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Rob Simmelkjaer: New York Road Runners is a non-profit organization with a vision to build healthier lives and stronger communities through the transformative power of running. The support of members and donors like you helps us achieve our mission to transform the health and well-being of our communities through inclusive and accessible running experiences, empowering all to achieve their potential. Learn more and contribute at nyrr.org/donate.

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Speaker 2: Thank you, New York. Today, we're reminded of the power of community and the power of coming together. Athletes, on your mark.

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Speaker 3: The first woman to finish for the second straight year here in the New York City Marathon is Miki Gorman, a smiling Miki Gorman, and why not? 2: 29:30, the time for Grete Waitz.

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Speaker 4: Look at the emotion of Shalane Flanagan as she comes to the line. Pointing to his chest, pointing to the USA he so proudly wears across his chest. A great day for Meb Keflezighi!

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Hey, everybody, and welcome to another episode of Set The Pace presented by Peloton. It's the official podcast of New York Road Runners. I'm your host and CEO of NYRR, Rob Simmelkjaer. With me, week in and week out from Peloton, Becs Gentry, the woman about to go on this insane global running journey of seven marathons on seven continents in seven days. Becs, how are you?

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Becs Gentry: Oh, living the dream.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Sounds like a nightmare to me. Oh, my goodness. No, it's incredible. I'm still reeling from what it is you're going to do. You announced it on your social after the episode last week.

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Becs Gentry: Oh, my gosh.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Here it starts, huh? It must be an incredible

training journey now that you have. How are you even thinking about training for this incredible feat, especially given how hot it is in New York right now?

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Becs Gentry: Yeah, we've been throwing the curve balls here, but I think part of this race is the unknown. As much as we can say it's going to be unbearably cold in Antarctica, yes, the other six races are probably going to be warmer rather than cold, but we don't really know. Miami could be really humid or it could be torrential rain. So, having the mindset right now of I have to go out and run and run a couple of times a day, get myself tired, and run on tired legs. The heat has been something I've just had to work through and it has helped me bring my pace down, be more humble with my pace, because there's no way I'm doing speed work out there. It's been good to run with people, because if you do feel a bit funny, it's better to have a friend with you who might be able to help you get to some water. It's been great learning to run with water as well because we are very lucky here in New York City, there's a lot of water fountains on most of our run routes here. But having said that, I still feel better if I'm running with water and electrolytes in my hand. I'm trying to go early, Rob. I'm trying, but I really like my mornings with my baby girl. I love the wake up time with Tallulah, so I struggle to do that. So, I have actually been running 9:00 onwards. This morning was brutal. I don't know what the dew point was this morning, but it felt like 100%.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I don't know how you do it. I mean I've been doing my runs, I'm doing some training now, thinking about running something in the fall, which we'll talk about another time. But for me, it's just if I'm not done by about 8:00 in these conditions, I'm just done. You talk about running slower. Yeah, I mean I just have no choice but to run slower. My conservative pace tempo runs, I just feel like sprinting right now. It is just tough.

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Becs Gentry: Yeah. We all have other things to do in the day. That's the biggest takeaway I want people to remember here is that then maybe we have some elite runners, I'm sure we do, who are listening to this, who it's their profession. But I would hazard a guess. The vast majority of us are hobby runners, myself included. I have a job. I have a family life that I have a role in after my running and I need to remind myself that I cannot be totally exhausted after these runs. You can be tired, of course. You got to

work hard, but heat exhaustion is really ugly. It's really, really dangerous. So, you have to think, "Okay, if I'm going to carry on with this hobby running, I need to ensure I can go about the rest of my day successfully as well," whatever that means for you.

So, this is a great test in humility. It is a great test in finding electrolytes that work for you, water fountains. Don't be afraid of running through them, my friends. We are all children at heart. I was there with the kids in the Brooklyn Bridge water fountain the other day, just splashing around in the middle of my run.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely. Be kind to yourselves. Do what you need to do to be safe out there. Running in this heat, whether you're in New York or somewhere else that's hot, it feels like everywhere is hot right now. So, everybody out there, be safe and be careful as you're doing your thing. Before we jump into today's episode, and it's a really good one, Becs, just a reminder, if you've got a question out there for Becs and I still have a lot of questions about this incredible world marathon challenge, please you can post it on our Apple Podcasts page and we'll definitely get to answer it here on the show. You can ask a question of Becs, of Meb, or of me, and we'll definitely answer it. So, check us out there, leave a review.

Becs, speaking of the weather, it's been a topic in our race calendar as well. We did manage to get the NYRR Retro 4-Miler in last Saturday through some raindrops for sure. There was a pretty heavy downpour before the race. There was rain during the race. So, congratulations to the 4,400 or so intrepid and very wet runners who finished the Retro 4-Miler.

