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Rob Simmelkjaer: New York Road Runners is a nonprofit 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 wellbeing 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 (inaudible)

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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 from (inaudible) .

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Hey everybody, and welcome back to Set the Pace, the official podcast of New York Road Runners, presented by Peloton. I'm your host and the CEO of New York Road Runners, Rob Simmelkjaer, and my co-host Bec, she is still enjoying some quality family time at home in the UK, so I'm flying solo again. Becs, we miss you. We're going to do our best. Bec's really, she's British, so Fourth of July, not really her thing. She's back home in the country we broke away from on Independence Day. She'll be back next week. And by the way, she'll have some big news when she comes back.

So happy Fourth of July week to everybody. It is, by the way, I always say probably my favorite holiday of the year, the Fourth of July. It's just the mid-summer, the long days, the beach, the barbecue. Christmas and Thanksgiving, they're all great, but I love the Fourth of July, so happy Fourth of July to everybody out there. Hope you're having a great, great holiday week.

And remember, even though Becs isn't here, she's always available to answer your questions. So am I. A great way to reach us is to leave a comment on Apple Podcasts with your question included, and we'll be sure to answer it and give you a shout-out right here on the show. So check out that space, and we hope to hear from you over there.

Speaking of the holiday weekend, we produce a lot of races at New York Road Runners, over 60 events a year, and that means we work really hard. Our staff works so hard year round. A few years ago, a new tradition actually started at Road Runners. Thanks to my predecessor Kerin Hempel, who was fantastic as CEO, we give the whole staff off the Fourth of July week. It's one of the great reasons to work at New York Road Runners.

So we're all out this week and we therefore recorded this episode right before the Pride Race, the four miler. So that is something that happened after we recorded. I'm excited for that race. I'm actually going to be running it myself, as I speak here on the day before. The Front Runners New York LGBTQ Pride Run, a four miler. It's been hot. We know it's going to be a hot day, but hopefully everybody had, as you hear this, a great day in New York City. And if you aren't in New York to see the race for yourself, you're going to have to wait an extra week for our wrap up. We'll talk about that race when we come back next week. So tune into our episode on July 11th to hear all about the Front Runners New York LGBTQ Pride Run four miler.

And in honor of the Fourth of July, we just thought that it would be great to fly the Stars and Stripes and talk about one of the most decorated faces of team USA, Tatyana McFadden. Tatyana is the winner of five New York City marathons and she's a six time Paralympian, a 20

time Paralympic medalist, and a 20 time world championship medalist. She's won 24 Abbott World Marathon major races as an incredible wheelchair athlete. She's one of the great athletes of our time, and her story is even better. So stay tuned, as we're so excited to have her on the show today and tell the incredible story of Tatyana McFadden.

Also, my friend Meb Keflezighi will be here for our member moment this week with an incredibly inspiring member who has run more than 77 races with New York Road Runners. So wait till you hear his story, as well. And then finally today we'll have our Meb minute. Meb's going to give us some tips on cross-training, so stay tuned for that.

Our guest today is Tatyana McFadden, a world champion wheelchair athlete and a legend in the Paralympic sports community. Tatyana was born with spina bifida, but since then she's emerged as just a dominant force in Paralympic sports. She has won a total of 20 medals across multiple Paralympic Games, including eight gold medals. Her career highlights include becoming the first athlete to win four major marathons in a single year and setting numerous world records along the way. Tatyana's dedication to the sport and to creating a world of greater opportunity for future Paralympians has solidified her reputation as one of the greatest wheelchair athletes of her generation. Tatyana, it is so great to see you and to have you with us on Set the Pace. Welcome.

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Tatyana McFadden: Thank you. Thank you so much for having me and for the wonderful introduction.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: It's easy to give you a wonderful introduction because you've done a lot of wonderful things. So how are you feeling ahead of Paris? We are sitting here talking in late June, another Paralympic Games coming down the pike. How does it feel?

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Tatyana McFadden: I am really excited for these Paralympic Games in Paris. It's going to be the first Games out of COVID. My family, my friends will be there. I'm just really looking forward to it. The crowds are going to be amazing, and that's the best, best part of the Games really.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Is there anything about the Paris Games that you're particularly looking forward to? You've been to a number of these Games, you've had a chance to experience lots of different places. What about Paris and these Games is getting you excited?

