

Matt Hart_final v3

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SPEAKERS

Justin Angle, Matt Hart, Jeff Meese



Justin Angle 00:00

Hey folks, please indulge me a brief special comment before today's episode. Doing this show is a great privilege. And with that privilege comes an obligation. My goal with these shows is to learn and to make sense of the world. As I sat with my daughter last Wednesday evening, watching events unfold at our nation's capitol, and trying to answer her many questions. Not much made sense. What are we watching? She kept asking. And the only answer I knew to be correct was watching history. Like many of you, I've been reading and listening and thinking a lot these last few days. One of the most profound things I read was from the Atlantic's and Applebaum. She wrote, we have promoted democracy in our movies and books. We speak of democracy in our speeches and lectures. We even sing about democracy, from sea to shining sea. In our national songs. We have entire government bureaus devoted to thinking about how we can help countries become and remain democratic. We fund institutions that do the same. And yet, by far, the most important weapon the United States of America has ever wielded in defense of democracy, in defense of political liberty, in defense of universal rights, in defense of the rule of law, was the power of example. In the end, it wasn't our words, our songs, or diplomacy, or even our money, or our military power that mattered. It was rather the things we had achieved the two and a half centuries of peaceful transitions of power, the slow but massive expansion of the franchise, and the long, seemingly solid traditions of civilized debate. So, as our leaders resumed their work on Wednesday night, we heard many of them declare, this is not who we are. Well, right now, I'm not so sure. In some ways, this is precisely who we are, or what we've allowed ourselves to become. The only

way the arc of history bends towards justice, is if we do the bending. So I urge all of you all of us, if you don't think what you saw on Wednesday, is who we are. What are you doing to fix that? It's gonna take all of us, and it's gonna take grace. Okay, thanks for listening. Now on to the show.

M

Matt Hart 02:57

But if you imagine yourself, you know, with a six figure contract on the Nike campus, running on the Michael Johnson track where Phil Knight can look out his window and see you every day, you know, you are in the most legit program, that there is on earth with the most powerful coach, and you just don't go into that relationship assuming that he might lead you astray. But he did.

J

Justin Angle 03:19

This is a new angle, and I'm your host, Justin Angle, marketing professor at the University of Montana College of Business. This podcast is my chance to speak with cool people doing awesome things in and around the great state of Montana. We are proudly underwritten by first security bank and Blackfoot. Hey folks, welcome back, and thanks for tuning in. Today we continue our healthy sports series by examining how many of the questions and issues raised in the last two episodes exist at the highest level of sport. In this case, elite professional running. Matt Hart is a former professional athlete turned investigative journalist. His reporting on questionable practices by elite coaches, doctors and their runners produced the front page stories in the New York Times, as well as his recently published debut book *Win At All Costs*. Matt and I discussed the role of sport in our society, the risks and trade offs facing athletes, and the abuse of coaching power at the hands of Alberto Salazar, former head coach of the Nike Oregon project. Matt is a dear friend. I really enjoyed this conversation. And I hope that you do too. So now I bring you, Matt Hart. So I'm here today with Matt Hart, investigative journalist, author of *Win At All Costs: Inside Nike Running and Its Culture of Deception*, Matt, so good to reconnect. So good to have you on the podcast and hear your voice. Thanks for being here.

M

Matt Hart 04:46

Yeah, Justin, thanks for having me.

J

Justin Angle 04:48

You know, actually, I was thinking about it this morning. Like we actually led parallel lives for a while. I mean, you went to a rival High School in New Hampshire. We didn't actually

know each other. You lived in San Francisco, and I did actually After college, but we didn't know each other, live in Seattle concurrently for a while, and then finally mad in like 2004. And yeah, it's just so wonderful to see to follow your writing and your success and your career progression. But also, congratulations on getting this this incredible piece of journalism and reporting out. I mean, it is, it is a piece of work. How do you feel having published your first book?

M

Matt Hart 05:29

I mean, it feels great. You know, when you work on anything for three plus years, just to have finally completed it feels like a win on some level. You know, and I can honestly admit, if it wasn't for my editors, my great editors at HarperCollins, I probably never would have published it. You know, I wish I would have just tinkered probably till I died. But at some point, when you have a book contract, they're like, Alright, it's time, you've got to stop being neurotic. And let us send this out into the world. And so yeah, it feels great.

J

Justin Angle 06:02

Awesome. Well, I think listeners should probably, I think listeners might like learning a little bit about your backstory. I mean, when we met, you were in the software industry, working at Microsoft, and left become a professional athlete and now a writer. Talk about your career choices, because they're not how one would draw them up in the career offices of a university like the one I work in.

M

Matt Hart 06:25

Yeah. I after graduating school, I did a work abroad program and found actually, the last year my last year at the University of New Hampshire, where I went to school, I found myself just enamored with computers, and wasn't studying computer science was studying Media Studies and communication and journalism. And so I kind of got sidetracked my senior year just became sort of obsessed with how computers work and did a work abroad program where I worked on computers and came back and eventually, through San Francisco in the internet, boom, got a job at Microsoft. And that's when we met, you know, that was with if you're, if you remember correctly, that we met in '04. I didn't quite remember that. But, uh, yeah, worked there through the end of '05, I think. And just, you know, I was the, I felt like a corporate drone, a little bit at Microsoft. And, you know, I had, I had been writing, although I couldn't see that far down river yet. You know, when we met, I was obsessed with ultra running and adventure racing.



Justin Angle 07:28

Yeah. And you were writing great stuff on your blog. I mean, that that became kind of a go to place for adventure athletes in the northwest, as I recall.



