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Rob Simmelkjaer: I know that any particular change that we make is going to advantage certain types of runners and disadvantage certain types of runners. Any solution is going to tilt in one direction or the other, but I want everyone to understand that our number one goal is accessibility. We want to ensure the accessibility of running to New Yorkers, and that is the north star that I'm looking at when it comes to decisions that we make. Hey everybody, and welcome to Set The Pace, the official podcast of New York Road Runners presented by Peloton. I'm Rob Simmelkjaer, the CEO of New York Road Runners, and I am flying somewhat solo, at least without Becs this week. Becs is off, we miss her. Hopefully she's enjoying the winter somewhere warm. It has not been warm here in New York. It has been cold, it has been icy, it has been snowy, and we know how hard it is to miss a great race like the Fred Lebow Half.

It bummed us out so much to have to cancel that race this past weekend. The Fred Lebow Half is one of the really iconic races on our calendar every year, obviously because it's named after one of the founding fathers of New York Road Runners, Fred Lebow. But also because it is the race that, I respect the people who finish the Fred Lebow just about as much as any race that we have here, because they're going up Harlem Hill three times. And I know how many of you trained for that race, how hard you worked to get ready for it. I know some of you use these half-marathons to time qualify for the marathon as well, and it's also a shame we've had to now cancel too straight with Staten Island last fall.

So it was a tough, tough call, but obviously it was a no-brainer. We had to do it, there was a ton of snow coming down early on Sunday morning. And so, we hope that since we announced the cancellation on Friday, a lot of you were able to get in your long runs on Saturday before the snow came and just messed everything up. So bummer, but we hope to get back at racing this weekend. The NYR Manhattan 10K scheduled for Sunday, that kicks off the 2026 Five-Borough Series. And the weather, I'm sitting here on Tuesday recording this, looks a lot more promising. So, hopefully we'll get some good weather this weekend. That of course is a full counterclockwise lap of Central Park, one of the races I really love on the calendar every year so hope to see everybody out there on Sunday. We've also, by the way, got the Millrose Games this weekend in the city.

That will not be affected by weather indoors at the armory, and we're looking forward to a great day of racing up there as well. Well, we had some very exciting news at New York Road Runners this week, a big rebrand of the organization. We're going to be talking about that rebrand, our new logo

and brand positioning a little bit later on in the show with our chief marketing and digital officer, Juliette Morris, and Emily Casey also from our marketing department. So, stay tuned for that. But before we get to that conversation, if you've been listening to this podcast for a while you know that we have an annual tradition where we do a little town hall episode usually at the beginning of the year. And this is really a chance for us to slow down a little bit, to speak directly with our members, more than 90, 000 of you out there right now.

We spend time listening to you, checking out the kinds of questions and issues that you all raise on social media. And so, our team's gone out and collected some of the top issues and questions and themes that we've seen out there across all the various platforms, Instagram, Reddit, Facebook, all the places. And so, we're going to have a little conversation that's going to be a town hall type thing where we're going to talk about some of the issues that we know is facing many of you as runners and obviously members of our community. And since we don't have Becs today, helping out with that conversation, because I need a conversation partner for this, is Juliette Morris. I just mentioned her, our chief marketing and digital officer. And Juliette, you're going to come in and help grill me on some of these really, really tough questions. Thanks for coming in.

00:04:15

Juliette Morris: Absolutely. And I have to say, I feel more fabulous and fit sitting in for Becs. So I can never fill those shoes, but I feel a little bit ... I'm sitting a little taller in this seat today.

00:04:28

Rob Simmelkjaer: Thank you so much, I know you'll do your best Becs impression. So, let's get into it. What's the first topic that we've seen out there that we think would be good to talk about?

00:04:37

Juliette Morris: Absolutely. And I would say we are, to your point, we are always looking and trying to understand what our community wants, needs, and feel. And we're so appreciative of all the feedback, good, bad, and sometimes ugly. The number one thing that we always see, and no surprise given the boon in running and the popularity of our races, and being situated in what I think is the running capital of the world, we hear a lot, "Why can't I get into these races? Why can't they just increase the number of runners so more people can get in?" And that happens regardless if they're talking about the marathon, or they're

talking about our halves or our shorter distances. So Rob, why is it so hard to get into these races, and why can't you just snap a finger and let more people run?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, Juliette, it's definitely the number one question we get. The question comes in many different forms. So, I'll start at the basics. The basic issue here is math. It is essentially a math problem, because we have a supply of spots and races that is limited, and it is limited by the permits that we get from the city of New York, from the parks department for all of our races that take place in parks, that set a hard limit of how many runners we can have in any given race. Our smallest races, what we call the weekly races, many of our races in Central Park or Prospect Park have a cap of about 5,000. And that's a lot of our races. Your typical four miler in Central Park, most of those races are capped at 5,000 runners. Some other races that we have in the park, some of our bigger ones, fibro series, things like that, we have a slightly higher cap, maybe 8,000.