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Tatyana McFadden: I think what about these Games is getting me really excited is I have the potential to make history at these Games. I am two medals away from being tied of having the most medals in track, tying with Chantal Petitclerc. She is a former wheelchair racer from Canada, and she has 21 Paralympic medals and I'm actually currently at 19 track medals. And so I'm really looking forward to chasing history and just being just so happy that I've kept up with the longevity of the sport and been able to stay in it injury free. It's been tough, especially after Rio, getting diagnosed with a blood clotting disorder and kind of reinventing myself and continuing my journey.

So I am really feeling really good for Paris. I've had a really good season so far, starting out in Dubai in January, and even at the Swiss series that we just had this past month. So I think the Games are going to be really exciting, and as well as we're seeing new women come on onto the track, especially on the sprinting side. There are a couple of new athletes that have never raced before and so that's really exciting as well. We really need female wheelchair raisers to come on up.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: You've had incredible success on the track, you've had incredible success on

the roads as well. What's the biggest difference for you between competing on track and on roads?

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Tatyana McFadden: I think the big difference is track, it's very quick, and the road you're going 26.2 miles, but what I really, really enjoy about marathoning and road racing is the community. And so we're able to share our stories a lot better with the community. And there's so much power in storytelling. I can share my journey from being adopted, to coming to the US, and how I got involved with the Paralympics, but then we can also teach society about what the Paralympics actually is, what wheelchair racing is, and the technologies, the technical advances that are coming in wheelchair racing and how we push our racing chairs and really just educate society on that.

We don't really get to do that so much on the Paralympic side of track. I feel like you just go in and compete. So I really felt like the road racing and marathon community really helped actually out in the track portion of the Paralympics, as well as bringing equality into our own communities for people with disabilities, because as we've seen it in sports and women in sports, if we bring equality in sports, we can really help bring equality in our own communities.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: So for those who haven't really engaged in the Paralympic Games before, haven't watched, haven't been to them, let's give a little primer. So what events are you actually going to compete in? Which distances are you competing in, Tatyana?

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Tatyana McFadden: I'm going to be competing in six events. I'm going to be competing in the 100, which I actually didn't qualify for in Tokyo, the 400, the 800, the 1500, the four by one, and the marathon to kick it all off, to finish off the Paralympics. So it'll be six crazy events, but I'm really, really looking forward to it. I think each event is really unique and special.

And it's really hard to do all those events. Not every athlete can do all those events. I would say there's probably three people. It would be me, Catherine, and Manuela that's been able to do from at least from the 100 all the way to the marathon and be pretty successful across the board getting-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: That's Catherine Debrunner and Manuela Schär. Yeah.

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Tatyana McFadden: Yes. And being able to be top three or top five in the world, which is pretty cool because we're competing against athletes who just focus on the one and the four and then athletes that just focus on the marathon.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Yeah. Tatyana, I was going to ask you that because listening to that event list, it's incredible. Congratulations.

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Tatyana McFadden: Thank you.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: You're going to do amazing things. But I'm sure a listener might think, wow, that would never happen in the mainstream side of things. The Olympic Games, that would never happen. You're not going to see Noah Lyles entering the marathon. So how difficult is it to be able to span that kind of distance gap, and what is it about you and about a couple other women you mentioned who have the ability to do that? What kind of, is it training? Is it just ability? How can somebody be that good at that wide range of distances?

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Tatyana McFadden: Yeah, that's a good question. Sometimes I'm like, how is it even possible? I think, one, from my history starting out in sprinting, that's what I started out specifying in, is sprinting. So focusing on just the one, the two, and the four in the beginning of my career. And I didn't add on marathoning until college.

And so when you look at maturity of a female athlete, we get better as we get older in longer events. And the sprinting is really built really well at a younger age. And so the key thing is that as you get older to keep the whole package together. And so going into these Paralympic Games, into my thirties, we had to completely change my training. I couldn't do the training that I've done when I was in my twenties. If I want to keep that quick speed, if I want to keep the hand speed up, if I want to keep the endurance and the acceleration towards the end up, I have to change things. And to keep up with the elite women today and how fast they're going and just calculating the marathon times and calculating the 100 meters, what do I have to do to get there?