Matt Hart 07:35

Yeah. Yeah, that was really fun. I wrote a little bit for Mountain zone.com. when they were out. And, you know, I had a hit here or there that, I don't know, felt like something. But in hindsight, was probably nothing. But either way, it was enough to sort of put the seed in my brain and spur me on. And then, you know, I left Microsoft, with a little bit of money in the bank to try to, you know, run an adventure race professionally. And, you know, that was I mean, ultimately, objectively, to look back pretty unsuccessful, but it was, I kept afloat. You know, I could say that, and I could have



Justin Angle 08:08

defined success. Right? Yeah. Yeah, totally. You shifted your career effectively. And now, you know, you're, you're, you're an author, and so that you could say it's a success of a sort. Right.



Matt Hart 08:20

Yeah. I mean, honestly, that's just a little bit of false self deprecation. Because, you know, that was running has brought me almost everything good in my life. And so that time period, I didn't have any money to save, but I also didn't go into debt. And it was 10 years of, you know, running in the mountains with you and other friends, and really exploring what I could do physiologically. And it turns out, I'm not killing jorns. And that's okay. You know, the effort, I tried to become someone of that caliber, you know, brought me all the good things that are in my life now. So, you know, it's probably a failure, but I don't look at failure. You know, I don't, I don't, it was a necessary step. And I'm so happy it happened. And I would, you know, I do it all over again.



Justin Angle 09:05

And so one of the things I always thought about you, Matt, and I gotta sort of put this the right way. But, you know, when you became new, and you sort of started focusing on your athletic pursuits, I sort of felt like, I think Matt needs a little bit more than that. I think he needs more sort of intellectual engagement. And you quickly kind of got into your writing and got into your coaching. And I remember like rides and runs, like we would talk about

some of these gray areas and sport that you report on in your book. So well, we'll kind of get to the details of that. But like, at what point, I mean, you're interested in endurance, obviously, but you're also sort of interested in the culture and the norms and the rules and kind of how humans interact with trying to maximize their own performance. And how did you kind of get interested in those topics in general?

M

Matt Hart 09:57

Yeah, I mean, you were really there to discuss these topics with me when they were sort of fomenting in my brain. I mean, it really spurred from, you know, trying to be the best athlete that I could be. And of course, you know, the logical thing to do is read every training manual you can and try to understand human physiology. And then when I was coaching other athletes testing things on them and myself, and, and then of course, you know, we were kind of coming up at the time where, you know, Lance Armstrong put on a black hat, we went from the hero to the villain in our time, and you and I discussed this ad nauseum. I know, yeah, I could remember those around us, telling us to, you know, choose another topic. But I was just, I mean, as you were, I think I was just so burned by, you know, you know, I was wearing a yellow wristband, and I really had bought into this whole fable. And, and so I was really just trying to work out right and wrong. And then of course, coming up in a sport with really ultra running with very few rules. And, you know, I don't know if you remember, but I had, you know, about of overtraining syndrome. Many actually, probably more than one. But that led me to a doctor that offered me testosterone. And so I have, in my past, these first hand first person experiences with a lot of the situations the Nike athletes found themselves in, where they're being, I mean, testosterone is just illegal, you know, but the way it was proposed to me by the doctor, he's like, well, your sport doesn't test, you know, if you get tested, you'll you'll fail a drug test. That's kind of how he said it to me. And of course, I said, No thanks. And I knew enough about testosterone levels and energy levels. And to know that if I lessened my training, and I eat, right, and I sleep better, and I stopped drinking so much coffee, that my body will rebound from this, I don't need testosterone to bring it back to into the normal range. And so, you know, I mean, all that to say that so much of this story I had, I'd felt like I had a first person touch of, and I had struggled with some of these same questions. I mean, it wasn't even really a struggle for me. I mean, as you and I discussed back in the day, I mean, that was just, you know, EPO and testosterone or cheating.

J

Justin Angle 12:12

Yeah, she'd like bright lines around those sorts. Yeah, yeah.

M

Matt Hart 12:16

Yeah. But I was interested in, you know, the nuance of this, because it's not super clear with the other substances. L carnitine. is an amino acid. It's not a banned substance. You know, athletes with legitimate asthma should be on Advair, and some of these other drugs. And so that's why I thought the story of the Oregon project was so interesting, just because he, they were constantly grappling with these questions of gray area substances and tactics. And, you know, eventually, they stepped over the line enough times to be banned. Alberto Salazar and Dr. Jeffrey Brown. And now the team has been shuttered. But you know, I'd really just found these topics, sort of this moral line of where athletes were willing to go and where they weren't willing to go. And then that kind of the fear around, you know, speaking truth to a big brand, and, and the most powerful coach, in the sport, I just was enamored with the story. And once I got a hold of it, I just kind of kept reporting. Even without, you know, I, you know, didn't have a book deal at the beginning. But the more I reported, the more I realized, oh, there's, there's a real story here.

J

Justin Angle 13:21

Yeah. So let's talk about kind of how you got on the story. I mean, interested in the topics as we just discussed, but, you know, you've received kind of a secret tranche of documents, right, like, how did this all happen? It's very kind of, can there's some, like high drama and high mystery involved in what happened? I'm sure you can only tell us so much. But yeah, how did this unfold? Yeah,

M

Matt Hart 13:45

I mean, I keep the source of the document, a secret, but, you know, kind of how it went down was, I mean, first of all, I should say, as someone who's interested in these topics, when I started to write my journalistic curiosity was, you know, kind of pointed at these things, from endurance sports in general to doping and you know, I had done some reporting around, you know, an Italian athlete who doped and ultra running and, and written a story for the Atlantic about Lance Armstrong and Floyd Landis, his 100 million dollar lawsuit. And so I was, I was in this world of, you know, someone who wrote about these things. And basically, I mean, that's the simplest reason why I was sent this USB document because the person who had it sent it to me thinking, maybe you can do something about it.

J

Justin Angle 14:30

Are you the only person that was sent this?

M Matt Hart 14:32
No, no, I mean, it was subsequently published afterwards.

J Justin Angle 14:35
Okay.