Then when we go onto the streets, our permits can get a little bit bigger. We may be at 12,000 for some of our bigger races, and then obviously it goes all the way up to marathon where we're now close to 60,000. So, we cannot have more runners in those races than allowed by permit, and we can also not have more races than we are allowed by permit. We have a certain number of races that we are given permits for every year, and so that caps how many races we can have. So that's the supply side. And then on the demand side, well, it's very clear that the demand is just outpacing the supply, because of the surge and popularity of running, because of the huge popularity of the marathon and the 9+1 program, which we know is driving a lot of this, people want to run the TCS New York City Marathon, and they're trying to get in their nine races to run, of course volunteering at one as well.

And so that's creating this demand. So, what are we doing about it? Well, this has been a topic that I've been looking at over a few years here, and I would say at this point we're still looking at a number of different solutions that are trying to, A, make sure that our races are accessible to people even if they're not running 9+1. That's a key priority for me is I don't want all of our races to only be folks who are running the 9+1 because we want to bring new people to the sport.

00:08:01

Juliette Morris: What are we doing to help make that a reality?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, so a couple of things. First of all, I'll point to a number of things that we've done. First and foremost, we are now looking at ways that are a little bit more fair for people to get into races. We experimented this year with a drawing for one of our races, the Manhattan 10K coming up, that was actually done by drawing. And so, adding another drawing is something that we felt was a little bit more fair to allow people to get in. Something that we announced recently, which was a big move and I know a little bit controversial in some quarters, was a limitation that we placed on how many member plus runners could get into any given race. So, folks know that the member plus level of membership allows you a two-day early registration period to get into races. And what we were starting to find, Juliette, is that some of our races were getting really close to selling out just in that two-day early registration period.

And we didn't want a situation where regular members or even non-members had absolutely no chance to get into races. So, what we've decided to do is set a cap, and that cap is something that we will revise over time as we see how it goes, of how many Member Plus members can get into a race. It's still a big advantage to be Member Plus, you still have that early registration period. And if you're on the ball, you're still going to get into most of the races that you want to get into, but it ensures that there are still spaces available for our general member population on that third day when those races go on sale for everyone. So, that was a really important step we took. We also added a few races that are now available for everyone, all members.

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Juliette Morris: Which races are those, Rob?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: We added for this next upcoming group, Grete's Great Gallop is now available for early registration for all members, as well as I believe it was the Mindful 5K, we'll correct this later if I got that wrong, but I'm pretty sure it's Mindful 5K and Grete's that we now have made available for all members to sign up early, because we want to make sure that everybody has a chance to get into a race. So, that's the second thing, Juliette. And then, I will give a little sneak preview of a third thing, because I do want to start getting the word out there a little bit as to something else we're thinking about, and it's about the 9+1 program. Because we know that 9+1 is driving so much of

this, and 9+1 is what is causing so many races to sell out within minutes of going on sale, we are likely going to start looking to have more races that are in our calendar that are not 9+1.

And that is really important because that will create more situations that a race will stay on sale for a longer period of time, and a casual runner will have an option to go and sign up for a race if they're not looking to run 9+1, if they're not looking to run the marathon, because that's really a key part of our mission is getting more people running. So, you'll likely see at least one race in the third quarter of races that we put on sale not be one of the 9+1 races. And in addition to that, we are rolling out a bunch of new types of events and races that are not part of the 9+1 program. We've always had Open Run, of course people know about that. That's free, that's every weekend in parks all around the city. That's never been 9+1, it's always an opportunity to run.

Last summer, Juliette, you'll recall we rolled out a new initiative called the Starting Line Series, Start Line Series that we rolled out in Queens and Brooklyn. Those were 5Ks that, again, were available to anyone, and free, and not part of 9+1. We're going to be rolling out two more of those this year. So, we'll have a total of four of the Start Line Series races available, and we've got plans to do more events on the track as well. So, we have something called the Speed Series every year out on Randalls Island. We're looking to expand that as well to give people a chance to run shorter distances. So we're looking, Juliette, to have more opportunities to run that are not 9+1, and by doing that there'll be more accessibility and more availability for people who just want to run, who don't necessarily want to run the marathon.

