybody knows him, he paved this path that was like, "You're from this tiny country with no money and you were able to beat everybody overseas in the States, how did you do that?" That's why he was my inspiration. But being a woman, it's like, "How do I achieve that? The men have these big muscles and their bigger hearts and they have everything possible that they can do physically."

So translating to a woman's side, I just found it I had to work harder. I had to work smarter. I had to be able to execute every race so that when I started running professionally, I was like, "I can actually do something with my strength." So the first year of my nationals, I did not perform well. It was like an embarrassment to go out there and try to represent these women and represent Jamaica and run so slow. So I promised myself, "The next year, I will do better." I promised myself. And the next year, I did. I didn't make the team again, but I did way better.

And then the third year, I promised myself again, "Do better, do better. If you want to wear Jamaica on your shirt, you need to do better." And that year, it's a bit of an embarrassing story, I crossed the finish line and the cameraman who was videotaping the winner of the heat had bent down in front of me and his crack was out. And I was writhing in so much anger because the disrespect you give to the other athletes who were also in the race, but all the attention on the winner, it's like you wouldn't have won if everybody else wasn't in the race. It's only about number one. So I wish Jamaica's culture would give a little bit more love and respect to everybody who shows up to the race.

So I promised myself from that day, staring at this man's butt, "You're never going to see me on the ground again."

The camera's going to be on me." So when I ran my 50.7 last year, that was the apex of my performance. I was so happy with myself. I didn't care that I came in fourth, but the camera was finally like, "And Leah Anderson coming in with a 50-point ..." It was like, "Wow, I actually did earn something," and going to Worlds and just being in Tokyo and being this world traveler, it was like I finally get to wear the Jamaica's colors proudly. And it was like, "I deserve it just as much as anybody else, whether I'm half Jamaican, whether I'm full Jamaican. I deserve it because I earned it and no one can actually take that from me." So I took back my respect.

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Becs Gentry: Yes, you did. You absolutely did. Who'd have thought it would be some cameraman's butt crack that really got that ... You really, really got it. But hey, you're like, "I'm never seeing that again, rightly so." I love that. I love that grit and that drive and that self-push, that digging deep and talking to yourself is so, so important. Thank you for sharing. Devon, on that theme, Mary founded this team because she experienced language in her world that was wrong. It was not acceptable. So can you talk us through how you and the team talk about bodies fueling, pushing through? What language is not acceptable to have amongst the Atalanta team? And where does it still ... Does it slip in sometimes and do we call it out? How is it for you guys?

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Devon Martin: Well, I think the great thing is having a team full of women. We all know what makes us feel good and so it isn't as difficult. We definitely want strong bodies for both our pro athletes and our high school athletes and we definitely want our high school athletes and our pro athletes to fuel properly before and after workouts, before and after races. So we're really focusing on being strong on there. Especially if you're like Leah, a 400-meter runner and you have three rounds that you have to get through at Jamaica Nationals, you've got to be strong as can be. And it's not about one body type and that you want some super thin, but that's not going to get you through the rounds and get you onto a world team on there.

So we really focus with all of our athletes on fueling well, strong bodies and bringing a sense of community on there. It used to be ... People used to always say, "Oh, you look so fit." We try not to go there. So when you say, "Oh, you look so fit," sometimes you're implying, "Oh, you look thin. You've lost weight." And that's not what we're going for. We're going for strength and strong on

there because that's what's going to help them succeed and have a long career. The key is we're not going for, " Oh, let's just run fast now on there." It's, " Let's have a long pro career and keep going forward and just keep getting faster and faster." And that comes with fueling properly.

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Audio: Mary Cain: The fact that nobody ever thought to be like, " Hey, let's do a broader mental health check. Let's do a broader, 'Is this person safe? Have they been abused?' check," those standards of care, at least within sports medicine when I was navigating this, just seemed to be really lacking.