M Matt Hart 14:36
But I, you know, I mean, it's hard. It's impossible for me to know, but when I reached out to, you know, Runner's World and and the New York Times, I said to them, you know, disabuse me of the idea that I'm the only one in the media with this file, but I'd really like to write about it for you. And part of me assumed, oh, Julian Macuer at the Times is probably already working on this, you know, someone, someone even you know, even deeper and with more experience than me, probably already has this. And so I actually reached out to Julia and she never responded. But she forwarded me to her editor who then of course made made the piece happen and no one in America, in American journalism, sports journalism seemed to have their hands on the file. And so, you know, then it was a process of like, Alright, what's the angle? What's the story? Or the The Times of London I should say, seem to either have a partial copy, or they figured out what was in it. And they wrote a couple very Eurocentric and mojarra centric pieces. They barely made an impression here, you know. And so when I got my hands on it, it was sort of obvious that, you know, the news really hadn't broken over here. And then, of course, the Times put it on the front page of the paper when it when we did publish it. So

J Justin Angle 15:45
Yeah, I mean, tell us about that. I mean, front page report, in the New York Times, I mean, that relative, I mean, you had written some great stuff up to that moment. But that was a moment of pretty significant breakthrough for you. How did it unfold? How did you sort of know that New York Times is going to publish it in such a prominent way?

M Matt Hart 16:08
Yeah, I had no idea until it came out that it was going to be on the page, actually. Yeah. I think if you work there, you know, you can you can fight for a one, as they say, or front page above your fold. And if you go into the editorial meetings, you know, maybe you have a say, but I had no say and no insight. I mean, my editor at the times told me when he told me it was gonna be in the newspaper. I was excited about that, because I wanted

to, I wanted to pick, go pick one up, and I had never written, you know, I was a magazine writer, I had never even written news for a newspaper. And it's funny, because he asked me, How old are you, Matt? I was like, I don't know, I was 43 at the time, he's like, Okay, I get it. Cuz, you know, he assumed if I'm in my early 30s, or even 20s, that I just wouldn't care if it came out in the newspaper. But I really wanted to, yeah, I wanted to hold on to it. And I knew the cover meant something, but I just didn't, you know, I didn't imagine that. He would, they would publish it on the front page. So I mean, I was pretty shocked the day that it came out.

J

Justin Angle 17:10

And so you wrote some subsequent pieces, and, you know, also in the Times that are in other places, and then at what point did the sort of idea of, like, how did you decide this has to go from, you know, a series of periodical articles to a book, like, I really need to do this in a book. How was that decision process?

M

Matt Hart 17:31

Yeah, that was pretty interesting. I mean, you know, trying to sort of follow this imaginary Krakauer-esque sort of career path. You know, where you write for a major magazine, and a story becomes interesting enough that it launches a book, or a book idea. I had, I mean, for years, I've had my feelers out, for my book idea, you know, this imagined, launch into being becoming an author. And so I was keen to figure out if this was ready to go, but really, you know, talking to Carrie Goucher behind the scenes when I was working on the New York Times piece, you know, just the courage that she had, I thought to myself, you know, I can I can build a book around her story, for sure. But then as I kept digging, I mean, honestly, I haven't been saying this, but I'm ready to say it now. There was just so I'm rigorously trying to figure out, I'm interrogating the facts, as they say, and, you know, it would have been just as happy to report, you know, that the media gotten it all wrong, or Salazar should be exonerated. You know, I really tried to go at it, you know, objectively as I possibly could, but almost immediately, you know, I'm confronted with people who are desperate to not let the story get out and angry at me. And and I mean, it doesn't take a rocket scientist, any journalists, spidey senses would start to tingle. And I was like, oh, there's way more here than people know. And that's when I started to realize, Oh, I mean, this whole story definitely hadn't been told. And then other people who, you know, were just angry and acting weird. And, you know, if you're a clean athlete, why on earth wouldn't you just talk to the guy who's writing about it for the New York Times, and you sort of just clear your chest and get it out there. But you know, people were very scared. And that was obvious, really early on. And I just thought, oh, that this whole cake is is this all these ingredients will make a whole cake. So

J

Justin Angle 19:26

indeed, so that's, I'm feeling those flashbacks of conversations where other people in the room said, Hey, you guys talk about something else. And maybe the reason being is because we might have left some listeners behind like, I want to make sure we sort of set the stage here. For those listeners that don't know the details of this story. Let's start with what is what was the Nike Oregon project and who is Alberto Salazar and let me just sort of give us the set the stage for us. Yeah.

M

Matt Hart 20:00

So Alberto Salazar is a Cuban born American who became basically one of America's best runners. Definitely one of our best marathoners. You know, he went, you know, after the fame of Steve Prefontaine, you know, the next generation through University of Oregon was, you know, Alberto Salazar, and Rudy Chapa. And, and, you know, they kind of dominated the NCAA, and before Alberto even left college, he was calling his shots at, you know, the New York City Marathon, which he won three times in the early 80s. And the Boston Marathon, he was a household name by 1982, which is the one the Boston Marathon. And he had had some legendary battles with athletes. And, you know, he had chosen Nike as a sponsor, and he's widely seen as being sort of the first runner to receive a, you know, not a football, not an NFL or NBA size salary, but I think Nike paid him a quarter million dollars back in the day. And so, you know, professional running had gone from, you know, recreational runners where if you wanted to compete in the Olympics, no races had prize money, no one was professional, you had to remain an amateur to even compete in the Olympics. And, you know, that sort of ended around Frank Shorter's time, he won the 72 gold medal in the Olympics, and it was sort of robbed in the 76 Olympics by someone who was found to be, you know, doping on the East German program. And so, you know, that changed everything doping in '76 was now all of a sudden a huge issue. The East German women, you know, didn't look like women anymore. They had been so dosed for so many years with so many steroids and, and so the, the sporting world was really sort of at a turning point. And then and then the Olympics, of course, then changed, you know, where professional athletes could then perform and, and, you know, Frank Shorter, was sort of one of the first guys to start getting paid, but Alberto Salazar was then the next guy to start beating in and became, you know, the next most famous American athlete. And so long story short, Alberto had successfully overtrained himself, right, you know, and, and went into a period of a decade or longer of, you know, just sadness and poor performances and throwing everything at the wall to improve his performance because he is essentially, you know, destroyed his endocrine system and his testosterone had cratered. And his hormones were a wreck, and he contemplated suicide and he had, you know, retire from professional running. And eventually, long story short, I'm trying to make it short, he ended up at Nike in the marketing department. That's what he'd studied

at the University of Oregon. And so fast forward through, you know, the next level. So there were about two decades of really lackluster American performance in Nikes, an American brand, you know, created and born and bred here in Oregon. And so Alberto