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Becs Gentry: I saw a lot of smiles out there. It may have been wet, but the vast majority of people were little Cheshire cats while they were running. I was very proud of you all.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Honestly, Becs, I think rain is about as good as you're going to get for running conditions right now, the way it's been in New York. I did a long run on my own on Saturday. It rained the entire time and I chose that as the time to do my run because it cooled me off. There was obviously no sun and it was the best time to run.

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Becs Gentry: I agree. I stepped out for a 10-mile. I was at

a friend's place in the Hamptons and I did miss the downpours. I had to do nap time chronicles. They had to come back this weekend. So, it was 12:30 and it was hot and humid, but it was just in between a couple of huge downpours and there was a sprinkle and it was the savior. It got me through 10 miles, that's for sure, but I will say I scratched my face. I don't know whether you could see this is sweat that it was raining and I wiped my face at one point with the sweat from the humidity and I had salt crust on my face and it actually made myself bleed. You guys, this is a running injury. Isn't that crazy?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Running injuries are normal, but yeah, not usually right on the bridge of your nose under your eye. Yeah, I get it. I get it. For me, when I choose to run in the rain, the key for me is a hat. That's when I really have to have a baseball cap on just for that brim to keep some of the water from hitting me directly in the eyes because that's not so much fun.

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Becs Gentry: I need a visor.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: A visor, exactly.

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Becs Gentry: I think I overheat in a hat and I need to train myself. This is going to be part of my training. I need to train myself to run in a proper running hat and pick one, but I'm thinking of trying a visor. I don't like that I look funny in visor so I get a bit self-conscious.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Visors are a particular fashion choice. Yeah, not everybody can pull off a visor. I think you could, Becs, but not everybody can pull one of those off. Then Becs, also with the weather, unfortunately, as folks will know by the time they hear this podcast, we did have to cancel the R-U-N Brooklyn 5K on Monday night. Just too hot in the PM hours right now, unfortunately, to have that race executed safely. So, unfortunately couldn't have that race. There'll be more information coming out about people's options for that race and their fees for that race as well coming out. But yeah, we were sad to do that, but it was pretty much a no-brainer given the weather conditions.

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Becs Gentry: Whether you're starting your marathon training

journey or simply aiming to run more, Peloton has you covered. The Peloton Tread offers a range of classes from running and walking to bootcamp expertly designed to boost your endurance speed and strength. It's the perfect companion to help you achieve your running goals this summer and beyond. Stay tuned for more fitness tips and inspiration all right here, right now. All access membership are separate. Learn more about Peloton Tread at onepeloton.com/running. Peloton, the official digital fitness partner for New York Road Runners.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Beccs, looking at the calendar now, we are now 16 weeks out from the TCS New York City Marathon, which is a milestone, especially for folks who are maybe running their first marathon. This is the time when those folks are starting that training. It is exciting for them. Obviously, tough to do in this heat, but what's your advice? Meb's going to be coming along with a Meb minute and we'll have a series of those over the next 16 weeks that are specifically focused on that marathon training block. So, we're getting into it now. But for that first-timer, Beccs, who's now getting into it, what's your number one piece of advice?

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Beccs Gentry: Remember why you signed up. Remember the emotion you felt when you put your name in. However you got in, whether it was ballot, charity, qualification, whatever, you need to have that bubbly butterfly feeling in your stomach of the why. Why did I sign up? Why did I say yes? How am I going to fulfill that all the way to the finish line? Because it's going to get difficult and challenging and you are going to plateau, AKA feel that you're not making any progress at maybe one, maybe two, maybe three points over the next 16 weeks. But trust me, every time you lace up and get out there, that is progress.

So, stay true to you and that finish line and that beautiful medal will be yours. I promise you well, I'll be at that finish line and I'll be cheering for you and shouting your names and getting all of the joy into the finish line this year again. So, get after it. Get after that why.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Absolutely. The why is everything. Beccs, speaking of the finish line of the TCS New York City Marathon, our guest today is someone who has done such an amazing job chronicling some of the moments that we have at the finish line of the marathon. I always say it's the happiest place on earth. It's one of the most amazing places

on earth. Nicolas Heller, who is better known as New York Nico, has an incredible Instagram feed. You might remember his video from last year's TCS New York City Marathon finish line.

It was just such a moving tribute to the more than 50,000 stories that crossed that finish line, exhausted and triumphant every single November. So, New York Nico is going to join us today to talk about that and also a very exciting new partnership that we have with New York Nico as we look to tell even more of those incredible stories, Becs.

