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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. My co-host Peloton instructor Becs Gentry is out of town this week.

Well, you've probably heard us talk about this big year we're having at New York Road Runners this year, the 50th anniversary of the 5-Boro New York City Marathon. We're celebrating it all year long, and we took a big step forward in that celebration this week.

50 years ago, five people really had the audacious idea to take the New York City Marathon out of Central Park and those laps that they were running in the early years of the marathon, and run it through all five boroughs for the very first time. Now, as we begin to celebrate that 50th anniversary of the 5-Boro Marathon, we're telling their story.

Yesterday we launched a new campaign called The Trailblazers. Most of us have run their course without ever even knowing their names. Ted Corbitt, George Hirsch, Fred Lebow, George Spitz, and Percy Sutton. They were the visionaries, the builders, the connectors, and the believers that really brought the idea of a five-borough New York City Marathon to life.

They each played a unique role in making this vision a reality, and it turns out that they turned this impossible idea of a five-borough marathon running through the streets of the city into a global tradition and a global event that now brings people from all over the world to New York City once a year, and that has been emulated in major cities all around the world. When you look at marathons in places like London and Berlin and Chicago and Tokyo, that all came from the idea of a marathon running through a major city.

Of course, Boston had been around for a while, but Boston had been running from the suburbs into the city. This is a marathon that touches all parts of New York City, and they really were the ones to bring it to life.

So over the next four months, we're going to be telling their incredible story. So keep an eye out across all of our social media channels, on our website, at the Marathon Expo this year, in signage across all five boroughs, and on the race broadcast of this year's TCS New York City

Marathon, because we're going to be talking about the trailblazers all year long.

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Announcer: History takes the track this summer in New York City. Join us for the USATF Outdoor and Para National Championships, July 23rd through 26th at Icahn Stadium in New York City as the sport celebrates 150 years of outdoor championships.

Watch America's best athletes compete for national titles and records at one of track and field's most iconic venues. Secure your tickets today at usatf.org/tickets. Again, that's usatf.org/tickets.

00:03:15

Rob Simmelkjaer: Speaking of the 50th anniversary of the 5-Boro New York City Marathon, when it ran through five boroughs for the first time in 1976, only 63 women crossed the finish line that year. In 2025, over 27,000 crossed the TCS New York City Marathon finish line in Central Park.

So how did we get from 63 to 27,156 women running the New York City Marathon? Our guest today is one of the rare people who can really answer that story, Gordon Bakoulis.

Coach Gordon, to many of you, is a five-time Olympic marathon trials qualifier who began running just two years after that game-changing 5-Boro Marathon in 1976. She was a legend who came up in the sport just as women's distance running was really being invented around her. Gordon is also New York Road Runners' editorial director, which makes her the keeper of this organization's stories.

And today, as she prepares to retire after an incredible 24-year run at New York Road Runners, she's finally joined us here on Set the Pace to tell her own story.

Gordon, I know you've been a pretty regular listener to Set the Pace. You've made sure that all of our stories were accurate all this time. So it's great to actually have you on the podcast.

00:04:39

Gordon Bakoulis: Thanks, Rob. It's great to be here. Yeah, long-time listener, first-time guest.

00:04:43

Rob Simmelkjaer: Long-time listener, first-time guest. Exactly. Well, it's a great, great time to have you on. So thanks for joining us.

Before we jump in, by the way, we're going to share a few numbers with our listeners. I'm going to tease them, and then they'll come out as we go through this conversation. So some numbers to keep in the back of your mind if you're

listening. 468, 33, 239, 370, and 3044. So we'll get through and to all of those numbers as we talk.

But let's start, Gordon, about the marathon then and now. As you know, we're close to 60,000 runners now in the marathon, a drawing that the vast majority of people who enter lose when they try. Lots of different ways in, but it's such a hard thing to get into now, as you know.

You started running as a high-schooler in the late '70s two years after the first 5-Boro Race when only 63 women finished, as I said before. What do you remember about being a woman in the sport of distance running back in those days?

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Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah, no, it was a different time. It was definitely a different era. I started running my senior year of high school in the fall of that year, that was 1978. And as you said, just two years after the first 5-Boro New York City Marathon.

I honestly do not remember the first 5-Boro New York City Marathon. I was 15, and my dad actually had just started running maybe about a year before that. He started running in late 1975. So I was adjacent to that sort of first beginnings of the running boom, the 1970s running boom.

I also remember 1972 when I was 11, Frank Shorter winning the Olympic marathon in Munich. An American winner, he won just so triumphantly. He was so far ahead of the field, he made it look so effortless. So that caught a lot of people's attention, people within and outside the running world. But it didn't really cause the running boom to explode at the time, but it got people's attention.

And then there was just this sort of groundswell of increased interest in running. And like I said, my dad, he was typical of new runners at the time. He was not competitive. He didn't have any lofty aspirations. It was for him, just he was in his early 40s making some overall lifestyle changes for better health.

Actually, he was in a Twelve Step program for recovery from alcoholism, and several of his friends in the program were runners. And they said, "It's a really good way to healthy up your lifestyle, get away from your drinking buddies." And so that for him was the impetus to start running.