J Justin Angle 22:57
with running at its core

M Matt Hart 22:58
yeah

J Justin Angle 22:59
I mean, that's, that's a piece of this too, is like, as this guy, Alberto Salazar is starting to really sort of dominate marathons and a brash sort of irreverent way. I mean, read, you know, Phil Knight's autobiography, Shoe Dog, like Nike is sort of coming up with a similar brashness and a similar like, irreverence and trying to break through break some of the rule like it's, it's kind of part of their origin story is how they, you know, I could see how these two characters fit well together, the Phil Knight, Nike brand and Salazar in his character as well.

M Matt Hart 23:34
Yeah, Nike seemed to specifically seek out athletes from their first sponsored athlete, Natasa, who is a tennis player, you know, he was known as a sort of a petulant child on the court. And Nike was attracted to these rebellious athletes, so to speak that one. And so it should be said, you know, Alberto won his last big race, the Boston Marathon, or I shouldn't say that he won in 94 as part of the story of the comrades marathon but, you know, after he won Boston and 82, you got to remember Adidas was the global sports brand, the biggest global sports fan back then. So it wasn't till 83 the neck The following year, that Nike surpassed Adidas and worldwide sales, in part because you know, of athletes like Alberto Salazar, you know, they were so prominent and all over the television and Nikes just masterful masterfully marketing them all with their commercials and, and so yeah, Alberto had headed over to the Boston Deli on the Nike campus in Beaverton, Oregon, in 2001. And he sat down with a vice president at the time, Tom Clark, who was also a really experienced marathoner. And they watched you know, the Boston Marathon proceed and we're just kind of disgusted with America, the Americans, American racers performance. Sure, you know, the fastest or the best athlete I think, finished six place and you know, Alberto had been the last American to win the race. And so they're, they

basically hatched a plan that day, like, all right, well, we've got these countries who are, you know, illegally supporting their athletes in some cases. But whatever the case, the East African countries are dominating the sport and Americans are not no longer relevant. And so they decided to put money in technology. And put Alberto at the helm of this team, the Nike Oregon project, they weren't named at the time that name came later. But, you know, they decided to just put Nikes law just behind, you know, a real running program that started early with collegiate athletes. And then they even worked backwards to high school athletes with Galen Rupp, and a few others. For about 10 years, they really didn't do anything all that impressive. You know, without with the exception of Kara. She was racing nationally pretty well, especially as she got into marathons in the later stages of her career, but they hadn't had anyone in on an international podium, really. And that all changed in 2011 with Galen Ruffin, and mo fara going one and two at the Olympics. But that's the origin.

J

Justin Angle 26:00

So let's focus on just two characters that play so prominently in the story Adam and Cara Goucher. He's interesting, Adams, a character who's now sort of been detailed in multiple books. I mean, I remember reading about Adam in Running with a Buffalo. I think it was Chris Lear's documentation of a season at the University of Colorado's cross country team and Adam is sort of the star runner during that season. Now later meets and marries Kara Goucher, and now the two of them as budding professional athletes are some of the the first prominent characters signed by Nike Oregon project. Is that kind of the because they were too big gets for that program early on, right?

M

Matt Hart 26:44

Yeah, yeah, the team had, you know, Alberto had kind of dismissed the early years of saying, you know, we had, we had B players at one point, when he was asked to sort of account for the first five years of the program or whatever, I guess that would only be three years of the program. So that Goucher's joined in '04. And really, at first, you know, Kara, it's hard to realize this now, because she became, you know, Nikes, most prominent runner, but back in the day, when they were recruiting the two of them. Adam was the prominent runner, he was America's hope he was, you know, Bob Kennedy had dominated the scene for years. And Adam was one of the first American athletes to ever beat him. And so it seemed as though Adam was next in line to be, you know, America's best runner, and he had signed with Fila out of college. And so Nike had to wait for him for quite a while. And then when they signed him, they kind of signed Kara as an afterthought. But they signed her nonetheless. And then Adams career, you know, unfortunately, through probably some some witch's brew of overtraining, and Albertos, I don't know

miscalculations with athletes that his career started to nosedive, and Kara became the prominent athlete on the team.

J

Justin Angle 27:55

Yeah, and the treatment of Kara was something that played a big, you know, it's a big thread in the book, whether it's sort of, you know, how she was treated as a female athlete relative to male athletes how she was, you know, how her her anatomy sort of journey into parenthood was part of the story. And then her comeback from pregnancy. Talk about Kara's experience, because she, I mean, you had to have had developed a pretty close source relationship with her a lot of what she shares in the book is pretty courageous.