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Becs Gentry: I cannot wait. This is one of my favorite episodes. He is a legend of this city and brings awareness to some unknown wonderful story. So, yeah, I'm honored to have spent the time we did with him.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: It's the greatest day of the year in New York City, Marathon Sunday, and New York Nico is going to help us chronicle that story again this year. So, that's coming up in just a bit. Then our member moment this week is with New York Road Runner's member Sofía Camacho Ferral, our non-binary winner of the RBC Brooklyn Half Marathon. They are a New York transplant by way of Miami and Paris, and they are shaking up the running world. So, stay tuned to hear all about Sofía's journey. All right, time now to get to our guest this week. It's a man named Nicolas Heller, who is better known as New York Nico, and he is the quintessential New York City social media documentarian.

Nico is dedicated to capturing the essence of New York's vibrant street life and all of the very unique characters we have in our city. He has a massive following on TikTok and Instagram and really has become the city's unofficial talent scout, showcasing all of our hidden gems and local personalities. We are so thrilled to now announce a collaboration with New York Nico, which we'll talk about here on Set The Pace today. If you don't follow him, he is @NewYorkNico on Instagram, @NewYorkNico, incredible feed, incredible storyteller. Nico, it's great to have you here on Set The Pace. Welcome.

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Nicolas Heller: Thank you. Honored to be here.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Nico, I think the first thing that our audience will want to know about you is that well, you're not a runner, which is-

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Nicolas Heller: I'm not a runner.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Exactly. You're a rare bird here on this show, not being a runner.

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Nicolas Heller: Am I the first?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Not maybe quite the first but close to it. Yeah, I'm struggling to think of who else, but we've had a couple of journalists on, but it's okay, Nico. It really is okay because you have a way of capturing the amazingness that is the finish line of the TCS New York City Marathon, which is beautiful. Folks can find it on your Instagram feed. It's pinned right to the top of your feed. I always talk about the finish line, Nico. People ask me what my favorite part of my job is here, and I always talk about the finish line. I say apologies to our friends at Disney, but the finish line of the TCS New York City Marathon is truly the happiest place on earth. You have done such a great job of capturing those moments of people crossing the finish line of the marathon. As a non-runner, Nico, what was it that gave you the urge to go and capture that?

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Nicolas Heller: Oh man. So, I think the first time that I was at the finish line was only two years ago and it was just nothing I've ever experienced before. I was able to capture these moments that I feel like I've never captured before, this raw human emotion from every single person who crossed that line. It was so overwhelming, and I don't really have the right word for it. It's just emotional is just how I would describe it. You said it's the happiest place on earth. I don't know if that's the right word. I feel like it's the most emotional place on earth. I think the majority of those people are happy, but you also see them crying. I don't know if they're necessarily tears of joy.

Last year, I captured a few really, really just unbelievable moments of, well, specifically these two men who were racing or running for their very close friend who had collapsed and passed away and they were running for him. I got this video of them hugging and crying with his bib. I believe the marathon actually gave him a bib, even though he wasn't present, obviously. It's just moments like that. Where else are you going to see anything like that? So anyway, to get back to my story, I mean, so two years ago was the first

time and I was able to capture some really great video. Yeah, this past marathon came out, had ample amount of time to spend there.

It was just unbelievable capturing someone proposing, capturing a paraplegic person being carried across the finish line, the story that I just told you. It's truly, truly unbelievable. Like you said, I'm not even a runner, but I can appreciate the hell out of it. Yeah, I also tell everybody, I have a large following. The internet is not the nicest place. A lot of times I'll post videos and I'll get a lot of negative comments from people being like... No matter what event I cover in New York, the Pride Parade, the Puerto Rican Day, the Mermaid Parade, anything, it's always going to be mostly positive, but you'll get those negative comments. You never get any negative comments when you post about the marathon.

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Becs Gentry: Yay.

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Nicolas Heller: So it's the one time where I can post and not feel bad about getting negative comments and it's just like the energy in the city is absolutely insane. I can't imagine what it's like to be a runner and experience this.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: We can help you imagine it, Nico, if you-

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Becs Gentry: We can.

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Nicolas Heller: Well, I mean I guess I can imagine it through my experiences viewing it, but yeah, it's the best day of the year in New York in my opinion.

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Becs Gentry: It truly is. Having run it once and shared it many, many times and been lucky enough to also be at the finish line commentating on the race last year, I know what you mean by saying it's emotional. I vividly remember the video you posted two years ago of the two friends and I went down a rabbit hole looking at that guy's story. Oh, that got me. But the finish line is what I consider to be where some of the best moments of humanity are seen because you'll have perfect strangers who will all of a sudden help someone they've never met before, covered in sweat, vomit, who knows what. They will embrace them, they will lift them, they will carry them, and they will ensure they reach that

finish line.