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Becs Gentry: Okay. So taken what Mary went through and what she learned from her experiences, she told us it took years for anyone to name what was specifically happening in her body. And the framework that finally reached her was RED- S, relative energy deficiency in sport. So I believe, Susan, Devon spoke to you at some point in your 18 months with the team about getting your iron checked, something that maybe a lot of women don't take note of. And what did you both notice through that process?

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Susan Aneno: Well, I just had a rough workout. I remember we were doing, I think, something like 800, 600, 400 repeats. And the prescribed pace that I normally would run that workout in, I was just way, way off. And I was just behind everybody where I shouldn't really be. I did not keep up with my training group. And I knew, I just felt really, really tired that day. I thought that maybe I was tired from the previous workout. That's what I thought. And the conversation about general health, checking your iron isn't something that I was really very familiar with. I've only done iron testing twice in my life and I just remember that whole week I just felt really, really terrible in practice.

Did the blood work, I got the results in, and when the result came in, she then called Emily and I and she said, " Okay, girls, let's have a conversation." Then started telling us the importance, making sure we know our ferritin numbers and the kind of supplement that I needed to get on, the kind of food and things that will help with iron absorption, all this information. To be honest, I didn't even know and yet I'd been running for such a long time. So that was really, really helpful. And immediately, I had to get into doing the work of like, okay, eating the right thing. So that was really helpful.

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Becs Gentry: Did it make an immediate change to you or was it a process then thereafter?

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Susan Aneno: I think it helped. I started taking the supplement, at the same time making sure I'm intentionally eating things that will help me get my numbers up because my number was really, really low. So I just usually eat the food that I like. I never really thought so much about the nutrition of ... Well, even though I know as an athlete, I'm like, "Oh, I love beans, I have rice, I have this, right?" But just adding the little things on it, I think, overall, I eat very healthy, but it's not also just about the things that I eat, it's also about the quantity and how much, how frequently I have to feel given that we work so hard from Monday to Sunday basically.

So the energy intake versus the energy outtake, I think trying to find a right balance I think was important. So it took a couple of weeks to be able, but at first, I was like, "Oh, go ..." When I saw them, I'm like, "This is really, really low. I'm even below the normal person." But it took time, but understanding that I had to tell my coaches about it and they were able to work around that to make sure I was feeling good, checking on me and just keep me on schedule.

00:31:57

Becs Gentry: My gosh, I love it. You got Devon watching you and monitoring it too. I love that. Emily, when you are with the high school girls that you coach, you said to them that getting their period is a gift. Where did you learn to say that and embrace that and encourage younger girls to celebrate that, especially in the sporting world?

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Emily Richards: Yeah, I don't really know where it came from, but I remember I just said it one day and the particular girl that I was talking to responded really well to it. And I was like, "Huh? I'm going to say that more often." I was like, "Dang, I really nailed that." But no, I do believe that that is true. Gosh, when I was their age, I probably didn't think of my period as a gift. Every young girl probably hates their period. And that was how the conversation arose, a conversation about, "Oh, I feel bad. I'm cramping. I don't feel like I can perform." And I think changing the conversation around periods as this bad thing that we have to deal with to changing it into something good that means we're healthy, we're strong, our bodies are doing what they're supposed to I think is a really important

conversation to start early. Yeah.

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Becs Gentry: Absolutely. And the young girls who are working too hard maybe or too skinny and hoping that their periods may come away so they can carry on working, pushing their bodies past these limits. How do you come back to that kind of conversation?

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Emily Richards: I think similar to what Devon was saying earlier. I think putting the emphasis back on how you feel is really important because I think I would tell a young girl who was struggling with that, that, "We're all on our own journeys and everybody has a different body and different bodies can look different ways, but still function the same way. So as long as you feel strong and you're not having iron issues or anything like that, then how you look doesn't matter. Just because you think something looks good doesn't mean it is good." So I think that having myself, Leah and Susan as the mentors too is really positive and has that conversation without having to have that conversation because we all have really strong bodies. You look at us and you know that we're athletes.