M

Matt Hart 28:30

Kara, you know, as she she really grew close to Alberto. And so, you know, one thing that readers have to realize is, for coaching athletes experience and relationship to work, the athlete really has to buy into what the coach is telling them 100%. Otherwise, the first time you're tired, or you're asked to do something that you don't agree with, you just won't do it. And so, one thing that Alberto did really well, at the beginning was, you know, he fostered this sort of familial environment where, you know, they go to church together, and they do all their workouts and treatments together. And so, you know, Adam, you know, he was just going after he was just experiencing injury after injury. And so he focused even his own attention as he was recovering on on Kara and her career and helping her psychologically, and in Alberta, and her grew to be very close through this period. And she really started to, you know, perform really well. She'd be Paula Radcliffe, at a Great North Run in England, which really kind of shocked people and sort of brought Kara to the forefront. And then Kara, you know, then subsequently went and was invited to the New York City Marathon and got to ride along in one of the cars and watched Radcliffe who'd she just beat you know, six months earlier, or some some such around there. When the New York City Marathon again, and it really sort of ignited this idea and her that, you know, okay, maybe Alberto is right, that I'm going to be a long distance runner and I'm going to be a marathon runner, but she'd never really been interested in before. And, you know, they had seen things They didn't like, throughout. And, you know, it just hadn't hit a tipping point yet where they were worried. You know.

J

Justin Angle 30:08

Adam and Kara had seen practices or debates people retreated that just raised some red flags for them. Is that

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Matt Hart 30:15

Yeah, yeah. 100% I mean, they came to love Alberto, you know, Kara, and our first time we sat down with the recorder, you know, tearfully explained that to me, and how she didn't want the book to be all bad. She's like, we had great times. And so part, you know, in deference to her, I really, I mean, and journalism and journalistic integrity, basically, I tried to, you know, portray that in the book as like, Look this, these were, you know, at least good times at the beginning, and they had just seen so many things that accumulated and they weren't yet naive when they started their young kids. So Kara described, you know, testosterone cream on the counter and oh, seven training camp. Sure. And of course, now and my, our modern setting and being who I am, I'm like, why didn't that raise any flags? And she had the, you know, her honest explanation is we were just so naive, Alberto, you know, he had a head out, he had had a heart attack, and he had cream. And we just didn't really pay attention to what it was.

J

Justin Angle 31:15

A new angle is brought to you by first security bank and Blackfoot two cool companies doing awesome things all over Montana.

J

Jeff Meese 31:22

Hi, this is Jeff Meese media technician at the College of Business, and you're listening to a new angle.

M

Matt Hart 31:33

And we so trusted him that of course it would be, you know, anything illegal. And so, you know, sort of a slow and gradual unmasking of, you know, the depths of which he was willing to go. I mean, to be fair to him. It doesn't it? Well, I can't even I can't even begin to try to speak to him. Because some of the things I just can't logically explain even to this day, why he would do certain things. But you know, he kept going closer and closer to the line. And then you know, of course, eventually he stepped over it. And that's why you saw it abandoned from sport.

J

Justin Angle 32:05

Well, let's, let's talk about that. I mean, because the culture of this team, the practices of this team you describe are not like the stories we hear from Armstrong in US Postal. I mean, when you're talking about some of these sites, these these pro cyclist stories, you're

talking about EPO and blood transfusions and growth hormone and like, you know, substances in practices that are clearly against the rules, and they're the game they were playing was trying to beat the testing, essentially. Whereas the culture you describe is trying to find areas that maybe aren't regulated yet. advantages that aren't known broadly yet. loopholes and just push the limits of gray as far as you can. So maybe kind of just paint the picture of maybe through an example of one of these practices. I think that the l carnitine. infusions is a great example. therapeutic use exemptions, things like that, like this is a different type of performance maximization.

M

Matt Hart 33:18

Yeah. Yeah. The marginal gains that you heard about in cycling, indeed, that's really what they seem to be going for. And it's the idea that, you know, Lance Armstrong described EPO as a 10 percenter, and he described all the other drugs as 3234 percenters. And so you know, EPO was the 10 percenter, meaning you kind of had to be on it if you wanted to compete, at least that's what he were arguing. And these drugs, with the exception of testosterone, which we can talk about later that Salazar was involved with, really were more, you know, they had this ostensible deniability where a doctor would prescribe them. And we didn't find out till later that oftentimes, none of the athletes would test sort of out of the normal range for these drugs. So Salazar had a number of things he felt would help an athlete from, you know, high doses of vitamin D, which he was, so he was obsessed with a testosterone and he, he thought high doses of vitamin D would increase an athlete's testosterone. So he had all the athletes on, you know, 50 IU twice, you know, twice a week, which is, that's a lot. That's a ton. I mean, that's, it's medical grade. And so that's why you need a prescription to have that much vitamin D, which is also a hormone prescribed to you. You can't just pick up that much in a pill at your local drugstore. And so, you know, he had this pet theory and he had tested it on his sons often and and he thought that helped and the idea of marginal gains being if that's a one percenter, you, you know, you get 10 of these one percenters and you've got 10% they're all going to equal maybe what an EPO would give you. And he wasn't necessarily wrong there. But, you know, he just started bumping up against the rules and l carnitine. You know, another Nike lab performance lab director had brought this to Alberto he had just run into the research in his in his daily work and he said you should look at carnitine. It looks like it helps athletes with fat metabolizing meaning that they could run further on fat fuel without tipping and dipping into their carbohydrate stores, which then cause you to bark you know, in their limited stores during a marathon. So this would give an athlete extended endurance basically, until Alberto dug into that with this new assistant coach Steve Magnuson, you know, where they went wrong was really just because out. So carnitine is an amino acid, it's hard to load into the muscle. And so you need sugar to loaded into the muscle. And they found that through the research, you know, injecting it or infusing it was the best way to get it