That's what gets me is just all of a sudden, this city that's quite scary becomes one of the most friendly and supportive places on that day. I think it is more or less only that day for me personally in the whole year that happens in New York. So, as a runner and as somebody who works with New York Road Runners on the day of the marathon now, thank you for capturing the beauty in it, the real beauty, because it is sad. It's desperately sad. Some people are running through a lot of grief and loss, and I think it's really important to acknowledge that as well as the joy and the celebration of completing 26.2 miles through this hilly city.

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Nicolas Heller: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah, like you said, it's one of those rare moments where we're all in this together. Everyone's in it together. Everyone's helping out one another. The aim is to cross that finish line. Yeah. Another great experience for me is when I'm done shooting at the finish line, I exit. As I'm exiting, there's this incredible photographer who I posted before and I think he's like a guy. He's probably been doing it for 20 years or so, but he's photographing everyone and their medal and he's just like the most charismatic, bubbly guy. Yeah, I don't even know why I brought that up.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: There's so many great-

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Nicolas Heller: There's so many moments.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... moments and people. I teased it before. Can you talk about what this collaboration is going to be this year with the marathon?

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Nicolas Heller: Just being at the finish line these past two years, it's like every single person who crosses that finish line has a story, and it's probably an amazing story. In the videos that I've posted, I don't get to tell those stories. I just get to capture that moment at the very end, but they had a whole journey leading up to that. I've spent moments fantasizing about what some of these stories could be. I've obviously rewatched my own video several times and these faces are ingrained in my brain. So, I have developed my own narrative for these people.

I was thinking about it. It was like, "Why don't I actually

find out what their story is and how they got to this point?" For anyone from the guy who proposed to his now wife, what was that story leading up to this? Why did he choose the finish line of the marathon to propose to his wife?

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Rob Simmelkjaer: So the story behind the moment that you might get at the finish line.

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Nicolas Heller: The story behind the moment, exactly.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I love that. So, you'll follow them leading up to the marathon and get some value.

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Nicolas Heller: That would be the idea. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I imagine people start training soon. So, I would like to start capturing footage sooner than later and check in with them throughout their journey and obviously capture that moment at the very end.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: So the takeaway for listeners out there is if you have a story or you know of a story that you think would be a great part of, we're going to be announcing this pretty much the day that this podcast drops on Thursday, this collaboration. So, you can reach out to our social channels and New York Road Runners or TCS New York City Marathon or Nico, probably yours, and let us know about these stories. So, we can follow up and figure out some of the most amazing ones to tell.

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Nicolas Heller: Yeah, and if you're planning on proposing, please let me know because that's one that we might not be able to find on our own, but now that you know I'm looking for that, let me know.

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Becs Gentry: Wow, you might've just pushed some relationships further down the line. Matchmaker and you didn't know it. I think there's going to be a lot of people reaching out. This is going to be such an exciting collaboration. I know there's hundreds of stories. There's just so many that even come to my mind straight away from-

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Nicolas Heller: Yeah, I'm sure.

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Becs Gentry: ... there's this lady in the UK and she is from completely Central America. She's in her 80s, and I think we spoke to her last year, I think, Rob, not on the podcast, but at the Javits Center. She has run the New York City Marathon 20 something times, and her and her sister do it together. They run ultras together. It's just unreal. That's just not even scratching the surface of the-

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Nicolas Heller: That's great.

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Becs Gentry: ... stories that are out there.

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Nicolas Heller: I'm so inspired by a lot of the older folks who are able to do this. I couldn't even dream of doing something like this. Here you are 80, 90 years old and you're running 26.2 miles.

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Becs Gentry: With a smile on their face.

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Nicolas Heller: With a smile on their face.

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Becs Gentry: They go come over the finish line dancing. We love that.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Nico, what about your story? I'm just so curious how this came to be how Nicolas Heller became New York Nico. I know you grew up in New York. You were a downtown kid, known as the mayor of 16th Street when you were a kid. I love that nickname. How did that come about? What led them to call you the mayor of 16th Street?

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Nicolas Heller: Well, I grew up on 16th Street, between 5th and 6th Avenue, and I don't know. Whenever I walked down 16th Street, I was just friends with all the street vendors, the security guards, the business owners. So, I don't know. I think my parents just called me the mayor of 16th Street, but it was because I was talking it up with everybody. But yeah, born and raised in New York. After college, I did a little stint in Los Angeles for six months where I had the

most miserable time of my life.