And he ran the New York City Marathon twice actually in 1978, the year I started, and again in 1980. So I was sort of adjacent to that early running boom culture. And most of his running buddies were men, but not all of them. There were a few women in his little running cohort, running community. So it wasn't odd to me to be around women runners.

But for me, yeah, it was again, a healthy lifestyle thing.

I was 17. I had always done sports. I loved sports, but I wasn't any good at any sport. I loved to run up and down the soccer field, run up and down the lacrosse field, the field hockey field. But when it came to the actual skills, I just didn't really have them. So being good at sports wasn't my jam, although I loved sports.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Until you started running. Yeah.

00:08:55

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. Yeah.

00:08:55

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah.

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Gordon Bakoulis: I started running with a friend.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: You found out.

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Gordon Bakoulis: And it was love at first step. It really was. It was an interesting time for women's running. It was the real pioneers. People call me a pioneer sometimes, but I feel like I just ran through the doors that the real pioneers of women's running opened for me. People like Kathrine Switzer, Nina Kuscsik, Grete Waitz, Joan Benoit Samuelson.

They had to fight blatant discrimination, misunderstanding, sexism, and just being told, "No, you can't do this." And I never had to overcome those obstacles. The doors were open, and I simply ran through them.

So it was great. And I didn't realize until many years later that there of course were a lot of inequities at the time. Women couldn't run the Olympic marathon. They couldn't even run the 10,000 when those doors had just been opened, and there were a lot of people who felt like women still had to prove themselves as runners.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah.

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Gordon Bakoulis: But for me, it felt great. The doors were open, felt like we were an army rather than just a little sliver, and I loved it. I loved it right from the start.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Tell me about your running. So did you start out running the mile?

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Gordon Bakoulis: Mm- hmm.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Was that the first event you really focused on?

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Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That's typical for high school athletes. When did you realize, "Wow, I'm pretty good at this"? Because my understanding is you made it all the way to the States that first year.

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Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. Yeah, I did pretty quickly. I ran with my friend, a friend in the neighborhood who had been on the track team and didn't want to do winter track. She wanted to just stay in shape for spring track. So she coaxed me to get up early and run around the neighborhood a few mornings a week, real slow, real easy, conversational, and I loved that.

And then the following spring when she went out for spring track, I was right there with her. I didn't want to play lacrosse anymore and spend more time warming the bench than actually participating. So I went out for spring track and pretty quickly.

I wasn't a sprinter at all, and I knew that. But I ran the 800, the mile, and the two mile because I couldn't run fast, but I could just run and run and run. And I did make it all the way to the state meet and realized, "Oh wow, here's a sport that I'm good at. Too bad I didn't discover this earlier."

But I'm always really grateful that I had that gentle introduction to running those few months, just enjoying the camaraderie, enjoying being up early, exploring the neighborhood, chatting with my friend. We formed a really strong bond where the two of us are still great friends to this day.

So I had that nice gentle introduction and then also the realization, "Oh, this is great. This is awesome. This is something I could be good at."

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. And where did it go from there? I know

you got clocked in a couple different places, people seeing you running fast times in the Mini 10K and some other events. When did you get, quote, unquote, discovered, if you will, as someone who could really run at a high level?

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Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah, it was funny. I went to University of Virginia where there was a great running program. But because I had just started my senior year of high school, I didn't get recruited or anything. And I didn't really even consider running there when I made friends with some of the women on the team, and I saw what they were doing running 100 miles a week. And I was just like, "No, no, no, no. That's not what I want to do in college anyway." So again, I was sort of adjacent to that, but not involved in that program.

So through college, I just ran the way any recreational runner would. And I also did a lot of other sports to just stay fit and sane and take study breaks and stuff like that.

And then I moved to the New York area when I graduated. I'd moved back to this area. I'm from New Jersey, but moved into the city in 1983. And in 1984, I wanted to run a marathon. So what better marathon than New York, of course?

And as you were alluding to earlier, it was a lot easier to get into the marathon in those days. By that point we had started with the lottery, but the odds were much, much, much better. So I applied and got in, and ran the marathon for fun. I ran three hours and 40 minutes, which was still good, but definitely not at all at the top competitive level, and loved it.

I mean, all the things that we say about the New York City Marathon just absolutely worked their magic on me. It was just a stunning way to see the city. I'd been living in New York for less than a year. I don't think I'd ever even been to Queens, certainly never run over the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge or any of those bridges. And just it was amazing.

It was like, "Wow, this is phenomenal." It was hard. I was definitely undertrained and didn't know all that really any of us know today about fueling and hydration and all those things, but it was great. It was a really great experience.

Still didn't think about trying to run fast again, even though in the back of my mind it was like, "Yeah yeah yeah, I was a state qualifying runner back in high school."

But the following spring, I just started to test myself. I'd go run around the Reservoir in Central Park to see if I could run faster today than I had run yesterday or last week or whatever. And I guess I got pretty fast because when the Mini 10K rolled around, the Women's Mini 10K in June, I ran that. I ran sub 40 minutes, 38- something, and

met up with a friend afterwards who had gone to UVA and had run for the team there.

And she said, "Yeah, yeah, I run for this team, Atalanta. It's a women's running team. You should come out to a workout." So I did.