And I think having that for girls to look at every day teaches them something without us even having to say anything.

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Becs Gentry: Yeah.

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Devon Martin: And I do want to add, I think it's important. I think, as women, we completely deemphasize the scale. We don't care about a number. There's no ideal weight as a runner that ... There's no goal. And that's something years ago I had to have conversations with some male sprint coaches that they wanted their athlete to weigh X. And I'm like, "You can't do that. Women's weights fluctuates. You have their periods every month. You're going to go up and down. And there's no magical number. You can be incredibly successful at all different weights. It's all about your own personal body type on there." And we really want our women just to fuel well, be strong and food should be joy. It should bring you joy. And that's really important. The social part of running is fueling.

00:35:33

Audio: Mary Cain: For a long time, the role models who girls have looked up to are not healthy. And they might tell you

they are, but it's a small world and we all know each other.

00:35:44

Becs Gentry: Let's talk about the kids that you guys coach because this is awesome. Mary said that half the point of Atalanta was fixing what she saw as the youth sports churn and burn problem. And I will say, as an expert in this country, I've been here nine years, I have a three and almost four-year-old daughter, should I say? It's scary to see schools here, obviously not her age, but looking ahead and hearing how many people in this country who have gone to school here hate running because it was punishment. And they turned up late to football practice and they had to run laps of the pitch or field or whatever you guys call it. And it's just like, "Why is running used as such a punishment here?"

And I love that Mary's highlighted it of just the push, the push for American children to be so incredibly highly successful at anything they touch, anything and everything is just too much, too much and especially when it comes to sport. So talk to us about the children at East Harlem and Lehman High School. What is it like when you walk in on your day of coaching? What do you see? How are the kids mentally? What's going on with them these days?

00:37:09

Susan Aneno: East Harlem ... It's called Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics. It's our new addition. We've been partnering with Lehman for a couple of years now. So we just newly added the East Harlem School. And I can say it's been quite interesting in a sense that I really love the kids and their energy that they really, really want to learn. Most of them, at least that was my first impression on them. They just seemed like they were starved of knowledge and learning, and an adult, somebody who can guide them and tell them what to do because they had a completely different system. They have the coaches who are from the school, but they are more or less like just supervisors really. They just come and don't give them any serious coaching.

So when Atalanta came in, the kids were just really, really super excited. They're like, "Okay, my goodness, my form," and they keep asking for questions, "How does my form look? How do I look? How do I breathe?" It's like the little things. And I think I really enjoy that part of our work because you get to help a kid develop and grow. And they're just really, really excited. So that was my first impression on them. And I look forward to going there every time because I know the one who commits themselves and they want to come, they just really, really want to learn. And they're

really very organized because they used to work out and be coached by their team captains.

So it's nice for us to come in to even give their team captains the relief so that they don't have to be the coaches themselves, "Just go be a kid." And I remember one of the team captains, she's an amazing captain. When I first started going, she would just be like, "Oh, yeah, I'm teaching them. We are just going to run with them, right?" And every time, like, "Okay, I'm just going to be on the side, watch you," and then ask if she needed help because she has been in position where she was the coach and the captain and the girls really, really respect her. So I had to take the backseat and just watch her and then say, "Okay, what do you have? How can I support you? How can I help you?" And just give the recommendations. And then eventually, we are built on a relationship.

I think the most important thing dealing with kids is building a relationship, building a trust where they feel like they can come to you, they can ask you questions, they can talk to you, they can vent on you. Because you are not just a coach, you end up being a mentor, you end up being a friend. Sometimes somebody breaks up with a boyfriend or a girlfriend and they're crying like, "What do I do with you?" right? Everybody's like, "Oh, coach, I have shin pain," "I have this," because they don't really have athletic trainer. They don't have somebody who helps them outside of that when they're injured.

So in most cases, you end up being the one to do the stretching. So it's not just one job of being a coach or a mentor. You just end up wearing many hats. Yeah. But it's been quite a journey, and hopefully, we continue to have fun and just learn. Yeah.