instantly into an athlete's body. And the research was created and done by this Nottingham group who was then going to try to commercialize it by making a drink. Well, they found out when you drink carnitine, it takes months for it to actually absorb into the muscle. And so Alberto just took the step of like, well, let's see how we how much we can infuse and still stay within the rules. But who knows what the conversations were going on behind closed doors, but, you know, he eventually infused it in at least one athlete, probably many athletes, just at a level that's not allowed. So you are not allowed to, you know, infuse 50 milliliters and more than 50 milliliters in a six hour period. And so they found that if they did that, in the first athlete, he did it to his assistant coach Steve Magnuson, who was also a current athlete at the time. So it was a definite violation of the rules. But you know, they gave him 1000 milliliters so way over, you know, any ostensible sort of argument that we're doing this within the rules, and then from then on, they ingest, they infused it in, you know, athletes like Galen Rupp and Mo Fara and Dathan Ritzenhein, you know, many of the best runners in the world. And, and the doctor who is also banned with Alberto just stopped writing down the quantity of the infusion. And so, you know, that's so obviously, medical malpractice, on some level, like, there's a few things you have to write down and one of them is the quantity of the drug that you're injecting. And so leaving that out, just seems so suspicious, but it also got pretty much got them off on being caught to have infused all the other athletes. But he did write down what he had infused Steve Magnuson with. And so there's all this smoke around all the other athletes, but that's just that's just one example. He frequently like to, you know, give female athletes diuretics, so they could get their weight down, he would often change their birth control pills, their birth control, I should say, in a way that, you know, they would menstruate less and maintain more blood maintain more red blood cells for running. And so, you know, everything was looked at, you know, literally from your birth control pills to your daily vitamin. And he, you know, he just kept pushing that line and sort of obsessing over each and every one of them, and to see if it would work. And it was really quite anecdotal. Would it work for that athlete? It wasn't, these weren't, you know, recent, you know, this wasn't properly set up research. With placebo, it was just data and run a little faster today, after he's had his vitamin D for two weeks. And so sort of haphazard and there's that in their lives, the risk with the athletes, and you know, that we can go into examples of that. But well, that

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Justin Angle 38:22

I mean, that's a big part of it, too. And that, you know, some of this is Salazar's own theorizing, some of it but but a lot of this work needs to happen. In some sort of collaboration with a doctor, and Dr. Brown is the character you write about. Their relationship is an interesting one, because it sounds like sometimes, whatever Salazar asks Dr. Brown to do, he'll do. And then other times, Dr. Brown says no, and so the their

relationship is an interesting piece of that. And another thing we should mention, are these therapeutic use exemptions, right? So there are certain categories of substances, that if you've got a medically valid reason to use it, you can get an exemption for that. And doctors sort of adjudicate that process. And you know, and Salazar pushed the limits of that exemption process. So maybe describe that relationship between Salazar and Brown.

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Matt Hart 39:23

Yeah. So in 2004, you know, Adam had joined the team and almost immediately started to deal with injuries and issues and he had won a national championship and was like I was telling you after Bob Kennedy, he was really supposed to be the next great American athlete, but he had cratered himself essentially. And I say that I think we talked about this earlier, but I knew I had done that to myself, so I knew that feeling. And he, you know, after racing after a track workout with Cole Pepper, another famous American athlete, he, like left the track in tears, checked himself into the ER and said I'm feeling so terrible, you have to tell me what's going on, I'm headed to the Olympics. And so his his former coach at CU, Mark Wetmore had told him about a doctor named Dr. Jeffrey Brown, who, you know, was being heralded in the sports scene in the National Sports Scene as like the guy to go see. And he had worked with Carl Lewis and other famous athletes. And his thing was prescribing thyroid medications, thyroid hormones, to athletes who probably didn't need it. We know that now. So he extent he claims to have extended Carl Lewis his career. And he did that by giving him you know, we think thyroid medication, which can you know, works on your metabolism ups, your metabolism allows you to lose weight quicker when you're trying to get down to a raceway, it gives you more energy throughout the day to train. And so that was our thought, as he thought many drugs also helped increase testosterone. There's very scant evidence of that, but he had that pet theory. And so yeah, you really need if you're going to work in these gray areas, you need a doctor to help prescribe the things and so Adam went to see the doctor got on thyroid medication. And it should be said that he didn't test out a range, you know, TSH, thyroid stimulating hormone, you know, between point five, up to 4.12 million international units is the range. And Adam tested squarely in that range, you know, like five times, so he was not someone a normal doctor would prescribe thyroid hormone to okay, but Dr. Brown prescribed it to him anyway, as he had done with, like I said, Carl Lewis and other athletes. And so Adam started racing better and feeling great. And then Alberto went to see the doctor. And now Dr. Brown's you know, now Dr. Brown's in this weird, he has, Alberto is a patient. And he has Nike, as a boss, where they're paying him, and but he's also responsible for the athletes care. But as you you know, there's a conflict here. So are you going to try to, regardless of the athletes, long term health, are you just going to try to make them run really well in the next Olympics? Or are you going to do what you're supposed to what

you've what you've, you know, taken an oath to do for their long term health. And it seems like he just started to fall towards the pressure of making great athletes. And they should, I mean, he, he loved this, you know, he would do presentations, where he, you know, would claim that he helped Carl Lewis and others, you know, come back from the brink and win, you know, subsequent gold medals. And so he saw himself as this groundbreaking doctor. And so Adam seems to have connected him to the team. Then Carolyn saw him and the rest of the team sort of got in line to see Dr. Brown. And, you know, there was nothing nefarious back in the day at the beginning. Or at least maybe in Alberto's mind, there was but to the rest of the athletes, you know, a doctor was prescribing them this substance. And so maybe some of them thought, this weird that I'm still in the range, but he thinks I should be on it. But they really did just trust their doctor wholeheartedly. And that, yeah, so the relationship between the two of those, the two men, the doctor and the coach, you just evolved over time where most of the time, Dr. Brown seem to be, you know, totally a team player, and on Alberto's side, but there was a break. Dr. Brown, seemingly, really liked the limelight, and he did an interview with The Wall Street Journal about his techniques. And that, as far as I can tell, seem to be the break between the two, because Alberto did not appreciate that. And Nike did not appreciate that Dr. Brown was sort of spilling his secrets about the thyroid hormones that he was prescribing to the athletes to the rest of the world. And so the two had sort of a falling out there. And yeah, the rest is history. I mean, you saw, you know, in 2015, the BBC and Propublica, you know, had talked to enough people to amass enough information on the tactics to report further on it and, and that sort of, well, that and some whistleblowing really launched the solder report, and they chased down, you know, all credible leads, and that led to the suspension September 30, 2019.