And again, right away, found success. I was leading the workouts and I started running, cut my time in the 10K really quickly. And that was my reintroduction to competitive running. And it was great. Again, just success and a lot of learning.

We had a wonderful coach, Bob Glover, the legendary Bob Glover-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yes.

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Gordon Bakoulis: ... who ran the New York Road Runners, what was the precursor, the predecessor of our group training program for years. He had started it in the '70s, and he continued in that role until 2015. He's a super legend, and he was a great coach and a real, real believer in women's running, equality for women.

So I just stuck with that and had some ups and downs, injuries as we all do and that sort of thing. But just his belief in women's running and his dedication to women's running and then opening my eyes. I had no idea how one got on an Olympic team or really what adult women's post-collegiate running was all about. So that was my introduction.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. And then it went from that 1984 marathon at 3:40 to cut to a few years later at Grandma's and quite a bit of improvement for you. So nearly an hour faster-

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Gordon Bakoulis: Exactly.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... in that marathon that qualified you for the Olympic trials.

Take us to the moment you crossed that finish line in 1987, understanding what you'd done. I assume you knew the time. Did you know the time-

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Gordon Bakoulis: I did.

00:17:07

Rob Simmelkjaer: ... you had to hit to qualify for the Olympics trial?

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Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah, the standard, I don't know if this is accurate, but I think it was like 2: 51. The standards were a little more lenient back then. I mean, it post pre-supershoes-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Of course.

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Gordon Bakoulis: ... whenever I tell people my PRs, it's always, " Oh, and I did it all without supershoes, by the way." Yeah, I think 2: 51 is what it was.

And again, I just didn't know anything about this at all. I give Bob Glover all the credit in the world, plus the teammates that I had who had had experience, who had run in the '84 trials.

And I, one, didn't know how it all worked, how you qualified for the Olympics and that sort of thing. And two, really had a limited understanding of how new this all was for women.

As I'm sure you know, 1984 was the first year that a women's Olympic marathon happened, and that was Los Angeles, Joan Benoit Samuelson, American of course won the gold medal. And I just didn't know that that at all happened just a couple of years before I got into the sport.

And so Bob had to educate me, Bob and my teammates. " Okay, this is how it works. You go to a race that's sanctioned, you run the time, and then you can go run the Olympic trials. And then at the trials the top three across the line, as long as they've hit the Olympic standard, go to the Olympics."

It's like, "Oh, okay, that sounds cool."

So yes, Grandma's Marathon in 1987, I had tried to qualify at New York in 1986. But I developed an injury during training with plantar fasciitis and really standing on the starting line, the very (inaudible) it was like, " This isn't going to happen. My heel hurts a lot right now, and I'm not even running yet."

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That's (inaudible) Yeah.

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Gordon Bakoulis: So that's one of the only two marathons in my career that I dropped out of, and I was devastated.

But again, Bob and my teammates just said, " Oh, you got

plenty of time. Injuries heal."

That was my first major injury, and I was like, "Oh, I'll never run again," as we all do. But yeah, I healed up fine. And then the following spring, 1987, and I had run half-marathons in close to 1:20. So I knew that the formula, double it and add 10 minutes, I should have a little bit of a breathing room there.

But Grandma's, I don't know if you've ever run that marathon. It just happened last weekend.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

00:19:46

Gordon Bakoulis: It's a wonderful, wonderful race out in Duluth, Minnesota along the shores of Lake Superior, flat. It can be very fast depending on the weather. But if you have any kind of a tailwind, it's like Boston. If you have a tailwind, it's a tailwind the whole way. We had a tailwind that year, and it was great.

And I just remember Bob, several of us ran. So Bob came out to watch and cheer, and he was on the course at about mile 24. And he just said, not even like that loudly, very quietly, "You've got this," as I went by. And it was just like the best feeling in the world, "Yeah, I'm going to qualify for the Olympic trials."

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. Yeah.

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Gordon Bakoulis: I'm sure I ran just over 2:46, 2:46.0 something, gave me a nice little buffer there.

So yeah, that was that. I was off to the Olympic trials, which were in 1988 in Pittsburgh and improved a lot there as well. Although never in that race did I entertain thoughts of, "Oh, I could make the Olympic team." Because the winners, the top women entered in that race were significantly at a higher level than I was.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: (inaudible)

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Gordon Bakoulis: But it felt like my Olympics just going to something that has the word Olympic in it was like, "Oh, that's good enough for me."

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I think that's exactly right. For anybody who,

I mean a lot of women and men on the men's side get there, and that's their big day.

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Gordon Bakoulis: I agree.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That's their big moment. Only a few are going to make the actual Olympics, but dozens get to have that day, which is one of the things I love about that format.

What is most remarkable to me about you? I mean, there's a lot of remarkable things about you, but in terms of your running career, the longevity and the consistency that you were able to have over such a long period of time. Not one, not two, not three, not four, five Olympic trials, five cycles of that, you were able to come back again and again and again and meet that standard and get to that day.

And so I have two questions for you. How did you do that? What was the secret to your longevity?

And then, what was the year that you felt you maybe had a chance to actually make it? What was your closest or the year you felt you actually maybe could pull it off in terms of getting to the Olympics?

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Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. Yeah, no, those are great questions. And I think they speak to just the system that we have in this country for choosing our Olympic teams.