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Juliette Morris: And to your earlier point, this is not going to solve everything because there's always going to be, because of the demand, there's always going to be a certain amount of people that are going to be disappointed that they can't get in. And we wish that we could change that, but all of these changes are really about trying to make sure more equitable, greater percentage across all of our different kinds of runners can get access into the races and try to make improvements that way.

00:13:04

Rob Simmelkjaer: That's right, Juliette. I know that any particular change that we make is going to advantage certain types of runners and disadvantage certain types of runners because of, again, the math problem. When you have a math

problem, any solution is going to tilt in one direction or the other, but I want everyone to understand that our number one goal is accessibility. We want to ensure the accessibility of running to New Yorkers, and that is the north star that I'm looking at when it comes to decisions that we make.

00:13:38

Juliette Morris: That's great. One of the other big, more recent comments that we've been seeing across social media, obviously we are a nonprofit, everything we do is getting people running and trying to reinvest, not trying, and reinvesting back into New York, but we are running races. And we just recently announced a processing fee that needed to be applied to transactions within the organization. And we've gotten a lot of pushback about that processing fee. And so, we understand that, but I also think maybe people don't understand why we did it and what the thinking behind it was. So, can you share a little bit about that?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. So, just as we are not immune to the laws of mathematics, which we were just talking about when it comes to race access, we are also not immune to the laws of economics. And in this environment that we've all been living in, I mean, this has always been the case but even more so recently, prices go up. There's a constant increase in the prices of everything that all of us are doing in the world. We've all experienced it with our groceries, or gasoline, or lots of other things. And even though we're a nonprofit, people don't give us things for free. We have to go out and pay lots and lots of vendors, service providers, and by the way, our staff, who expect to be paid and compensated fairly, and are looking for that annual increase as all of us are in our jobs.

So it's a simple, normal situation that we experience like every other organization and company out there in the world, that our prices are always going up year over year. It's remarkable that this organization has been able to keep the prices where they are for such a long period of time. The fact that our membership is \$ 60 a year, the fact that our weekly races for members are \$ 25, it's really incredible that we've been able to keep that level of affordability, and that goes back to the point of accessibility being really important to us. But we always have to look at how we can be a sustainable organization and continue to provide these services. And if we keep prices frozen for everything forever, the math just isn't going to work out. We're not going to be able to do it. So, as we see a cost come along, like processing fees, and as everybody knows we've

switched our provider for our transactional platform, the way that people sign up for our races.

We have a great partner, haku, that has done this for us, and it has helped us really improve the process of signing up for races. There's no longer 90 minute, two hour wait times for people trying to register for races. So that's been a big improvement, but of course that comes at a cost as well. And so, as you see quite broadly in the world, you see lots of companies, organizations, nonprofits passing along transaction fees when they are being charged by a provider, it's something that in the broad outlook of our cost base and what it takes us to run this organization was something that just made sense for us to pass along. And so in doing that, we didn't have to raise the actual price of the races. Now, I'm not saying that we won't have to do that at some point, we will 100% have to raise the actual price of races at some point.

We will have to raise the price of the NYC half and the marathon at some point, because again, that's just the law of economics. Prices do have to increase from time to time to cover costs, but this was something that we thought was manageable and was something that was directly tied to a cost that we have. So, that's what we decided we needed to do. And we know it's not fun to have to pay a little bit more, but hopefully our runners understand and continue to find the experience worth it.

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Juliette Morris: Yeah. And I would add, I know the entire internal team also looked at other race organizations and other organizations in general on what those processing fees are, because we also wanted to make sure that we were consistent with industry standards and try to have the lowest possible processing fee we could.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely, and it's very normal what we're doing. I mean, if you've bought tickets to a concert lately or maybe a Broadway show or something like that, I mean, not to call anybody out but check out those transaction fees. There are some significant fees that are charged out there in this landscape. And so, where we are we think is pretty reasonable. And it's just, again, something that we had to do to sustain the level of service that we provide our community.