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Justin Angle 44:04

And what you're describing in in this reporting is, it almost seems more pernicious than, you know, the EPO growth hormone blood bag type of doping, because in some instances, it almost seems like the athletes, like you said, they're they're putting themselves in a physician's care and a coach's care. And then they're being they're being you know, prescribe medications that you have doctor tells you, you need a medication. Okay, that seems that seems like a thing I should say yes to usually like there's this power dynamic there and then and then so it's something like I carnitine. There's probably this like, hey, well, I've never heard of this thing. What is it is illegal, like these athletes seemed like they're in a, in a position where they don't really, you know, we often put the choice to dope or not dope on the feet of the athlete, and then ultimately, like, that's the person I guess, who's is deciding whether to ingest something or not. But it's not quite so simple. And this is this is part of the gray area, too.

M

Matt Hart 45:12

Yeah, I mean, I the way I explain it, you know, as you say, athletes are responsible for everything they put into their body. But if you imagine yourself, you know, with a six figure contract on the Nike campus, running on the Michael Johnson track where Phil Knight can look out his window and see you every day, you know, you are in the most legit program, that there is on earth with the most powerful coach, and you just don't go into that relationship, assuming that he might lead you astray. But he did. I mean, he deeply betrayed all of these athletes, there are times where, you know, the athletes did at times protest, like you like the quote, kind of you were just alluding to his data and written and asking him like, Alberto, this doesn't seem legal, like, is this legal? And he said, Yes, of course it is. But what they were doing, you know, we found out later was, you know, just not writing down how much the infusion they were getting infused, and just kind of playing games, with the rules, assuming that you sada or no one would ever go back and look at the medical records. And so, yeah, I mean, it is ultimately the athletes and what they they're responsible for what they put into their body. But I mean, you can have to empathize with them on some level, and I do throughout. Yeah, I mean, even in my situation, where a doctor, I didn't know that well had offered me testosterone. I mean, I didn't think twice about it, because it was testosterone. But if you imagine that, and another, you know, as being a lesser drug, or one that no one's heard of, you know, you could take something not in your best long term health interest, or even that can put you at risk of failing a drug test, you know, just under the guidance of a doctor that you trust. And so with Coach and Doctor both telling you, you, you have to do this, you know, the power dynamic comes in here where Alberto would sort of hold contracts over athletes heads. And he did that with Dathan Ritzenhein for sure. They stopped paying an old point. And, you know, Steve Magnus, also the assistant coach was, he told me, you know, they just stopped paying me at some point. And when I brought it up to Alberto, he said, he'd go look into it. And and he ultimately, you know, in hindsight, thought, though, he was trying to manipulate me, he was letting me use reminding me that I could stop these checks at any time. And the power, the power dynamic? Yeah.

J

Justin Angle 47:19

So let's, so we've given I think, hopefully, the audience a great lot of great reasons to check out the book when at all costs. But I'd like in our remaining time, Matt, if you could indulge me, let's pull the lens back a little bit and talk about what you've learned about endurance, sports, culture, performance, it's really easy to throw up your hands and sort of feel like anything you see in the Olympics, or in professional sports is not real. How do you feel about sport in general, and kind of the ethics of sport and maximizing performance?

M

Matt Hart 47:58

Yeah. I mean, that's a good question. And I'm, I'm working that out every day. Yeah. I mean, it was terribly disheartening. I talked to in my work before the book, but then for the book, I talked to some experts on performance enhancing drugs, and, you know, they'd been around the block, these are names you've probably known or have read in the paper before, but they basically would say things like, you know, anything on television, there's such a financial incentive there that they're doing. These are the corrupted sports, the ones you see on TV, the ones with money, and then and, you know, Adam had this, you know, as I quote him in the book, he thought 90% of American sports are corrupted and or sport is corrupted in general. I mean, he meant tennis and golf and all of them, you know, it's impossible to know how true that is. I fear that it's that that's, that is actually the truth where there's enough money in it, you know, athletes are going to cheat. So it was terribly disheartening to realize that on some level, but then you don't have to say on the very same campus, there's a coach named Jerry Schumacher, who is an honest and honorable man.

J

Justin Angle 49:06

Yeah, he seemed like a fantastic character.

M

Matt Hart 49:08

Yeah. I mean, I was just blown away with him. And he, he was there at the same time as Alberto and, you know, he kept his moral compass, so to speak, you know, pointed in the right direction, I guess. He was he managed to in this environment, this this one at all costs world of Nike, you know, he managed, he had been hired. So Alberto had a heart attack in 2007. And they hired Jerry Schumacher from University of Wisconsin, this, you know, heralded coach to take his place because they didn't know how long Alberto was going to last. You know, he was tired and he was having other symptoms. later on. He thought he was having another heart attack and so they're like, Well, we've got Galen Rupp and Kara Goucher we've got America's best runners, we better get them a backup coach and so they hired Jerry and as it turned out, Alberto gets, you know, came back to full health and stayed on to coach but you know, Jerry just instantly came in and like clashed away from Alberto. He couldn't, he couldn't bring himself to believe in all of these tricks and tactics that Alberto was doing, you know, the obsession with supplements, and that kind of thing. And so he clashed and went off and started coaching the BARROWMAN Track Club, which still exists today. But it just goes, you know, it just goes to show like a guy with that kind of moral fortitude, I guess, is able to navigate those waters. And so he those waters, even though like he's literally in the belly of the beast, you know, like that the expectations on his team are just as severe as they were for Alberto's team. But he couldn't bring

himself to believe in this, what he saw is sort of just nonsense, you know, wasting your time on supplements when you know if you eat right, sleep, right, and train, right. We know those work. And that's 90% of, you know, making a great athlete. And so he just leaned into those. And he gave me you know, great hope, as did Steve Magnus, who quit the program and whistle blew, and now has gone on to, you know, coach at the university level and, you know, become somewhat of a famous coach now, even though you know, Alberto, of course, tried to discredit him throughout the process, but those guys give me hope that they're doing willing to and doing it, right. I mean, I say this and the end of the book, you might have catch the drift there that like, Will people stick around to watch professional track and road running through all this. And that's really me. I mean, that's, that's what I was feeling. At the end of the book, like, can I even, you know, now that I've finished this book on this sport, can I will I even sit down to watch? And I think I do still, but often for the wrong reasons. Yeah, train wreck, rather than the inspirational athletes.