I think the trial system, you could debate it all day because there's pros and cons. But I think the pro, the biggest selling point for a trial system is that it does create this aspirational environment where you really aspire to even make it to the trials. Because you're right, it's not easy. And then you just have to show up on the day.

And so that atmosphere on the start line of the trials when you know in your heart at hearts, "She's here, she's here, she's here, I'm probably not going to make the team." But you could, in theory.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, that's right. You could have a good day. Other people have not such a good day.

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Gordon Bakoulis: Exactly.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: There you go.

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Gordon Bakoulis: Until the race is actually run, you don't know how it's going to come out. So that drew me in the first time. I'd never experienced anything like that. And fortunately, I had a really good day, which probably helped. I came in 17th in 1988 with the 2: 37, and it was just intoxicating.

The atmosphere, just the way the trials athletes are treated, at all the trials that I ran, the host committee and all the officials, volunteers and everything, you just felt so, so, so special. So that was a motivation to keep trying to qualify every four years.

In terms of the longevity, I do think that I was lucky. I've been lucky over the years. But also just again, I give Bob Glover just so much credit for how he coached, how he was very developmental, how he never got rattled, never let me get rattled through injuries, through setbacks.

It's just like, " This is a long- term thing that you're doing," and connecting me to healer people, medical people and that injuries come and go, that you have good patches and bad patches in your career and you overcome them. You figure out ways to deal with setbacks and to keep going and just inspiring that love of the sport.

I think any coach that can do that, that's more valuable than, " Hey, I'm going to write you the greatest training program the world has ever seen."

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah.

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Gordon Bakoulis: And the team environment as well. Atalanta was a really, really wonderful program, a really great team of women. And I just by accident ended up on an all- women's team, but I do speak very, very highly of women's- only running teams. Because I just think that in atmosphere, especially in those days when again, there weren't as many women competing. There weren't environments that catered specifically to women as competitive athletes, and I just happened to be in a really, really good one.

And the longevity, I think, also had to do with just having a balanced lifestyle. I never was completely a professional elite runner where that was the only thing I did. I was either working full- time or having a lot of freelance.

I've always been a writer and editor as my career, and always having a lot of freelance projects that kept me balanced so I wasn't just sitting around between workouts, getting nervous about how I was going to do 10 by 800 in 2: 20 or whatever was on the docket for the day.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. Yeah.

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Gordon Bakoulis: So I think those things made a big difference.

But yeah, it wasn't always easy. I think the hardest trial for me was in 2000, which was just five months after we had our second kid, my son Sam. I had him in September of '99, and then the trials were in February of 2000.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Wow.

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Gordon Bakoulis: So I tempered my expectations as I didn't expect to do a really stellar time. Not only because it's hard to come back from childbirth, it really, really is. Every woman is different, and every pregnancy is different. I had a pretty easy comeback from our first son, Joe, who was born in 1997, but you never know. I was fortunate to have a relatively easy comeback after we had Sam as well.

But that was two kids age two and under, so there was also the time factor. I remember I had-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Of course. The sleep factor.

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Gordon Bakoulis: ... sort of set up a rule, "All right, I'm only going to run if I can get in at least 30 minutes," because what's the point really of going out and running for less than 30 minutes? That went out the window almost immediately. I had a lot of 27-minute runs. "Oh, here's a 19-minute run." It's just like whatever you could fit in.

'92 was the year that I came closest to making the team. I came in eighth-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Oh, wow.

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Gordon Bakoulis: ... and as you know, top three make the team. So I was with the lead pack-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Wow.

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Gordon Bakoulis: ... for a significant chunk of the race and

then it was-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Incredible.

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Gordon Bakoulis: ... that classic race of attrition the last five miles.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That would've been Barcelona. (inaudible) yeah.

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Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah, that would've been Barcelona games. The trials that year were in Houston.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. Yeah.

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Gordon Bakoulis: It was great day.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Incredible.

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Gordon Bakoulis: But not good enough.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That's great history. Gordon, you talked so much about the impact that a great coach had on you. When did you first decide you also wanted to coach?

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Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. Yeah, no, that was in the '90s. I stayed with Bob Glover and the Atalanta team through the early '90s. And then I had been doing some training stints out in Boulder, Colorado where one of my sisters was living. And they had a program back in the day called, I think it was called the BOLDERBoulder High Altitude Training Program. So I had done that a couple of times and connected there with a coach named Benji Durden.

Benji had been an Olympian. He made the team in 1980, and that was of course the year of the boycott. So he didn't actually compete in the Olympic marathon, but he had made the team.

We connected several times over the years. And then on one of the stints I decided to make the break from working with Atalanta and work remotely with Benji.

I forget what your question was, actually. Sorry.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Just when you first decided you wanted to be a coach yourself-

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Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. Yes, yes, yes.

00:29:09

Rob Simmelkjaer: ... and start coaching over other runners. Yeah.

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Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. And as much success as I'd had with Bob, I was like, "Okay, there's other ways of coaching."

Almost all of what I absorbed from Bob was working, but there were a few things that weren't working. And I just didn't really realize there were different ways of coaching. There were different coaching styles, different coaching philosophies.