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Juliette Morris: One of the, not necessarily the last, but one of the last things I'd love you to talk about a little bit is obviously everything we do is to get people running and

to transform communities, and have significant impact on the five boroughs in the city that we call home and love so dearly. And we recently looked at what kind of impact that we have. And I have to say, new to the organization only a year, it actually was pretty astonishing to me what this organization and all of our races do for New York City. Can you talk a little bit about that so that the people that are seeing these increased processing fees and spending money with us understand where it's going and what we're trying to accomplish, and are accomplishing?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. Thanks, Juliette, for that question, and we are really proud at the results of an economic impact study that we did this past fall before the marathon. We engaged a top-notch provider of these kinds of studies, and they did a really deep dive looking at what economic activity is driven in New York City all year long by the activities of New York Road Runners. So, what does that mean? I mean, it doesn't just mean stuff that would have happened anyway. We're talking about incremental economic activity that was driven by our events. So money that was spent in New York City, the five boroughs of New York City, that wouldn't have been spent otherwise. And that totaled nearly \$1 billion per year in economic impact that New York Road Runners has on the city of New York. The marathon alone was almost 700 million of that. So, that won't surprise anybody who is in New York City during the week of the marathon.

And when you're in the city, what do you see? You see hotels that are booked solid with people coming from all around the world to run the TCS New York City Marathon. You see restaurants that are packed, you see people in museums, getting tickets to Broadway shows, spending money shopping and in the stores, spending money at the expo, which is part of this as well. You see this huge influx of people from all over the world coming to New York for what we know is the best day of the year. And so, what does that mean? What does that translate into? Well, if you ask anyone who runs a hotel, owns a restaurant, runs a boutique, it means money to those businesses and that means jobs. And those jobs are significant in what's driven by New York Road Runners. The stat that astounded me the most, Juliette, was that our economic impact was greater than the combined impact of the entire regular season for the New York Yankees and the New York Mets.

They each play 81 home games a year-

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Juliette Morris: Go Mets.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That's right, let's go Mets, but we beat them on this one. We drive a huge amount. And why is that? I mean, of course the tickets and all that are expensive to these baseball games, but that's money that our study determines would have been spent somewhere else anyway. These are mostly New Yorkers who are going to these games. Whereas with our stuff, it's people who are coming from everywhere who are riding the subways marathon weekends, who are spending this kind of money all over our city. So it's a really big deal, it means jobs, it means tax revenue for the city of New York that can be spent on all the services that we all need, and we're really proud to play that role. And so if you ask, "Well, why does New York City, why does it give Road Runners permits? Why does the city shut down for the marathon every year?" Well, A, it's the best day of the year in New York, but B, this is another big reason why is because it really is making our city more economically viable by having this event every year.

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Juliette Morris: Well, and I have to say it was pretty incredible this year because we, for the first time, if I am correct, had beacons and were able to get a better sense of how many spectators were lining all the streets. And when I got here, we would talk about a million people, and I grew up in New York. I stood on First Avenue probably 30 times watching people run by, and this year we had close to, if not over two million spectators lining the streets. And to your point, they are going in and getting coffee, they are picking up muffins, they are picking up food for their loved ones and that spectator crowd is just growing exponentially every year.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: 100%. That's another big part of not just what makes marathon day great, but also what makes it great for the city is, I mean, how many bars on Second Avenue would typically be packed at 9: 00 AM, 10:00 AM, 11:00 AM on a Sunday morning? Maybe for football, but that's a party that's happening in Brooklyn or over on Second Avenue. And that's part of what makes it a great day, both in terms of the spirit but also in terms of the economic impact.

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Juliette Morris: So, what are some of the things that you're the most excited about for Road Runners and for our community in 2026?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Well, Juliette, you know it well because we talk about it every week. First and foremost, I'd say is the 50th anniversary of the Five Borough Marathon that's coming up this fall. And the organization was robbed a little bit of the opportunity to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the marathon overall back in 2021, of course because of COVID and the fact that the marathon could only be half of its normal size, and it didn't have the scale that we're all used to. Now in 2026, God willing no more pandemics, anything like that happening, we'll be able to have that true celebration of this incredible event. And I think that the Five-Borough Marathon anniversary to me is really the one that matters in a lot of ways, because what we all have come to know and love as the best day of the year in New York City is the fact that people are running from Staten Island across the Verrazzano Bridge through Brooklyn, through Queens, over the 59th Street Bridge into Manhattan, up the Upper East Side and then through the Bronx and back into Central Park, that's the marathon.

No offense to the people who started and ran back in the days when it was loops around Central Park, but it's the inclusion of the entire city that makes the TCS New York City Marathon the incredible event that it is. And so, that's something that's really worth celebrating, and we've got an incredible set of things planned. You and the marketing team have done a great job of creating a really special logo that we rolled out last fall, people have probably seen that, represents the five boroughs of New York. We've got so many other things planned for this year, a lot of content that's telling the story of the history of the marathon, telling the story of some of the incredible things we're going to do this year. So, I would say first and foremost is that, is really celebrating the 50th anniversary of this iconic event that makes New York Road Runners the organization that it is, and that gives so many New Yorkers and people around the world something to look forward to all year long.