Without that, I probably wouldn't be where I am today because it really made me appreciate New York that much more. Because when I moved back, I started noticing things that I hadn't noticed growing up here. That's when my appreciation for the locals came to be. As soon as I came back from LA, I was 21, I think. I started making documentaries on New York City street characters, so Wendell, the homeless fashion designer of Union Square or Larry the Birdman of Washington Square. I started making these documentaries, and that was around the same time that I created my Instagram and just took off from there. It's been a slow and steady rise, I guess.

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Becs Gentry: I can't imagine the amount of characters you see and maybe not even meet, but you at least see in New York. Do you have a process of how you pick the ones that are going to be featured on your social accounts?

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Nicolas Heller: That's a great question. No, I mean, I would say a third of the people who I feature, I just find out and about. Another third are people who are referred to me. Actually, I don't know. I don't even know why I decided to do a whole math thing here. I don't know. It's a mix of people I'm introduced to, people I just see out and about, and then sometimes I get tipped off to people through Instagram or whatever. But in terms of who I feature, it's hard for me to say because it's just who I'm interested in. It's just a personal preference. Yeah, I don't know. I like unique one-of-a-kind individuals. I like people with that New York attitude, but I never profile people that I don't like, I don't respect, because then why would I want to hang out with these people if I don't like or respect them?

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Becs Gentry: That makes sense. Is there anyone you've gone back to over the years and tracks their career or their progression in life?

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Nicolas Heller: Yeah, for sure. I mean, I would say there are 10 or 15 people who I post regularly, who I've had friendships with for many years. I think a fan favorite is Henry Yao. He owns this Army Navy surplus store on Houston Street. For the past, I guess five years or four years, it started at the beginning of the pandemic. But every time I go and visit him, I have my camera rolling. So, he's filling out, he sees me, he gets really excited, and he

screams, " Oh, Nicholas!"

The reason why he reacts that way is because over the pandemic, I was able to help him stay in business. He has just been very appreciative of that. So, every time I come in, he greets me with this great big, but people love it. He's visited from all over the world because people want to meet him in person. Yeah, no, there's a lot of people who have been reoccurring throughout the years.

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Becs Gentry: One of your top posters, you have it pinned, but it's one of my favorites and one that does actually intrigue me is the story of the organist Ray Castoldi and how you shot that. Did you sneak in to a gig?

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Nicolas Heller: No, no, no, no. I work with the Knicks quite a bit.

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Becs Gentry: Amazing.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: This is the organist at Madison Square Garden for the Knicks.

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Becs Gentry: Yeah, for decades.

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Nicolas Heller: Yes. So, a lot of people, and myself included, I didn't realize that there was an actual guy playing the organ. I had just assumed it was like every other stadium where they have a pre-recorded thing. But no, the Knicks have a guy, his name is Ray Castoldi and he plays the organ at the Knicks and Rangers games. When I did that piece, it was probably three years ago. I mean if you knew, you knew, but a lot of people did not know that he existed. I made this piece and even die hard Knicks fans who have season tickets didn't even realize it. My whole thing is sharing the stories of unsung heroes like Ray Castoldi. He's been doing his thing for 30 years and I feel like he deserves his flowers.

Call me crazy, but I feel like he contributes to the outcome of the game because he really is a conductor to the fans and players will tell you that they get their energy from the fans. So, I feel like we got to respect people like Ray and people who have those behind the scenes jobs that you might not know about.

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Becs Gentry: Absolutely.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Another character that you've gone a little bit deeper on is your documentary Big Mike Takes Lunch, which helped launch the career of Mike Saviello in the art world. Can you talk about that a little bit? Who is Mike Saviello?

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Nicolas Heller: Yeah, so I don't know if you guys are familiar with Astor Place barber shop, but it's one of the oldest barbers. There you go.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I got my haircut there for years when I was a young lawyer in New York City, that was my go-to spot. I lived on 17th Street and I went there. A guy I went to high school with, I believe Jonathan Trichter came in-

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Nicolas Heller: Yeah, he's a good friend.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... and bought that place. Yes, absolutely. He and I went to high school together.

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Nicolas Heller: Wow. So, it's one of the oldest barbershops in Manhattan. I believe it's 1965. It's also one of the biggest barbershops. I've been going there to get my hair cut since I was 10 or 11 years old. It was always a place where I just went to get my haircut. I didn't go there to make friends. It was like you go in and Big Mike was there behind the counter and he was like this old school, not super friendly New York guy who just tells you where to go to get your haircut. You get your haircut. You pay \$ 15 and then you leave, but I love that. Also, for people who aren't aware of Astor Place, when you go in, it has this big sign that says, " We speak," and then it's pretty much every single language that you can think of. Then at the end, it says, " And a little bit of English."