So that planted the seed, like, "Well, maybe this is something I can do someday."

And by the mid-'90s, I became the founder of a team called Moving Comfort New York. Moving Comfort was a women's clothing company back in the day that had been founded by two women in the '70s when there was nothing, absolutely nothing for women to run in. Literally jockstraps made into running bras because they didn't exist in running. Yeah, you don't want to know. I'll just leave it at that.

But the two women, I'm blanking on their names right now, founded Moving Comfort, and they sponsored a team that I ran with for years. It was just called Moving Comfort Racing Team.

And then through me and the liaison to that, a man named Jeff Darman, who's been a long time involved with running in various capacities, we founded a New York chapter of that called Moving Comfort New York. I became the coach of that, and did that for years and years.

Our names changed over the years because Moving Comfort was eventually bought by Russell Athletic. So they weren't sponsoring women's running teams anymore. We had so many different names.

Athena was our name for a while and Running Divas, and then we disbanded in 2012, not due to anything negative. It was just everyone was off having babies and getting involved in other things. So that team no longer exists. But I coached it for 20 years.

And then just as that was winding down, I knew Bob Glover was going to be retiring from his collaboration with New York Road Runners as head of the running program. So I started coaching with group training in 2016, right at the

end of 2015. So been doing that ever since.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: And I've had the opportunity to know you as a coach. I've done some group training sessions myself. I'm wondering through that process, Gordon, you talked about different ways of coaching, different styles of coaching.

How did your style of coaching evolve? How do you think you grew as a coach, and how would you describe your style of coaching now?

00:31:56

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah, that's a great question because it really has evolved. I guess the short answer is just I've become more confident in my role as a coach and just more realizing that the best thing a coach can do is just be confident in their athlete.

I used to just get so wrapped up in, "What if I don't write the perfect ..." Like I was saying before, writing the perfect training program is kind of the easy part. And it's the part, honestly, that matters the least.

As long as you're following basic rules of hard days followed by easy days, allowing for recovery, long runs that build gradually, et cetera, et cetera, a little bit of tempo so you get used to sustaining a high level but not too high a level, you're pretty good. And a lot of coaches are good at that.

And what it took me a longer time to develop was just the confidence internally in what I was doing to convey confidence and imbue my athletes with the confidence they needed to succeed.

And quite honestly, some of my athletes taught me more about how to do that than I feel like I taught them. So it was just a gradual process over the years of just being there, creating ... Mostly what I do now is, as you know, coach with group training. So it's coaching groups of athletes rather than one-on-one, although I've done a lot of one-on-one over the years.

Just creating an atmosphere that's welcoming, inclusive, just meets people where they are, non-judgmental, setting high standards like, "Okay, this is what we're going to do today. It's not going to be easy, but here's how we're going to do it."

But wherever people are with their lives, they come, do the workout, and that's all you can ask of them is to just give it their best shot. And I try to just convey that positivity and that belief and that lack of judgment every single workout.

It's always interesting at the beginning of a group training session. There's always new people who may have never done a

workout at all, or never done one since they had a mean coach back in high school or something 30 years ago. And they had this look in their eye, kind of wide-eyed.

And then after the workout, they're just like, "Okay, yeah, this is fine. I can do this. This is hard. It's not going to be something that I can just coast through every week or twice a week or whatever, but I can do this. And I feel that the people here believe in me, want me to be here, welcome me, include me, see me."

And that just means everything, in running and in life.

00:35:00

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. And when I started working here three-and-a-half years ago and I started coming to those group trainings.

00:35:06

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah, I remember that well.

00:35:06

Rob Simmelkjaer: I hadn't been in a group running situation like an organized coached workout since I had run cross country in high school. So it had been a really long time of just running on my own.

I'd run a couple of marathons, but mostly training on my own through a static training plan that I would get in a magazine or something like that.

And I just remember like, "Wow," what I felt I was getting from it, the improvement that I felt and just the accountability of having somewhere to be and a workout that was planned, it really was game changing.

00:35:42

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah.

00:35:42

Rob Simmelkjaer: Talk to the people out there who are like I was. And that's a lot of runners who just run on their own. That's one of the beauties of running is that you can do that.

But the benefits that you can get from showing up at something like a group training, whether it's with us or with a club or whatever it might be, why? Why put yourself through that if you're a runner and you aspire to get better?

00:36:07

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. You're right, Rob. You are very typical in that sense that you have an athletic background, but it's been years. And a lot of people show up in exactly that

situation.

And I'll add, I think women more than men are likely to show up having had a negative experience with that earlier on. Maybe a situation that wasn't intended to be negative, no one was deliberately mean to them, just where they felt maybe marginalized or second to the men's team or the men's program or whatever.

And just to have them show up and be treated with complete equality, with complete, just acceptance, inclusion I think really means everything.

And yeah, for those people, which is the majority of new people to group training, we just want them to have a really positive experience. We definitely want to share our knowledge and wisdom and our own experience. And we are very well-trained.

Most of us have become certified through USATF or Road Runners Club of America, RRCA. So we know what we're doing. We're not just willy-nilly making up these programs and workouts that we don't know whether they're going to work or not. We know they work. They're very tested.