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Juliette Morris: And I have to say for those that are listening, we've got some very exciting surprises and activations lined up for that.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely. And then the second thing I would point to is we just have an incredible opportunity at New York Road Runners to take the surge of popularity of running and turn that into even more impact. We are already doing incredible things with more than 100,000 kids in New York

City enrolled in our Rising New York Road Runners program. We've got this great Run for the Future program for high school girls to get moving and get involved in running. We have our Open Run program, free runs around the city. We've got our Striders program, walking program for older adults. We have our Race Free program as well. And so, because of the popularity of running right now, we actually have the ability to greatly expand our impact. And by the time we reach marathon, we're going to have some really exciting announcements about things that we're going to be doing in the years ahead that will expand even more the kind of impact that we have as a nonprofit in New York City.

So stay tuned for more on that, but I think that's the other thing I'm most excited about.

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Juliette Morris: Well, that was a nice cliffhanger for people.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I used to work in television, so we love a good tease.

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Juliette Morris: Did you? Rob, I think there's some other exciting news to share relative to our Run Center and the kind of experience we're trying to build there. So, if you could share that with everyone, and also give everybody a little bit of heads up as to while that is coming to fruition what it might mean for each of them.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yes, Juliette. Yeah, we are excited that this year we're going to be undertaking a pretty significant renovation of the NYRR Run Center and the Run Hub, which is the New Balance store that's in that location on 57th Street between 8th and 9th Avenue. Of course, pretty much all of our members know it well. They're going there to pick up their bibs on a regular basis, maybe buy some New Balance gear, and it's a really important part of our organization. Well, we have some exciting news, which is that we are actually going to be expanding that space. For those who know, there used to be a Starbucks, I think it was like a Starbucks reserve center right next door going west from the run center. We were able to acquire that space under a new lease, and we're going to be expanding into that space as part of this renovation.

So, what will happen is the area where bibs are currently picked up will remain the bib pickup area, the new Starbucks space that is west of that will become the New Balance store. So, instead of having to go all the way in the back

and up the stairs for the New Balance store, that's going to now be right at the street, street facing with an entrance on that side, and we'll be able to go right over there. You'll be able to look in the windows and see what great new gear New Balance has on offer. So, that's going to be exciting, it's going to be a great new space there. And then, the space that is currently New Balance in the back is going to become a fantastic new event space for us at New York Road Runners, which is probably what I'm most excited about, Juliette, because we have on a regular basis panels and various discussions.

Some of them are put on by New York Road Runners, some of them are put on by our partners at various times in the year. And this is going to be a really great audience space for people to gather, to talk about running, to have great conversations, and also to do some things that are active, like have yoga classes or a great area for stretching when there's not an event going on. So, that's going to be a really exciting new addition to the Run Center and it's going to be a spectacular new space. Your marketing team is doing an amazing job of really reimagining how we present ourselves as New York Road Runners, how we tell our history and all of that. So, that's all going to be a part of this amazingly reimagined Run Center. That's the good news. Obviously with any renovation comes a little bit of an interregnum period, if you will. There's going to be some construction work being done-

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Juliette Morris: Interregnum.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yes, yes. It's a word I learned at some point in high school. There's going to be a construction period. And so, during that period there certainly will be some inconveniences that we were going to ask everybody to have patience with. We don't yet know a lot in terms of the detail of how we're going to manage, but we know that while there'll still be a good amount of space to hand out bibs for races, it's going to be a little bit confined and we'll probably see some lines that will get a little bit longer and come outside the Run Center a little bit for our busiest races. But we are thinking right now about how we can ease the burden that's going to take place during that period of time, including expanding some bib pickup options at races for future races, things like that. So, stay tuned for more information on all of that.

We're going to do our best to limit the inconveniences that folks will have, particularly picking up bibs. But the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow of all this is going to

be an amazing new space for all of us to enjoy, and gather, and come together as a running community. So, it's going to be great.

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Juliette Morris: Yeah. We will make sure as an organization we're over communicating to people about the bib pickup and the timelines. And we are also really excited about the space. Just to give it perspective, we're really tripling to a degree the ability, or the amount, I should say, of people that will be able to come and join us for live podcasts, for panels, for working out. And this is really all about improving the experience of our community. So, it's going to be exciting and it's a great new palette for us to talk about the whole NYRR story, and have our Believe in Every Step platform and logo come to life.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: All right. Well, Juliette, you're going to regret coming on this episode of Set the Pace because you did such a great job, I see no way we're not going to drag you back on the show at some point-

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Juliette Morris: I have been waiting to be discovered, Rob. So, thank you for letting me be a part of it, especially kicking off the year and all this great news.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Thank you. And we're going to keep you around because in just a second you're going to be joined by your colleague, Emily Casey, to talk about the exciting rebrand and new logo that we unveiled this week.