00:39:59

Becs Gentry: All right. Let's talk about the Bronx schools.

00:40:01

Emily Richards: Yeah. So Lehman High School is the school that we've been working with since Atalanta started, I believe, or shortly after it started. Six years. Yeah.

00:40:10

Devon Martin: Six schools.

00:40:11

Emily Richards: Oh, sorry, six schools. Sorry, Devon was like, "Six," and I was like, "Six years." Six schools under one Lehman campus.

00:40:18

Becs Gentry: Oh, wow.

00:40:19

Emily Richards: So they all run for Lehman, but there's six different schools in one building. And we're really fortunate to have a boys coach and a girls coach who have been with the teams for a while and are really organized. And it's a well-oiled machine at this point. Leah and Susan and I come in and we're support for the coaches there and they're pretty good about letting us lead workouts. And I think we all work together really well at the Bronx schools. So it's an under-resourced school. They only have a straightaway at their school. So we sometimes have to get really creative with what we do when practice is at the school because it's also a shared space with other sports teams.

But then when the weather is nice, we're fortunate to be able to use Pelham Bay Park at the end of the 6 Train, which is a really awesome track that we can meet up at. And gosh, I've been with the team at the program for three years and I've seen a lot of growth on this team over these three years. And I have to hand it to some of the young members this year. We had some really great freshmen, not only who were talented, but who also just are really great teammates. You can tell they care about each other. And I think that was what was missing before.

The culture at Lehman was everyone for themselves and we've been working hard to kind of break that cycle, but sometimes it just takes the right group of kids and it takes time to change cultures on a team.

And these young kids have come in and they're talented and they push the older kids and the older kids are threatened by them. They all work really well together. And our girls team in particular had the best year that they've had, I think in Lehman history, which was really fun to see them put that season together.

00:42:07

Becs Gentry: I love that. I love that. So when one of their teammates is doing well, they're all there celebrating and cheering and-

00:42:14

Emily Richards: Yeah. And I don't think that that really happened in previous years, but this year in particular, and I won't say it didn't happen, they are the loudest people. At Icahn Stadium, you can hear our girls screaming from probably across the bridge. They are so loud when it comes to their teammates and that's really fun to be part of.

00:42:34

Becs Gentry: Oh, that's brilliant. That's really amazing to hear, that the camaraderie is there from day one of supporting and celebrating their successes. Leah, for you, what is-

00:42:44

Susan Aneno: Oh, sorry. If I may add something small. I remember when I came last year during indoor season, we were doing the Boroughs Championship and we only had one girl who got two medals. No one else. I remember some girls showed up really, really late. We only had few people there. So we had a picture of just one girl with two medals. And then the vibe was just really, really low. And my favorite moment this year, almost everybody had a medal, one, two, three. We have this group picture that we took at the end of the meet. It was like they ranked fourth, the highest point they scored in the school history. So looking at where we were a year ago to what they accomplished this year, we even had the freshmen qualified for the city championship, two girls in high jump, 400, a short put and multiple event.

So it's like that was really, really beautiful. And even those who didn't qualify, they kept showing up for practice. They showed up for the meet. That so far was my favorite picture.

00:43:39

Becs Gentry: Oh, that's fantastic.

00:43:42

Susan Aneno: Yeah, thanks.

00:43:43

Becs Gentry: Oh, I like that. Yeah. And that's the progress that you're making, you guys need to take some credit for that too. You're leading by example and giving them very direct inspiration. So congrats. Well, Leah-

00:43:55

Susan Aneno: Thank you.

00:43:55

Becs Gentry: ... I was going to ask you what it's like, you've recently come back from the Jamaican Nationals as a runner in the 400 and what is it like for you coming back and stepping back into the school coaching environment after going through that? And do the kids want to know everything? Are they all inspired? How do you take your experience at that level into your coaching?