J

Justin Angle 51:44

I remember the arc I went through with professional cycling. I mean, the Armstrong years and the Tour de France are some of the most fun. Yeah, sports fandom I ever experienced, like we would, we would watch these things. It was he was it was the hero the drama, but also like, whatever, you know, substances they were on it made for, like, incredibly compelling sport to watch. Yeah. And it's, you know, the sport is kind of, you know, who knows what's happening in the sport now, but it's lost some of that excitement. You can talk about why that is. There's a bunch of reasons. But that's part of it, too. It's like, I don't know, if I'm interested in an NFL where players are slower and can't jump as high. It is entertainment. And ultimately, the entertainment dollar is what drives it. And so it creates this weird, complicated set of incentives. And the morality behind all those things is very confusing.

M

Matt Hart 52:43

Yeah, it always seemed, it mattered more to me when I was trying to be one of those athletes. I don't know. Yeah, for sure. Yeah. Yeah. And now, like you said, you can possibly we can look at it more just for the entertainment factor. But when it feels unfair, because you're one of the athletes, and we're in a different sport, but to imagine people cheating and ultra running, you know, would have infuriated us, you know, we wanted a fair we wanted a fair chance at, you know, winning a race or performing well. And so that is one aspect that's obviously long faded for me. But, you know, I mean, there's a number of arguments that Armstrong makes, you know, everyone was doing it, which is completely untrue. And, well, if we're all on the same drugs, you know, they're so even within if you're all using the same drugs, as you know, like there's a there's a genetic range here of who's a

hyper responder and who might not respond at all. Yeah, it's another variable. So even if you're all on the same drugs, I hate this argument, because no one points it out. You might be a hyper responder to EPO, and I'm not, or, you know, as they know, as we know, from from the books about the Tour de France days, Tyler Hamilton, for instance, was had, I think it was in '96. And Armstrong was '92. So Armstrong could double basically, dope twice as much. Yep. That before he hit that 50% magic line, that they would test the athletes for and so so Tyler could only dope a little bit, but Lance could dope a lot. And you know, and it's just like, that's not even, that's not obviously not a level playing field that everyone thinks would miraculously exist, if we could all just dope. And then the risks to the drugs. You know, Salazar had the athletes on calcitonin because he, this drug he thought helped with stress fractures. And one of the athletes brought up to him like, hey, guys, this is correlated with increased cancer risk. And so they freaked out and took the team off it, but there's the risk and like trying anything and throwing anything at the wall, you know, that these some of these substances are, are dangerous, you know, and in certain combinations for certain athletes, you know, really dangerous. And so I can't get on board with the Wild West sort of argument. But, you know, when you're outside of the sport, like we were just talking about, and it's just entertainment for you. Yeah, you do want them to be able to do the things See windmill dunk can jump higher and, and run faster. But at what, at what risks to their lives? You know, I'm talking with the UFC, which I love to watch. But I know, you know, it's the ultimate fighting. Yeah, it's leaving these athletes with brain damage, you know, as is football. And, you know, it's very complicated. These are nuanced issues. I mean, that's one of the reasons. I mean, that's what I tried to do in the book. You know, this is a complicated, nuanced story. Alberto is a human being, you know, he's not, he's not evil incarnate. He's not all bad or all good. He's a nuanced human being that's made mistakes, as have I, we all have, you know, Nike, the same way I treat them the same way. There's great people there. There's people who make, you know, silly or bad mistakes in an effort to win at all costs. And, and so hopefully, the book, you know, book length treatment of the story, I think, was necessary to really lay that out. Like, this is definitely not black and white. And it's not Armstrong, you know, injecting EPO with breakfast before he goes to dominate the tour.

J

Justin Angle 55:59

100%. Well, Matt, this has been fantastic. Congratulations on the book. And so great to kind of learn more about the behind the scenes of how it came to be. I know, it's a dangerous question to ask writers. But what's what's next for you other than fatherhood, but what's next?

M

Matt Hart 56:20

Yeah, yeah, it's coming up quick. But, you know, I'm working on a story for The New Yorker, which is kind of been a dream of mine along this journalism route. And I know I'm at risk of saying that because you know, you never know in this in this industry, what's going to get published and what's not. But that's pretty much what I'm focused on now. And kind of working on a new book idea. But yeah, those are the two things really

J Justin Angle 56:44

well, I look forward to a time when we can get together share some time on the trail and the bikes on skis, whatever it is. Best to you and your soon to be family. Congratulations again on the book.

M Matt Hart 56:58

Yeah, thanks so much. I appreciate the chat. It's fun.

J Justin Angle 57:03

Thanks for listening to a new angle, we really appreciate it. A new angle is underwritten by first security bank and Blackfoot with support from the University of Montana College of Business and consolidated electrical distributors. AJ Williams is our producer, Jeff Emet, John Wicks and BTO made our music and Jeff Meese is our master of all things sound. If you have any questions, suggestions, comments, insults, whatever, please email me at anewangle@montana.edu. If you like what you heard, tell your friends about it. Thanks a lot. See you next time.