00:33:19

Juliette Morris: Excited to share that with everyone in a few.

00:33:22

Speaker 3: Peloton's most advanced tread yet is here. The new Peloton cross-training series, Tread+, powered by Peloton IQ. Designed for runners who want top tier performance, it features premium hardware that makes every run and workout more efficient, effective, and motivating. And it accelerates your personal growth mile after mile. The rubberized slat belt cushions every single step and creates an energizing running space for each stride. And with strength workouts, you can stack right into your routine. You'll build lower body muscle to support stronger runs. With auto incline adjusting automatically to match instructor cues, your intensity stays exactly where it needs to be so you can

stay in the zone and focus on your workout. Experience our most advanced tread yet at onepeloton.com. Peloton, the official digital fitness partner of New York Road Runners.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Well, this week we shared something that we've been working on for a long time at New York Road Runners, an important moment for the organization and the future of how we show up in the world. It comes at an especially meaningful point in the organization's history, and reflects the impact that New York Road Runners has had on the city of New York and beyond. Joining Juliette and me now to help tell the whole story is co-head of marketing strategy at New York Road Runners, who spearheaded this big step forward for New York Road Runners, our new brand identity and our new logo, hopefully by now you've seen it. Welcome Juliette Morris, our chief marketing and digital officer, and Emily Casey, the co-head of marketing strategy. I'll start with you, Juliette, and the question of the day, which is why was now the right time to rebrand New York Road Runners and come out with this beautiful new logo?

00:35:12

Juliette Morris: Absolutely. And I will say that while it is such an honor to be here at this time and unveiling all the incredible work that we've done, this is certainly something that's been in the works even before I got here. And I would say-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: For those who don't know, Juliette's been here just over a year, so yes.

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Juliette Morris: Just over a year. And was something that I think really hit you when you got here at New York Road Runners. So, two things. One, when you just look at the visual identity of the New York Road Runners logo that has been used since 2012, it is iconic, it has served us really well, it is fabulous. It shows the road, it shows the runner, but the runner is what is out of date at this point. It is an ultra fit solitary man, and that is not who New York Road Runners is and it's not what running is today. Running is a communal activity. Certainly at times you're running alone, but it's a community. A singular figure does not represent that. And certainly New York Road Runners and running are about all body types, all types of people. And with the unbelievable boon that we are seeing with running, we are also seeing an incredible growth in female runners.

And so, what we wanted to do was make sure that our identity was not only contemporary and iconic, and could serve us well for decades to come, but that both the identity as well as the brand positioning was welcoming to all and inviting all in to our community and running.

00:37:07

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, it makes so much sense. And Emily, you were here for pretty much this entire process. As Juliette said, it's something we started looking at really after I'd been here for a little while, like, "Hey, is this," either the logo or the brand positioning that we had, and we had had, I guess a tagline that people had been familiar with for a long time called Run for Life, which had gone back a long way but it wasn't really being used consistently by the organization. And so, talk a little bit about the process of both coming up with this new brand identity, Believe in Every Step, and the new logo.

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Emily Casey: Amazing. And thank you, I liked how you sprinkled in that step line to introduce us because that's really something that we're carrying through all of this. The Believe in Every Step platform really did set the tone for the rest of this. We wanted to take a hard look at just the state of running, the state of the organization, where we were and where we want to go. I think looking at a lot of cultural insights, running insights, just the state of the city in general, and let that inform our next chapter. We considered a lot of mental health wellbeing or physical challenges and making sure running felt accessible to folks of all backgrounds, ages, because that really is what our mission does and our vision as well. So, that real first step to lean into the theme was updating our mission and vision.

And then from there, just taking a hard look at our brand platform, making sure that everyone has consistent messaging about how we talk, knows what we do, and that really the greater audience can see that and feel that in our communications, in our marketing, in our long-term campaign, and really tee us up for this rebrand in the next chapter of New York Road Runners.

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Juliette Morris: And I would add, if you're okay, Rob, that the work that Emily and team did with our agency, Yard NYC, to come up with Believe in Every Step, a big part of what we wanted to do was make sure that we opened up the aperture, similar to what we're doing with the visual identity, and make sure that even if someone didn't see

themselves as a runner or a runner today, they saw themselves with us and recognized that what we were sending out was a call for movement and forward momentum that anyone could be a part of regardless of how big or small that stride is.