00:44:23

Leah Anderson: I was actually unfortunately able to see them when I came back, but before I went to Jamaica to compete, the kids wished me luck. They showered me with praise. They were like, "We know you're going to be amazing." They were my little support team and I was like, "I'm going to miss you guys so much over the summer." But anytime I'm able to train them when I'm able to, I always encourage them, "I was just like you. When I went into track, I had no knowledge of track. I started when I was in ninth grade and it took me a while to get to where I am, but I never stopped. And now I'm national record holder for the five. I represent Jamaica, I represent myself and I'm able to run these fast, fast times." But before, all those years ago, I was just like them.

So I always constantly encourage them, "If you want to be like me, don't stop. Don't give up. Don't give in. Track is hard. Anything worth having is hard. So you have to just keep your wits about you keep your head on straight, pump those arms and finish the workout, finish the race and show up for yourself." These kids, they have all this time at school. They have to sit down, sit still, listen. So when they come to practice, they're a little rowdy. So when we and Emily and Susan walk in, they straighten up right away just because the discipline that we've been able to build. They're so ready to just be like us. They're like, "These women know what they're talking about. They know what they're doing. We can clearly see it."

So it's inspiring to see that these kids are willing. They're willing to be like me and I hope I'm a role model for all the young girls and the boys too. Yeah.

00:46:15

Speaker X: It's really the first, maybe only time I have felt that I've been able to put something in motion and other people can grab the baton and keep going versus it only being off my back.

00:46:27

Becs Gentry: Talking of doing the work over the past few years, obviously Atalanta has grown so much. Mary is now over in California. She is in her second year at Stanford Medical School, going to be the doctor that goes the extra few minutes with everybody in the room. She obviously doesn't take salary from Atalanta. She's on the board, but Devon, the day-to-day run of the show. Also on your board is another incredibly influential and one of my friends, Allyson Felix, she sits on your board. So you have two of arguably the top famous names in women's running attached to a team of four professional athletes. How do you think that affects the scale of what you're trying to do with Atalanta, Devon?

00:47:16

Devon Martin: Well, I think from the start, our goals were to make national caliber and international caliber athletes, so having our athletes compete internationally, make international teams. And so on that front, we've been incredibly successful. Leah's now been on five world teams, three world indoors, world relays and a world outdoors. And she just made the Commonwealth Games. So she's knocked it out of the park from someone who was not in the finals at NCAA's in college. So her progress has been out of this world on there with Emily, who was a star D- III athlete and is now one of the best in the US. We sent her over to Europe a couple summers ago and she was on the podium in all five of her international races on there.

And racing against some good Brits over in Belgium on there. And Susan as well, she's done amazing. She just set a Uganda national record indoors in the 500 on there.

00:48:25

Becs Gentry: Wow.

00:48:25

Devon Martin: Last summer, she was at so many of the world athletics, silver premium meets in Canada and in Austria and everything. So we haven't yet gotten the gold medal. Leah's working on the medal side for us on there, but we just keep getting better and better. And that's like anything, it's about developing, improving and growing and hitting the goal. So we're very fortunate to have Allyson Felix and Mary Cain involved with the organization. And we also have a great foundation with other board members and our advisory board. So we just keep hoping to grow and expand the team.

00:49:10

Becs Gentry: Yes. Keep going. Keep growing and expanding. After these-

00:49:14

Devon Martin: Yes. More pro athletes means more-

00:49:16

Becs Gentry: Yes, there we go.

00:49:16

Devon Martin: ... high school athletes we can take on and have a bigger impact here in New York City, which is obviously the ultimate goal.

00:49:23

Becs Gentry: Highlighting the transition from high school all the way through and that really does. It threads Mary's story into that very well, how it is a changed world or at least you're part of working towards that changed world.