But it's just that making it a positive experience, accepting them, seeing them, embracing them, and then creating a dynamic. By doing all those things, creating a dynamic within the workouts where they're lifting each other up.

A lot of runners are very social. As you know, the myth of the loneliness of the long distance runner has been shown many times to be a myth. We're incredibly social, and we foster that. There are times during the workouts where people can hang out and talk with each other.

Or even during the workouts they can interact, or even if they're not saying anything, you're doing it together. You have that accountability and that social connection that I think is so important.

We just celebrated 10 years of New York Road Runners group training this year. We've heard from a lot of people over the years, and we highlighted a few people in a blog post that we did recently. They say they keep coming back for the community.

They know what to do. They know how to go out and do a tempo run if they had to on their own or whatever, but they keep coming back for the community. So that's why we're here.

00:38:52

Rob Simmelkjaer: All right, Gordon. Yeah. So at the top of the interview, I teased five different numbers.

00:38:57

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah.

00:38:57

Rob Simmelkjaer: So I'm going to go through each one of these, Gordon.

00:38:59

Gordon Bakoulis: Okay.

00:38:59

Rob Simmelkjaer: And you tell me what this number represents in your career as a runner and with New York Road Runner.

00:39:05

Gordon Bakoulis: Oh, gosh. This is a spot quiz.

00:39:05

Rob Simmelkjaer: The first number. That's right. If you don't get it, I've got the answers.

00:39:12

Gordon Bakoulis: Okay.

00:39:14

Rob Simmelkjaer: The first number is 468.

00:39:14

Gordon Bakoulis: Oh my gosh. Okay. I actually know what this is. That is the number of New York Road Runners races that I've done in like 40 years or whatever it's been. 30 years.

00:39:21

Rob Simmelkjaer: That is correct. That is correct. That is exactly right. Over 40 years, you've run 468 races, from the L'eggs Mini in May of 1986 to the Citizens Queens 10K.

00:39:36

Gordon Bakoulis: That's bananas.

00:39:37

Rob Simmelkjaer: This past Saturday was number 468. Still going strong. I can't wait for 500, Gordon. Let's go. We're going to have to have a big day.

00:39:44

Gordon Bakoulis: Let me interject here. I want to give my dear husband a plug. Alan Ruben has done 505.

00:39:50

Rob Simmelkjaer: Wow ...

00:39:50

Gordon Bakoulis: So not that we're competitive with each other.

He's winning that particular little marriage rivalry.

00:39:59

Rob Simmelkjaer: He's gotcha by a few. All right.
Well, we got to make sure we're all there for number 500
when you cross that finish line.

00:40:04

Gordon Bakoulis: Okay.

00:40:05

Rob Simmelkjaer: That's going to be a big deal. All right.
How about 33?

00:40:09

Gordon Bakoulis: I don't know what that is. I'm sorry.

00:40:12

Rob Simmelkjaer: That is the number of times, Gordon, that you
have run the Mini 10K.

00:40:16

Gordon Bakoulis: Oh, of course. Of course. Yes, yes, yes, yes.

00:40:18

Rob Simmelkjaer: First-

00:40:18

Gordon Bakoulis: Sorry. Yep. You're right.

00:40:18

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yes. That's okay. No, we got you. The first
was 1986, and the latest was just a few weeks ago. By the
way, just a few weeks ago, Gordon Bakoulis still won her
age group.

00:40:29

Gordon Bakoulis: I did.

00:40:30

Rob Simmelkjaer: That's right. Still killing it. Unbelievable.

00:40:30

Gordon Bakoulis: On that beastly hot day somehow when I wanted
to stop so many times.

00:40:40

Rob Simmelkjaer: Incredible. Incredible.

00:40:41

Gordon Bakoulis: And won my age group. Thank you.

00:40:43

Rob Simmelkjaer: You got just adding some more hardware to that trophy case at home.

00:40:46

Gordon Bakoulis: Indeed.

00:40:47

Rob Simmelkjaer: How about 239? I'll give you a hint. This is in that age group category, 239.

00:40:55

Gordon Bakoulis: So have I won my age group 239 times? That's crazy.

00:40:59

Rob Simmelkjaer: Correct. That is right.

00:41:02

Gordon Bakoulis: How did you find that out?

00:41:04

Rob Simmelkjaer: (inaudible)

00:41:04

Gordon Bakoulis: You must have people in the scoring team.

00:41:06

Rob Simmelkjaer: And Kathryn Jones, I think she knows people. And they came up with these numbers, I think.

00:41:11

Gordon Bakoulis: Oh, that's so funny.

00:41:12

Rob Simmelkjaer: But our great producer, Kathryn, came up with some of these.

00:41:14

Gordon Bakoulis: I didn't know that one. The 33, I should have gotten that one, but okay. 239.

00:41:14

Rob Simmelkjaer: That's okay. That's incredible. Okay. How about this one? 370.

00:41:23

Gordon Bakoulis: I don't know that one either. Sorry, Rob. I'm

failing. I've already failed this test.

00:41:30

Rob Simmelkjaer: In the ballpark. This was a hard one. That's the number of times that you finished on the age group podium.

00:41:35

Gordon Bakoulis: Oh, that's cool.

00:41:36

Rob Simmelkjaer: Nearly four out of every five times you've raced with Road Runners, you finished on the podium in your age group.