When people photograph Astor Place, that's the first photograph they take and Mike is always behind that counter. But anyway, six years ago, I went to get my haircut and I went to the restroom, which is in the back. On my way to the restroom, the door to the storage area was open a crack. I peeked my head in, and Big Mike, who as I said, I just knew as the guy who tells you where to get your haircut or

who to go to, he was in the storage area with his shirt off in front of an easel and he was painting a Van Gogh inspired Biggie Smalls. I was just like, "What the hell? What are you doing?" I used this as an opportunity to finally talk to him because I'd never really talked to him. We ended up chatting about his art for an hour.

Basically, what had happened was he's like 58 and he's always wanted to paint but never had the time to paint. So, he decided that he would use his lunch break, his 45-minute lunch break at Astor Place to paint. He had just started doing this and he told me that he was going to continue doing it every single day. I told him, "I'm going to check in on you. I'm going to make sure that you're still doing this a week, a month from now." So I would check in on him periodically, and he eventually amassed an entire gallery of paintings in this storage area in the back of Astor Place. I would say a couple months into it, I asked, "Can I make a documentary on you? I feel like this story needs to be told."

He was very receptive to that and I made this documentary. It's just like a day in the life of Big Mike as the manager at the most iconic barbershop in New York with this secret new career as a painter and made this documentary. We had a screening of it in conjunction with his first art show at Astor Place barbershop and De Blasio was the mayor at the time. He came. All these news outlets covered it. Eventually, the New York Times wrote about him and he started selling his art for thousands and thousands of dollars. Mike just retired last week.

00:35:40

Rob Simmelkjaer: Wow.

00:35:41

Nicolas Heller: Yeah. So, the film is called Big Mike Takes Lunch and I wanted to make another film called Big Mike's Last Lunch, but I didn't really have the time to put it together, but I did do a little 60-second profile on his last day, which is on my Instagram.

00:35:58

Rob Simmelkjaer: Listening to this story, Nico, now I get what makes you you, because I spent years walking into that barbershop and getting the direction from Mike and handing him my money, that little white slip of paper you get with how much the haircut was and all that.

00:36:13

Nicolas Heller: Exactly.

00:36:13

Rob Simmelkjaer: Yes, I probably never said anything, but hi, thanks, bye to him in all those years going there. You made a documentary out of it. So, that's what makes you New York Nico, which is a beautiful thing.

00:36:26

Nicolas Heller: I appreciate it.

00:36:27

Rob Simmelkjaer: It's amazing. It's a great story.

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Nicolas Heller: Thank you. Thank you.

00:36:29

Becs Gentry: That's a really good point, Rob, that leads me onto what I was thinking about with all of this history that is steeped in the community of New York. You're born and bred New Yorker and it's in your blood. So, how do you find the balance between sharing these wonderful stories of people who have served a community for a really long time and the talent, the new upcoming, the talent scout side of your New York Nico role? How do you balance that?

00:37:03

Nicolas Heller: Well, I gave myself the title, the Unofficial Talent Scout of New York, just because I didn't know what to put in my Instagram bio. I didn't know how to describe myself. A lot of people ask what I do, and I just say, "I'm the unofficial talent scout of New York."

00:37:22

Rob Simmelkjaer: That's why it's unofficial.

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Nicolas Heller: But to me, someone like Big Mike, even though he's an older guy, he's a new talent because no one has really discovered this talent before. So, I work out at a park in Queens doing calisthenics, and there's this 89-year-old guy who works out there every single day and can do 20 pull-ups, does dips, does all these acrobatics. I literally just made a little film on him the other day while he was working out. Even though he's 90 years old, to me, he's like a newfound talent because no one really knew about him prior to this. Now you can just read the comments on the video. He's inspiring the world, what 90-year-old do you know that's going out every day and working out to that level.

So, yeah, I mean, anyone can be new talent. It doesn't

have to be an up and coming fashion person or filmmaker or something. It could be the guy on the corner who's just never been discovered as being a character. To me, that's talent.

00:38:45

Rob Simmelkjaer: I love it.

00:38:46

Nicolas Heller: I don't know if that answered your question.

00:38:47

Becs Gentry: No, it makes sense because it's not necessarily new in what they've been doing, but you are bringing it new in the news. It's new news.

00:38:58

Nicolas Heller: Again, to reiterate, to me, talent isn't just like, "Oh, you're a great singer" or "You're a great fashion designer or actress or whatever." It could literally be the guy on the corner who's just like a one-of-a-kind character.

00:39:12

Becs Gentry: Yeah, I love it.