00:49:37

Devon Martin: Yes, absolutely. That is definitely the goal, is changing the model of the pro athlete, changing the model of the pro team. We're a community. Giving back and mentoring high school kids is part of your job. Instead of ... I think a lot of pros are very good on giving back sporadically when it's convenient and we feel like, if we really want to make a difference, if we really want to make an impact, we have to be involved with these kids weekly. We can't just come in and out. We want to be there to watch them grow and develop and get into the college for the first time, the first one in their family to ever go to college, that sort of thing. And so we can see the difference we're making.

And these women have really just stepped up and it's fun when some of our former high school athletes come back and they talk about college and they're running either for the college team or the club team or they're just running as a part of their daily life.

00:50:33

Becs Gentry: Absolutely.

00:50:34

Devon Martin: So retention rate is really important to us too.

00:50:36

Becs Gentry: Yeah, yeah. I love that you said that you have to be there continuously instead of sporadically, because I think with doing what Atlanta is trying to do, you would miss if something was awry. If you were there sporadically, you wouldn't be able to acknowledge if somebody was experiencing some bad language, some cruelty, some personal issues. And I think that's very important for what you stand for, is that consistency and keeping the sport side of it a safe place and a healthy and strong, safe place for these children to grow and flourish in instead of essentially being smothered and not truly being allowed to grow as humans at all.

00:51:23

Devon Martin: Right. And I think also being there when tragedy strikes, to be their community. We had one of our athletes in December, her father was murdered in the Bronx. And I felt like the team really stepped up. I know our women

stepped up. We all reached out to this athlete and all you can do is be there for the athlete on there. And it's not always the fun thing, but that's the most important thing, is when you're there, when someone's just suffered and you can pick them up and came back and ran, I believe it was on the Borough Relay for us, just to give back the joy of running to that athlete because we've all suffered tragedy in there and the running hopefully brings that joy back.

00:52:11

Becs Gentry: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. What have you seen though that you didn't expect to work, but has worked really well? And I guess this is for any of you to answer this question.

00:52:23

Devon Martin: Well, for me, it's been interesting on the financial side. We've been very fortunate, very blessed on support from foundations. That has been crucial. We just got a foundation grant from the New York Giants.

00:52:39

Becs Gentry: Wow.

00:52:39

Devon Martin: And at the beginning, it was the US Olympic Committee that had done back when Mary had secured that one and USATF Foundation, but we've been so grateful to organizations, Bras for Girls who give sports bras to our athletes. That is a huge joy to get good fitting bras that fit. On Running has given us hundreds of shoes, free, beautiful shoes for our athletes to Aerie, which is American Eagle, helped our summer program. Lululemon Foundation has been one of our biggest supporters last year and again this year. And we couldn't have hired Susan without their help on financials. So that's been great. I think, long term, we do need more multiyear contracts, I think is a goal or an endowment where we have an asset-producing income on there instead of we get a grant one year.

We had another grant from Women's Sports Foundation this year. We're very grateful. So we constantly have to keep applying. So I've been surprised how good on the foundation side that we've been, but I would love to get a little bit more on the corporate side, having multiyear deals on there. But we are very fortunate, just is that we are able to get charity bibs through different marathons. The New York City Marathon and New York City Half has been something that we've had year in and year out and that's probably what helps keep financial security and stability. So we're very grateful to New York Road Runners on that front.

00:54:19

Becs Gentry: Hey, yay. We'll be cheering loud for you this year. Okay, final question. I can't believe we're here. We got through. And this one is for all four of you. Mary's book ends with a line about her family never giving up on her, so she never gave up on herself. If we ask you what Atalanta has given each of you personally that another team wouldn't have, what would you say? I'm going to start with Leah.

00:54:47

Leah Anderson: I would definitely say financial. I used to work at Dunkin Donuts. It wasn't easy being a Dunkin barista and going to practice every day and standing up on my feet for almost 12 hours. So Atalanta has given me ... It's like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that a lot of professional athletes of my caliber or better do not get. And it's like you can't. I'm so glad I was chosen for it. It could have been given to anybody, but I was able to receive it. And I'm just so grateful that to Mary, to actually be able to start something and give back to women like me who all we want to do is compete and be good at what we love and not work at Dunkin Donuts, making minimum wage.