So training's been really, really unique. In the winter, I really, really, really focused on the one, four, eight, and 15 this past winter. And then I only did the London Marathon. I really, really wanted to do Boston, but I had to really bring that volume up training just in time for the London Marathon.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: And we see wheelchair racers like yourself doing six, seven, eight marathons a year back to back weeks. So that really was a pullback for you to only do that and to focus on those shorter distances.

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Tatyana McFadden: Exactly, exactly. So that's kind of the unique thing, because most of my events are going to be on the track this year. Five of my events are on the track and one will be out on the road. So it's about being smart and refocusing on where your goals are. Luckily the endurance, I built it up for so many years that I can hold onto that for a little while, but sprinting can easily go and so you really have to maintain the sprinting aspect of the training.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Tatyana, I want to talk a little bit about how you got here, to be where you are as a wheelchair athlete. I mentioned in the intro you were born with spina bifida. At what point in your life, in your childhood, did this athletic career become something that you thought was possible? How did this happen? What was the first time that you raced in a wheelchair?

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Tatyana McFadden: So the first time that I raced in a wheelchair was after I was adopted at six years old. And I had several surgeries. I had about 10 surgeries growing up because my legs were atrophied behind my back and I needed to release all the nerves and the tendons in my legs so I could sit in a wheelchair, I can lay flat in a bed, just do daily normal activities. And being always in and out of the hospital, I wasn't strong. I was really quite weak.

And my parents thought, what would a normal parent do for a kid that they want to get strong and healthy and be part of their own community? Throw them into sports. And so my parents wanted to throw me into sports. So we had to do the research. We had to find out what sports programs that I could be involved with. And so we found the Bennett Blazers, the para sports club in Baltimore, and I was seven years old and I remember going and just, well, one, it was overwhelming because I was still learning English at that time. I'd only been in the US for about a year.

And so I tried swimming and I tried wheelchair basketball, I tried downhill skiing, ice hockey, and finally I tried wheelchair racing and I loved it. I just really took to it. And I don't know if it was a need for speed at such a young age, but I was like, this is so awesome. But the most important thing, Rob, was that I did several sports growing up. I didn't focus just on wheelchair

racing. My parents thought, no, we want her to be diverse. We want her not to solely focus on this one sport. And I'm so thankful for that because, one, I didn't get burnt out, and two, I built muscles in different areas of my body, and also learning about the different sports and the mental aspect of it too, being so diverse in that way.

And it wasn't until I was finishing up eighth grade that, no, sorry, it wasn't until I was starting eighth grade where I wrote down, I remember the first day of school we wrote down our academic goals and at the very bottom of it I wrote down, "I want to be an Olympian," because it was around the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. So it was all over the newspapers. It was all over the TV. We didn't have social media at the time. And the reason why I say the Olympics is because during that time the Paralympics wasn't promoted. I didn't even know it even existed. I thought, oh, the best athletes go to the Olympics.

And at that time I was obsessed with wheelchair racing. I mean, I woke up in my tights and I was ready to train before school and ready to train after school. And so we found out where trials were going to be. I was 14 and a half, and I was the youngest track athlete to try out ever for track and field during that time. I didn't know what I was getting into. I had no idea. All I thought was I better get top three. And so I remember-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Who told you it was a thing, Tatyana? How did you know that it was a thing? The Paralympic Games? Who was the first person who turned you onto that and said that is a possibility for you?

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Tatyana McFadden: My parents, because we did the research. We had to get on the computer and find out, pretty much like Googling, is there racing for people with disabilities on the elite level, something like that. We had to-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: These were the early days of Google, by the way.

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Tatyana McFadden: Yes.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: You were using like Google 1.0 when you did that.

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Tatyana McFadden: Exactly, exactly. So my parents, we were the ones that did that, and being the youngest-

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Rob Simmelkjaer: So what was that first trials experience like? You get there, you're the youngest one. How did it go?