00:39:13

Rob Simmelkjaer: Well, I love what you're doing. When we first started this podcast, one of the ideas was we know how many stories there are that are showing up at the starting line of the TCS New York City Marathon or pretty much all of our races. We know how many there are, and I just figured, "Well, geez, we can definitely tell 52 great stories a year by doing a weekly podcast about running in New York City." So that's what we do, and you do an amazing job with it with your videos. I can't wait to see what you come up with for the marathon this year because we know the stories are there. You're great at telling these stories.

So, that's going to be a lot of fun and we'll make sure everybody looks out for that announcement coming this week about our collaboration with New York Road Runners and New York Nico. Got to follow him on the IG. It's @NewYorkNico, N-I-C-O. Hey, Nico, it's been awesome having you. Congrats on the collaboration. Can't wait to see it. Thank you for hanging out with me and Becs for a little while.

00:40:21

Nicolas Heller: I appreciate it. Also, I have a book coming out October 22nd. Pre-order link is available. Really, really helps.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: What's it called?

00:40:32

Nicolas Heller: It's called New York Nico's Guide to New York City.

00:40:35

Rob Simmelkjaer: I love it.

00:40:37

Becs Gentry: Going to be getting it to go with my I love New York. I'm going to add Nico.

00:40:41

Nicolas Heller: I appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you.

00:40:44

Becs Gentry: Definitely ordering that book.

00:40:46

Rob Simmelkjaer: Nico, congrats. Good luck, and I know we'll be seeing you a lot between now and the marathon.

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Becs Gentry: For sure.

00:40:50

Nicolas Heller: I'm sure you will. Thank you.

00:40:51

Rob Simmelkjaer: Before we get to Meb, we have a special surprise for our listeners. The sweepstakes is back. That's right. It's no secret that the TCS New York City Marathon is one of the hardest races in the world to get into. So, for all of you, our loyal listeners here on Set The Pace, we're offering a few last minute chances to get a guaranteed complimentary entry into this year's TCS New York City Marathon. This is a hard thing to come by. So, check it out. Two weeks ago, we spoke to Tatyana McFadden about her potentially history-making trip to Paris this summer for the Paralympic games. How many medals does Tatyana need to win in Paris to become the most decorated Paralympic track and field athlete of all time?

The answer to this question is in the July 4th episode. So, if you missed my conversation with Tatyana, you still have time to go back and listen to it. We won't be drawing the winners of this contest until midnight on July 24th. To enter, go ahead and send your answer along with that

screenshot proving that you've subscribed to Set The Pace and left a rating. Send that screenshot to nyrrpodcast@nyrr.org. That's nyrrpodcast@nyrr.org. All rules surrounding the sweepstakes are available at nyrr.org/setthepace.

If you listen to the podcast regularly, you've probably heard us talk about today's featured member because they were the winner of the non-binary division of the 2024 RBC Brooklyn Half. Sofía Camacho Ferral was born in Florida but grew up in Paris where they graduated from the American School of Paris before coming back to the states to go to college at Columbia. After an incredible career on the cross-country team at Columbia, Sofía has hit the sub-elite circuit with a bang finishing in the top five in the non-binary category for all five NYRR races they have run, including of course, first in the RBC Brooklyn Half.

00:43:03

Meb Keflezighi: Thanks, Rob. Welcome, Sofía. How are you doing today?

00:43:07

Sofía Camacho Ferral: Good, thank you. How are you?

00:43:08

Meb Keflezighi: Doing well, thanks. Sofía, you run for the Columbia University Lions Cross Country Team.

00:43:14

Sofía Camacho Ferral: I did.

00:43:15

Meb Keflezighi: What has been surprising for your transition from running on college team to running to the Brooklyn Track Club?

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Sofía Camacho Ferral: I think a lot of my running is left up to me. So, I'm free to choose my race schedule, and I've graduated from running at such a high intensity in one way and then choosing the intensity that I want to run at. So, it's very self-fulfilling in a different way, but I really appreciate that.

00:43:41

Meb Keflezighi: You have run successful sophomore year at Columbia and then next season got canceled because of COVID. What was that like and not run in the 2020?

00:43:52

Sofía Camacho Ferral: It was really hard for me, obviously.

Well, I was quarantined in the city. I'm originally from Mexico, so everyone was there. My whole family was there, and I was quarantined in the city with my partner at the time. So, running looked a little bit different because we were left in a limbo. So, instead of telling us when we were coming back, obviously, everything was on hold, so we had no idea when we would be coming back. So, it was a little tough to train, not knowing what was coming next, just trying to maintain some fitness. But yeah, I don't feel like I exactly ran as well as I could have in college. So, that's why I guess I tried to look for a competitive team after graduating to see what I could do and push myself a little bit more.

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Meb Keflezighi: From two weeks possibly shut down to-

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Sofía Camacho Ferral: Exactly.