So now it's like I'm able to just concentrate on myself and get better and better. And if I could thank Mary personally, I would give her the biggest hug because she deserves it most of all honestly. So I just want to thank her and to my peers and to Devon just to keep going. And this is all I've ever wanted honestly. I don't want to get emotional, but this is all I've ever wanted, just to get paid to do what I love. That's incredible. Not many people who are just regular people do that.

00:56:07

Becs Gentry: No, no. That's awesome. You earned it. You earned it. That's for sure. Emily, how about you?

00:56:16

Emily Richards: Yeah, I think Leah hit the nail on the head there. It gives an opportunity to female athletes that I think wouldn't be there otherwise for any of us. I wasn't working at Dunkin Donuts, but I was coaching back in Ohio on a 12K salary. It's hard to find a job when you're also trying to balance running that you're going to be able to do both at the same time. Making a living and being able to run full-time is almost impossible unless you have a setup like this where it's giving you the financial ability to continue your career. And without fear of it just getting ripped out from under you. Before I was with Atalanta, I

was with Tracksmith, I mentioned, but then before that I was with Hoka. And those shoe brands, if you don't perform, they'll rip that away from you, and within 24 hours, your livelihood is gone.

And so I appreciate that this not only gives us the opportunity to continue our running careers without fear of losing it, but also it gives us the chance to work and build up our resumes and work with kids and mentor. And it makes us really well-rounded individuals, which is something that is really important to me just in life. And I would say it's also given me great friendships and great training partners. Leah and Susan are phenomenal and I'm so glad that I met them through this and that we get to work together, not only in training, but working with the kids and outside of that. And then we train with Devon's athletes at Central Park too and I've made a lot of friendships through that too. And that was something that was difficult for me to find before I was, people to train with. So I'm really appreciative of all of that.

00:58:04

Becs Gentry: Wonderful. Wonderful. Okay, Susan.

00:58:08

Susan Aneno: Oh, many things. I'll start by saying Atalanta helped me not quit track and field because I felt like I was getting to the budge of almost thinking about leaving track and field because it's a very difficult process to transition from doing college. I ran collegiately. And then when you graduate, you go from having a team, having coaches, having a great support system to basically having no one. And given that I'm not from here, I'm from Uganda, my whole family's there, I knew I wanted to run. And luckily, my college coach who is now a coach at Stanford was able to coach me and work with me, but I did not have any contract. I did not have any financial support.

And a lot of times, the races I did came down to the finances and how much money I was willing to spend on my own and not having to be ... I had a coach which was really great. You have to then be the agent and reach out to the meet directors and you have to buy yourself a ticket, book yourself a hotel and feed yourself and do all this. Then I'm like, "Oh, shoes cost this much." I didn't even know how the shoes cost that much money, buying gear for myself, buying shoes because I did not have any sponsorship. I did not have any support. I was a part of a club that was eventually able to help us with meet entries, but we did not have any financial support.

And I feel like that caused a lot of stress and impacted you, not just as an athlete, but an individual too because it

makes you feel like, "Is this even worth it?" when you feel like you're really not moving forward. And in order to get to a point where you're competing at the Olympics, you need to run fast, right? Everybody tell you, "When you do run fast, you're going to get the contract." "But wait, before I can run fast, I actually need the support now and the resources to make sure that I'm able to focus on training." So Atalanta gave us, to add on what the girl says, the financial stability and not having to worry about like, "Oh, will I be able to pay my rent, eat and then go do a meet?"

And then just having a community, I'm so grateful for my team. Honestly, we all get along very well. And that is something that I actually didn't have, "Oh, I actually work with the people that I really enjoy, I love outside of our work too." And just being able to also grow, not just athletically, but we are also learning from Devon. We are always having conversation and I love it when she says, "Okay, let's all get serious in business and tell you ... Get professional." And she's somebody that we all really admire and look up to and it's been incredibly fun and just interesting to be able to learn from her. We see how she operates. And I think the best thing, being in this position, it's not just to be able to do things, but also have somebody like Devon to look up to and learn things from even when she's not telling us just the way she operates, how she runs business.