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Tatyana McFadden: I was super nervous. A lot of people told me that I wasn't going to make it because I was so young, and I thought, okay, well, I'm here. All I need to do is just be top three. I tried out for the one, the two, and the four, and I managed to get top three. I shocked everyone, and I was like, oh my gosh, I get to go to the Paralympics. I get to compete on a world stage like the Olympic athletes, and I was just in such awe of that moment.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: It's a great story. There's so many things about that story I actually want to just dive into. The first thing that jumped out at me is the fact that your parents did make you play diverse sports, and that's such an issue now with kids in sports. It's a huge issue with

able-bodied athletes starting to specialize in baseball or in skiing. It's happening all the time, that the youth sports system is pushing kids in that direction. So interesting for me to hear that, A, your parents had that foresight at that time to see how that would benefit you, but that there was also pressure probably even as a Paralympic athlete to start specializing once people saw that you were fast.

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Tatyana McFadden: Exactly. That is also true, but being at 15, when the Paralympics was done, I was still going back to that sports program. I was just starting high school when I finished up the Paralympic Games, and so I still specialized in, I still did track, I still did field. I still did swimming. I still tried archery. I was not good at archery. And I still played ice hockey.

I actually got a scholarship to go to college in basketball, not in wheelchair racing. That's a fun fact that a lot of people don't know. So I love following basketball. I know the game just in and out. And so I am really happy that I was able to stay diverse and that I was constantly doing all these different sports because I didn't become over-obsessed with it. And it allowed me to hang in so long. I didn't get burnt out by my second Games or my third Games and be like, oh, I'm tired. My body is tired. I put so much time into this. I cut my time in half because I was doing other sports.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: It's amazing, and it clearly made a difference. You're just an athlete, obviously, and it's paying off. Okay, so I want to go back to 2004. So you said you wanted to go to the Olympics, the Paralympics, you did it. And so what was that first Paralympic Games like for you in Athens? It was your dream and it happened amazingly quickly for you, so there you are.

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Tatyana McFadden: Yes. I didn't really know what to expect. I learned for the very first time about a lot of things, for being prepared to go to the warmup track, being prepared to have all your racing equipment ready, having a nighttime before race routine, the morning of race routine. I was learning that during Athens, and other athletes, other wheelchair athletes were kind of helping me, like, okay, this is what you pack in a bag when you take to the track in case you get a flat tire, or if you need a snack, or the tools you might need to fix your own racing chair, extra uniforms, your medal stand uniforms. I was learning all that in Athens.

But what really came out of Athens for me that was I guess quite special was that I sort of found my why in sports. I know it's such a cliché to say, Rob, finding your why in sports, but when I was on that medal stand and when I looked up, I remember like it was yesterday, 20 of my family members were there, and the stadium was only filled with coaches and family members. I mean, my family cheered on for every single athlete on that starting line. The stadium was empty. And I thought, okay, at 15 you're like, is Paralympics not important? It's like, who cares that I went? And I thought, okay. So that was the shock that I had when I won the 100 meter.

And then when I got a medal in the 200, I was like, okay, what do I have to do to make this sport well known? Because here I am on the medal stand again, and I'm looking up and gosh, it's hello, family. And I thought, okay, well, I'm going to promise myself that I'm going to be the best athlete in the world and then I'll have a voice because I see it on TV and I see it in the news, athletes who are the best, winning races, they're the voice of the sport. And so I made that promise to myself at such a young age.

And because when I came back home, too, I felt like people didn't even know I was gone, competing at such a world stage. So I almost didn't want to talk about it because I was like, it's really not important that I went to go compete for my country, winning a silver and bronze medal, because no one knew. They were like, "Paralympics, what's that?" And so that was really tough, but I felt like it was my responsibility as an athlete starting during that time, and even now, educating society.

And at 15 years old, I was like, what is that parallel? What are we missing? Why can't people understand what the Paralympics is? Is the disability a taboo? Is it a taboo in the United States?

Is it a taboo globally? What questions do I need to figure out that society is really thinking in their minds that I need to answer for them? And so that was just kind of the start of the journey.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: And so now looking, Tatyana, at where Paralympic sport is today versus where it was then in 2004 when you didn't think anybody was paying attention, how far do you think it's come? What do you expect in terms of how many people are going to be in the stands in Paris and how much attention you're going to get, and are people going to know when you come home that you competed and won medals in Paris?

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Tatyana McFadden: It's changed so much. I mean, it really has. Just to see it, I'm like, wow, we have come such a long way. Yes, we still need, we have work to do, but we've come a long way, from Athens was nobody, no one in the stands really, to Beijing, having people in the stands, to the London Games paralleling it. The awesome, most greatest branding was saying OP. So they called it the Olympic and Paralympic Games. When they were branding with commercials or commentary showcasing the London Games, they always made sure they talked about the Paralympics. So people began to hear it.