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Emily Casey: Yeah, absolutely. And just to go off of that a little bit more, I think even looking at our tone and our personality, making sure that we were confident without being cocky, direct without being rude, ambitious, inclusive, innovative without being technical, really just taking a look at those positionings of the way we speak and what we do going forward.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, and it makes sense. And I know I've been following the reaction on social media, mostly to the logo, because that's of course what people react to. It's visual. Logos are such a subjective thing, people get used to something and they like it, and all of a sudden it's something new. And I actually have been surprised at how overwhelmingly positive the reaction has been, because you do expect a lot of folks to react negatively to change. That's just human nature in a lot of cases. But Juliette, first to you, why does it matter? That's one thing that I saw some people ask is like, what's the difference? Why do organizations and companies do this rebranding thing in a lot of cases and feel the need to refresh a logo, refresh a brand positioning? What is the real impetus behind organizations like New York Road Runners even doing this in the first place?

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Juliette Morris: No, it's a great question. And in a perfect world they're doing it for the reasons that we did it, which is you look at your organization, what you stand for, what your long-term goals are, what you're trying to accomplish, and make sure that the visual identity and the messaging is consistent with that and taking you forward. And as Emily and I both said, and you saw when you came into the organization, no pun intended about step, but the visual identity was out of step with who and what we were. And so, it's important that what we have created is enduring for us, and to move forward. I do believe that there are companies at times that just do it for the sake of doing it, and that is not what we did here. We made a very, very conscious step. And I know a lot of people in the comments are like, "Where is the runner?" But we made that step purposefully, because when you graphically show a runner

you are graphically showing one type of person and that is not who we are.

So the torch, which for hundreds of years has represented running, but most particularly represents Lady Liberty, and New York, and welcoming, and diversity is a better representation. And certainly by spelling out our name New York Road Road Runners, we are making it clear that we are a running organization as opposed to the abbreviation NYRR.

00:42:44

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

00:42:46

Emily Casey: And if I could just add to the more tactical use, our existing logo had some complexities with it having both NYRR and New York Road Runners. It was difficult in smaller instances, whether it was on a bug of a screen, for example what we're doing right now, like getting all of that into one spot is challenging. And with us having so many different races and programmings, making sure that New York Road Runners was prominent was squeezing a logo into a logo. So, our hope really with the torch and the simple, iconic, really memorable inkiness, the bold abstract symbol is that it will be iconic and that people will notice it. I keep coming back to one page of our brand guidelines that I'm personally very attached to, but it's our merchandise and it really is a lifestyle brand. It has the torch, and it's memorable, and you'll see it on a chest of a vest, or a windbreaker, or a pair of shorts.

And our hope is that people embrace it in that way too, that they recognize it running in the park or on the streets, and that it just becomes something lasting and enduring so we don't have to do this again for a very, very long time.

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Juliette Morris: Might need to be my first tattoo. Who knows?

00:44:07

Emily Casey: I love it, let's get matching.

00:44:10

Rob Simmelkjaer: I love it. And there's also, of course the connection, Juliette and Emily, with the torch to our marathon logo. And that's something that we talked about a lot as we consider different options. We of course looked at more than one potential logo option with our great partners on the design side, but having that connection between the marathon and the organization that owns, and stages, and puts on the marathon, New York Road Runners, was really to me

somewhat overdue because Juliette, you've heard me make the joke a million times, people don't always know that there's a connection between Road Runners and the marathon. Or some people think that, "Oh, the marathon is really all that we do here, and then we all go away for 11 months and don't have a full-time job." And this is really drawing that connectivity between the marathon and this organization that is doing incredible work all year long that hopefully will get people to get a better understanding of what New York Road Runners really is, Juliette.

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Juliette Morris: Well, absolutely, 100%. And as you know, when I first started I had the luxury of being fresh eyes going to our races and going to our events. And when I went in many cases, it was not obvious to me that it was our race in terms of ... We have the best sponsors and the best partners, and we put them front and center, as we should, loud and proud, but we almost had taken a step back and lost the ability to reinforce that this was part of our ecosystem in addition to our community programs. And so, to Emily's point about how iconic the torch is, one, it is a constant representation of our premier race, best and biggest in the world that creates that link. But this now iconic torch helps bring our entire ecosystem together, whether it be our Rising program, whether it be our Striders program, whether it be our halves or our 5Ks, you will know it is all part of New York Road Runners.