00:44:38

Meb Keflezighi: ... a long, long time, what was your mental status on that? How was the environment within school or your teammates?

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Sofía Camacho Ferral: Yeah, it was very sudden and unknown, especially because school shut down and half of my team went and did a training camp and then the other half of us didn't do that because we couldn't. So, it was very divided. So, then when we came back, it was like the half that did train and then the half that had to figure it out on our own. Luckily, I stayed around campus. So, I had one other friend that I would run with masked and separated, so it was at least nice to have one other person to run with. Yeah.

00:45:18

Meb Keflezighi: Sofía, you just ran the non-binary division of the RBC Brooklyn Half Marathon with the time of amazing 1:14:09. Congratulations. What does that mean to compete in the non-binary category?

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Sofía Camacho Ferral: Thank you. Yeah, the 1:14, the low 1:14 was a PR. I had been running 1:15s pretty consistently. I was sick for a lot of this year, so a lot of colds. I had a really bad lung infection for one of the races and then strep for another race. So, those 1:15s, I was like, "I knew I could run a little bit faster if I wasn't sick

one day." So it was a pleasant surprise, especially after southbound with all the mileage that I'm not used to running. Coming and running a good race was fun. I really love running in the non-binary division, especially because my whole running career, I was forced into running on a women's team.

I always thought that the way I felt about that or about on any given team was a problem that I had or I'm just not meant to be friends with all these people or things like that. But I quickly just realized that not running in my gender identity was the core issue at hand. So, running authentically has been something that has also just helped me run better as a whole. Yeah.

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Meb Keflezighi: Awesome. You have great success with this, so congratulations.

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Sofía Camacho Ferral: Thank you.

00:46:42

Meb Keflezighi: You also ran the California International Marathon. Is there any other marathons in your future?

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Sofía Camacho Ferral: Yes, so that was my debut. I did not have the best build. So, again, with that time, I'll take it for now. I'm okay with it, but I had a great time. It felt great. I'm running New York City in the fall, the New York City Marathon. So, I'm actually very, very excited for that one because I expected think two years now and the energy is always incredible. So, to run competitively is a whole new experience for me. Yeah.

00:47:20

Meb Keflezighi: It's going to be wonderful to be able to go to school there and live there, to be able to just run the TCS New York City Marathon in November. What are you expecting? What are some of your goals?

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Nicolas Heller: I would love to place in the non-binary division and be competitive in the top three. Yeah, I just want to bring a lot of attention to this category and keep its integrity. So, one of my goals is to just be, I guess, as present and as seen, but I would love to continue the work that we're putting into the category throughout the whole year, obviously, because I exist as a non-binary individual year-round. So, yeah, just to continue to be

present and to continue to be an advocate.

00:48:03

Meb Keflezighi: Awesome. Thanks for joining us today and wish you all the best in the future and also the TCS New York City Marathon.

00:48:09

Sofía Camacho Ferral: Thank you.

00:48:10

Rob Simmelkjaer: Thank you so much, Sofía, for joining us and for being a member of New York Road Runners. Now it's onto the final part of our show, the Med Minute.

00:48:17

Meb Keflezighi: Thanks, Rob. Meb Minute this week is getting ready for the TCS New York City Marathon. Sixteen weeks out, what are you thinking is the why. Why am I doing this? Because you just did your first week of training and your body is a little bit of sore and you have a lot of doubts. Am I going to be able to make it? Why is this happening and did I make the right decision? Obviously, you made the right decision because you're running one of the biggest marathons in the world. So, that's where your why comes. It's like, "How am I going to get ready for this?" Don't worry, we all go through it, but at the same time, you're trying to get ready for the first Sunday of November. Don't judge what you are doing this week, but understand that it's a process to get there.

Sixteen weeks out, 15 weeks out, and all those things, you will make the decision that you need to make to be able to train and training is important and the journey. Go through that process to be the best version of your yourself. You're thinking about, "Hey, am I sleeping right? Am I training right, nutrition?" All those things are going to fall into places as you train to the next 16 weeks, but this is the time to say, "You know what? I am committed. I am deserving to be at the starting line in November." So now just making the progress to train right and you got coaches and mentors to help you do that, but if you have a little bit of self-doubt, it's okay because you care and you want to do it. So, this is the best time. You know what? Sixteen weeks, let me get my train going and you're going to do great.

00:49:50

Rob Simmelkjaer: All right. That does it for another episode of Set The Pace. Remember, if you like this episode, please go ahead and subscribe, rate it, leave a comment for the show. We love to hear from you and that also helps other

people find the show as well. We will see you next week.
Stay cool and enjoy the miles.