00:41:43

Gordon Bakoulis: Wow. In my age group. Wow. (inaudible)

00:41:45

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah.

00:41:45

Gordon Bakoulis: Okay. Yes. I like this. I like this. I'm going to hire you. You can write some press releases, right?

00:41:51

Rob Simmelkjaer: Hire Kathryn. I'm not the one.

00:41:54

Gordon Bakoulis: Thank you, Kathryn.

00:41:54

Rob Simmelkjaer: Thank you, Kathryn, for the numbers.
How about this number? 11403.

00:42:00

Gordon Bakoulis: Oh, okay. That's a half-marathon time. I think it's my fastest half-marathon in Central Park, and it was like a Central Park record. I don't know. I don't know.

00:42:13

Rob Simmelkjaer: (inaudible) you were.

00:42:13

Gordon Bakoulis: I need some help. I know it's a half-marathon time. I get partial credit.

00:42:16

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yep. You definitely do. It is your Fred Lebow half-marathon event record time.

00:42:23

Gordon Bakoulis: Right. That's it.

00:42:24

Rob Simmelkjaer: Which has stood since 1992.

00:42:25

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. Yeah. And that race used to be in the summer, so that was run on a hot day. So I am really proud of that one. That was another one where I wanted to drop out many times. I said, "Oh, keep going, keep going, keep going." I remember that.

00:42:40

Rob Simmelkjaer: That's incredible, by the way.

00:42:40

Gordon Bakoulis: Thank you, Kathryn.

00:42:40

Rob Simmelkjaer: I did not know that used to be in the summer.

00:42:45

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah.

00:42:45

Rob Simmelkjaer: That must have been absolutely brutal to run that course in the summertime.

00:42:48

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. It was kind of crazy.

00:42:50

Rob Simmelkjaer: All right. And last but not least, 3044. 1.

00:42:57

Gordon Bakoulis: That's probably, I'm going to guess, the number of miles that I've run in New York (inaudible)

00:43:03

Rob Simmelkjaer: You got it. You got it. That's exactly right. That's the total number of miles you have raced-

00:43:08

Gordon Bakoulis: Okay. All right.

00:43:08

Rob Simmelkjaer: ... not trained, raced in New York Road Runners events.

00:43:11

Gordon Bakoulis: Right.

00:43:11

Rob Simmelkjaer: Which by the way, is roughly the distance from New York City to Shannon, Ireland. So you've run across the Atlantic Ocean.

00:43:19

Gordon Bakoulis: Well, it'll go up this weekend.

00:43:21

Rob Simmelkjaer: (inaudible)

00:43:21

Gordon Bakoulis: I'm going to run the Pride Run on Saturday, and I don't know if I'll win my age group. I'll try, I always try. I still love winning my age group, not because I like beating my friends in the 65 to 69. I just like the competitiveness and the ... Yeah, we encourage each other. We're all really good friends, and we all want each other to do well.

00:43:44

Rob Simmelkjaer: It's so amazing.

00:43:45

Gordon Bakoulis: But that 3, 000 number, that'll go up because I'll run the four miles. I'll finish whether I win-

00:43:52

Rob Simmelkjaer: I think just about all those numbers are going up, except for maybe that Fred Lebow event record, that's going to stay the same (inaudible)

00:43:58

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah, I'm never going to see that 114 again ever. That is a fact.

00:44:04

Rob Simmelkjaer: But other than that, I think you've got upside in all of these, so it's pretty amazing.

00:44:09

Gordon Bakoulis: That was fun.

00:44:09

Rob Simmelkjaer: And Gordon, I want to end just talking about your role at New York Road Runners as our historian.

When I first got here, I remember I knew the organization a little bit. I'd been a member and a runner. But there was so much I didn't know about Road Runners, about the history. And how many times people would say, "Oh, you should ask Gordon that." Or, "Gordon knows," or, "Ask Gordon." You're such a resource here and a treasure trove of information about the history of the organization. What has it meant for you to be in that role as really our historian and keeping and telling the incredible history of this organization?

00:44:49

Gordon Bakoulis: Well, I mean, you just said it. It is an incredible history. So I think that's the first part of it. How can you not be interested in an organization that started with these 40 or so scrappy ... They were all men back in the '50s who just loved running.

They didn't have any money. They weren't doing it for prestige. They loved to run, and they believed in community, and they believed in inclusivity. There was never any membership restrictions that you had to be this fast or you had to be this race or this religion or this gender, anything. It was for anybody who wanted to run.

40 people or so back in 1958. And what, over 100,000 people today, and putting on the greatest races in the world in the best city in the world. How can you not find that compelling? So that's the main reason. It's just endlessly fascinating to me.

If you ever want to just not hear from me for the next four hours, just sit me down with a bunch of old magazines and I'll get ... We used to have a magazine, as I'm sure you know. And we have it all on digitized, so you can look at them in PDFs. And they're just amazing.

Just the growth, the people, the personalities, the events, the programs, the mission, the reach, just the reach that we've developed all over the world. But yet the focus here in New York and making New York a better place, in our partnerships with the city, with partners, all kinds of sponsorship relationships, it's just incredible. I'm getting chills.