And it's so critical that we tie that together, not only so our community has a better sense of what's available to them, but so that it continues to tell the whole NYRR story, New York Road Runners story.

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Emily Casey: I was just going to add with the marathon in particular, I think that it is our marquee race, it is the most glamorous, but just making everyone else aware that we are a nonprofit behind that and that we do have those programs 365 days a year. And of course it culminates in 55,000 people, but we impact thousands and hundreds of thousands throughout the rest of the year, and just being able to draw that connection. We did a survey with Morning Consult where only about a quarter of people surveyed knew that New York Road Runners was the organization behind the marathon. And our hope is that that changes in a year or so.

00:47:27

Rob Simmelkjaer: That is the goal, that is a big goal. And I wanted to share my favorite reaction on social media so far

to our unveiling of the new logo and brand positioning. You guys might've seen this, it's from an amazing guy named Thomas Eller, who, if you don't know him, was actually the world's first deaf six star finisher, and is an incredible activist for inclusivity of all kinds. And he wrote this, give me a second to read this.

"The Statue of Liberty was never the monument, the torch always was. The torch is movement, the torch is courage, the torch is a promise passed on from runner to runner, mile to mile. With this symbol, NYRR is not changing a logo. You are declaring what this community truly is, a force that lights the way for every runner from the front pack to the last finisher, from the first step to the finish line, from unseen to finally seen. New York has always been the city that runs forward, loud, diverse, relentless, human. This torch says, 'You belong. Your story belongs.' Keep going. This is not branding, this is belief, and the road ahead just got brighter."

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Juliette Morris: When I read that-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: We did not pay Thomas out. We did pay Thomas Eller, Juliette. He wrote that on his own-

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Juliette Morris: Right. When I read that and I sent that to you, one, I had chills and I cried. It was as if he was in all of our meetings and worked here, and understood what we were trying to communicate, and how gratifying it was to read that. So thank you, Thomas.

00:49:06

Emily Casey: Absolutely. I was thinking that could be the voice track to a video, just unveiling the new logo. And he really did hit the nail on the head with that one, beautifully said.

00:49:17

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. Thank you, Thomas. Thank you to everybody who has weighed in. Positive or negative, by the way. We appreciate all feedback here at New York Road Runners, but I really do believe for those of you who maybe are taking a little while to adjust, and I know because we all have lots and lots of shirts, and clothes, and jackets, and beanies with the old logo. Don't worry, you can still wear them. It's okay, it is completely fine-

00:49:43

Emily Casey: It's vintage.

00:49:43

Rob Simmelkjaer: ... to wear that now vintage stuff so don't be ashamed, but you're going to enjoy this new positioning. You're going to enjoy this new representation of this organization, of the sport that we all love, running. And so, we welcome your slow transition to loving this new visual identity, those of you who are still getting used to it.

00:50:05

Juliette Morris: And Rob, I so appreciate this opportunity to speak to the audience and share this, because their biggest surprise was the loss of the runner. And I hope hearing the conversation that the three of us are having today, they understand that very specific choice that we made and the reason for it.

00:50:29

Rob Simmelkjaer: Couldn't agree more. Thank you, Juliette. Thank you, Emily. Congratulations, by the way, on a terrific job on this project. I'm thrilled with where we landed, and it really is setting the organization on a fantastic path for decades and beyond. Hopefully, to your point Emily, this is something that won't be done again in a very, very, very long time. So Juliette Morris, Emily Casey, thank you both very much.

00:50:53

Juliette Morris: Thank you all.

00:50:53

Emily Casey: Thank you.

00:50:53

Juliette Morris: Bye, Rob.

00:50:56

Rob Simmelkjaer: Looking to elevate your running routine? Check out Set The Pace, the official podcast of New York Road Runners presented by Peloton. Each episode features exclusive interviews with inspiring runners, pro training tips, and the latest on big events like the TCS New York City Marathon. Whether you're preparing for a big race or just love running, set the pace as your go to for motivation and advice. Tune in anywhere you listen to podcasts.

All right, that does it for this special town hall episode of Set the Pace. I want to thank all of our listeners for asking questions throughout the year that we're able to

answer. And of course, I want to thank our chief marketing and digital officer, Juliette Morris, and Emily Casey, our co-head of marketing strategy for joining me as well. If you liked the episode, leave us a question in the comments. We'll answer those questions all year long. Make sure you subscribe or rate it so others can find it as well. Enjoy the miles, stay warm, hope to see you this weekend at the Manhattan 10K. I think we'll get it in this weekend. Enjoy the miles, we'll see you soon.