And I've never had a female coach ever in my life, so I was really, really excited to be able to work in this space. And hopefully, all of us will be able to have the opportunity to be in our position sometime in the future, I think, yeah.

01:01:23

Becs Gentry: That's beautiful. And, Devon, finally with you.

01:01:28

Devon Martin: I think that Atalanta, obviously I've said it before, I love the community work, what these women are doing to change the next generation of high school students, both girls and boys. We're inspiring the girls, but we're bringing the boys along and they get to see women in power, women who are leading and that it's normal. It's normal to have a female coach or a mentor and everything and so it doesn't become unusual at all. So I think what I love about Atalanta is really being able to empower women and girls for the future, not just for today, but change the whole thing. And I'm looking forward to seeing Leah, Emily and Susan as future coaches or leaders in the sport of running and really just getting more women out there, so we can change the

narrative and really make a difference.

We're going to make sure that what happened to Mary doesn't happen again. That's the whole point I feel like of Mary's book. And why she founded was to make change. It wasn't to complain or anything. It was, "Okay, the system needs to change and be better." And it's about improving and making it better for the next high school girls and even now for the current pro women, that we really support them and make it all happen and hopefully make their dreams come true. It's such a privilege to be part of people's Olympic journey.

01:02:57

Becs Gentry: Absolutely. Absolutely. Well, it's been an absolute pleasure speaking to each of you. Thank you for your time with us. Thank you for giving your time to the sport, both personally and giving back to future generations of athletes. You are all truly making an incredible change with what you're doing. I can only hope that my daughter has coaches like you, three, four in her future if she chooses to run. No pressure.

01:03:28

Speaker X: No pressure. Yeah, yeah.

01:03:28

Becs Gentry: No, no, but yeah, we're honored to have you here. So thank you again and good luck to each of you in your own personal running journeys.

01:03:41

Speaker X: Yes. Good luck. Thank you.

01:03:43

Speaker X: Thank you.

01:03:43

Speaker X: Thanks for your time.

01:03:44

Becs Gentry: Peloton has got something for whatever running mood you're in. Try instructor-led runs and walks that are built to fit into your routine with classes that help you stay consistent, build speed and be in the moment. Track your metrics, see your progress and train smarter. We've got it all to help you reach your goals and stay on track. Peloton, the official digital fitness partner of New York Road Runners. And that was at Atlanta NYC.

01:04:12

Rob Simmelkjaer: Thank you, Becs. Great conversation. And Mary Cain didn't fix the sport, right? She didn't change everything, reform corporations or change NCAA rules, but what she did do over the last six years is build one small corner of women's running where things now work differently.

01:04:30

Becs Gentry: Exactly. Three professional athletes in New York City with salaries, health insurance and coaching that doesn't put them on scales. A weekly mentorship for high school girls in East Harlem and the Bronx, come on, it's great.

01:04:44

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. And it all goes back to that conversation Mary had with the New York Times in 2019 and she's kept the conversation going now with this new memoir as well. So it's terrific and we hope to see this progress continue.

01:04:58

Becs Gentry: Absolutely. And we just want to say huge thanks to Mary Cain, to Devon, Emily, Susan and Leah. Don't forget Mary's book, This Is Not About Running, came out this past April from Mariner Books and is available for you to digest however you'd like. You can also support Atalanta at atalantanyc.org. That link will be in our show notes. Thank you to our partners at HSS for the RED- S series linked in last week's show notes too.

01:05:27

Rob Simmelkjaer: All right. I hope you enjoyed the episode. If you haven't already, make sure you leave us a five- star rating on whatever platform you listen on and we hope to see you next time. Enjoy the miles. We'll see you next time.