And really, I know I'm like a true believer, but I just don't understand how anyone could not find that fascinating.

00:46:59

Rob Simmelkjaer: What do you think people are saying?

00:46:59

Gordon Bakoulis: And the people, of course, I mentioned, I knew some of them personally, especially Ted Corbitt, Joe Kleinerman and Fred Lebow and Grete Waitz, the four of them

among many. We've had many, many incredible people that have been part of our organization, and they were all extraordinary individuals.

00:47:20

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah.

00:47:21

Gordon Bakoulis: They taught me a lot, and I just feel like to honor them, to honor their memory and their legacy, it's the least I can do to try to make sure those stories continue to be told.

00:47:35

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. Knowing the organization as well as you do, what is the thing about Road Runners that you think is maybe the least understood? What do you think people don't know about New York Road Runners that they should know?

00:47:50

Gordon Bakoulis: Yeah. What comes to mind is just the forward-thinking, always looking ahead to the next thing. I think that's somewhat well known, but there's just so many examples of that through the years.

It's more than just being visionary, which I think we are. We've always been visionary. Even when we couldn't see exactly what the future was going to look like, we knew that we were ... It's like running. You're heading towards something rather than away from something.

We created this 5-Boro Marathon, this amazing thing that it just sounded so extraordinary when we first came up with it, and it worked. We pulled it off in 1976, and it was supposed to be a one-off to celebrate the Bicentennial. But it was so successful and so compelling that we have done it every year since.

But right from that first moment, the leaders and everyone involved with the organization was trying to make it better.

Not just making sure it's accurately measured and all that, which is what all races do, but how can it be better? How can we bring more international runners in? How can we make the experience of getting to the start easier for the runners? Let's broadcast it. Let's get it on a broadcast and send it all over the world.

And just that forward-thinking attitude, not just with the marathon, but with everything that we do and that willingness to try new things. We're in such a good place right now. I mean, you know that better than I do. Running is so successful, we're so successful.

But still we're just thinking, "How can we make it better? How can we make it how our race is more equitable, so more

people can run our races in more places and have the experience and not feel like we're a club that they can't become a member of?"

I think that's it. And I think we all do a great job of this, just making sure that story, that aspect of who we are is woven into everything that we do.

00:50:22

Rob Simmelkjaer: Well, Gordon, congratulations on an amazing career here at New York Road Runners. We're going to miss you in the office, for sure.

00:50:29

Gordon Bakoulis: I know.

00:50:29

Rob Simmelkjaer: But we really will. You've been such a steadying and a force here and such a pillar of the organization. But I know we're going to keep seeing you at starting lines and finish lines, so you won't be far.

But thank you for everything. Thanks for joining us and thanks for sharing some of your journey today on Set the Pace.

00:50:51

Gordon Bakoulis: Oh, thank you so much. Yeah. No, retirement is a bittersweet moment for sure. I feel like I'm retiring to something rather than retiring from something, because I know I'll never fully leave New York Road Runners and all the relationships that I have here. But I'm excited to move on to the next thing.

And thank you as well. I truly feel that the past few years here have been the best in my experience with the organization, and we're in a great place.

00:51:26

Rob Simmelkjaer: That means a lot to me.

00:51:26

Gordon Bakoulis: So I appreciate your kind words, and I appreciate the organization and everything it's done and will continue to do. So thanks.

00:51:36

Rob Simmelkjaer: Thank you, Gordon.

00:51:37

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00:52:02

Rob Simmelkjaer: This past Saturday was the Citizens Queens 10K. It was the fourth race in the 2026 New York Road Runners 5-Boro series. We want to thank the more than 11,000 finishers we had out in Queens this past Saturday. The weather was beautiful. It was an absolutely gorgeous day to run. Now, we know that course was a little bit different. There were a lot of twists and turns on that course. The Citizens Queens 10K has always been a course with a lot of turns. We had to add even more for this year's edition because of construction that is going on in Flushing Meadows Park.

So we heard from all the folks out there who got a little dizzy running that course, but a lot of people liked it too. I heard from a lot of folks that liked the technical nature of the course. So if you like turns, it was a great, great event for you.

And obviously it was a beautiful day. So I know people had a lot of fun during the race, at the festival as well. Citizens and other partners come out, do such a great job creating a festive atmosphere around that race. So hope everybody had a good time out in Queens.

On the results side, the men's winner was Jaouad El Jazouli with a 31:07 from the United Mexican Runners of New York. On the women's side, Alana Levy, our friend from Brooklyn Track Club was the winner, 34:55. And the non-binary winner, Kester Antequina, with the time of 37:51 from Front Runners New York.

Speaking of front runners, we're so excited for this coming weekend, the Pride Run happening on Saturday. I will be there running that, one of my favorite races to run every year. And then of course, right after that, we've got our annual Hope & Possibility Race with our friends from Achilles. So that's going to be a big weekend of running in New York in Central Park coming up this weekend.

And that does it for another episode of Set the Pace. We want to thank our guest today, NYRR legend Gordon Bakoulis. If you liked our episode today, make sure you hit that Subscribe button, tell a friend, send us a comment so others can find this show as well. Good luck to everybody running this weekend. Enjoy the miles. We'll see you soon.