And then by the time that Rio happened, we had more stories out on NBC. We had more social media out, telling stories of Paralympic athletes and showing a variety of sports across the Paralympic sport. What was really unique about Tokyo was that it said Tokyo 2020, with the Olympic and Paralympic logos, even on the volunteer shirts as well. So people began to not only hear it, but they began to see it as well. So that was the best.

And then in Paris, they took it one step above and they started everything earlier. So they had a day of the Paralympics, they had Paralympic athletes even come in and showcasing running events. They had exhibitions for wheelchair basketball and I think tennis and just showcasing different sports quite early before the Paralympics in Paris. So we're really making headway.

But the best one was getting equal pay by Tokyo. I think what people really didn't understand was that we didn't receive, American athletes didn't receive equal pay until the 2020 Paralympic Games, summer athletes. The winter athletes were gifted the Games before, but the summer athletes finally received that equal pay, and that was a game changer. I didn't know how long I would see that, which is crazy because it is our job and to not have equal pay, it was just unbelievable.

And so we were banking on the importance of sponsorships. Other athletes were working, having sponsorships, and then training, just having all this balance just to stay afloat as an athlete. And on top of that, teaching what the sport is.

And so we have come a long way, but me as a current athlete, of course, I always want more for this sport because I want to leave a legacy. I want to leave a legacy, not just having the most medals won, but having equal pay and having all the sponsorships available, seeing it on TV, just waking up and being like, going down the street, "The Paralympics is tomorrow," and them being like, "Yep, I can't wait to watch so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so." So that will be a dream of mine.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: It has come a really long way. I've witnessed it. I've really seen it. I'm going to actually give a little love to my old colleagues at NBC Sports because in the time I was there from 2011 to 2019, I just saw a dramatic change in the way that it was presented, the way that it was marketed, the priority that it was given, starting to talk about the Games as not just two weeks, but as a four week, five week period that began with the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games and ended with the closing ceremony of the Paralympic Games. It's really been a marked difference. And people like you are obviously a big part of the reason why. So congratulations.

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Tatyana McFadden: Well, thank you. Well, it's the people before too. They had to do a lot of messy work just to have us even in the village, and then having transportation, so they had to do all the messy work. So I'm really thankful for all the athletes before because that was not easy.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I want to go back to one other thing about your story, Tatyana, for a second, and just talk about your parents, because I'm really curious about this. You and I have never had a conversation like this before, so I want to know more about your parents adopting you and the story there. How old were you and what kind of role they, obviously a really big role that they've played in your life, but how did that even come to be?

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Tatyana McFadden: Yeah, I love my parents. For the audience listening, I have two moms. Obviously we're really a big supporter of the LGBTQ community, and so I would say Pride is always every day celebrated in our house. But they're my biggest fans and absolutely my biggest supporters. I mean, the day from I was adopted, they definitely saw something and they never treated me differently. If I said I wanted to do something, they said, "Okay," and then we figured it out how to do it together.

And so my mom has a really, really unique story, and not only her being one of the, she was former commissioner of the United States for disability rights, and she was one of the 12 authors of the ADA. So she has a very interesting story in there. But my mom also, my mom was paralyzed in college. She has Guillain-Barré, so you just wake up and you're all of a sudden paralyzed. So she had to fight for the rights just for her to in school to have the right for testing, and they wouldn't graduate her because she had to give her exams talking and she couldn't write during that time and the professors didn't want... So she understands the fight and she understands pushing for equality and equity for people with disabilities because she went through it herself.

And my mom also ran her own adoption agency called ICA, International Children's Alliance. And so she was on a work trip in Russia during that time. And when she came into that orphanage, she went around everywhere. And when we met, I was like, oh my gosh, you just know it's meant to be.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: How old were you, Tatyana, at that point?

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Tatyana McFadden: I was six. I was six years old.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: And had you been living in the orphanage most of your life?

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Tatyana McFadden: Mm-hmm.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: How long?

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Tatyana McFadden: For the first six years. So when I was born with spina bifida, I didn't get operated on until 21 days after birth, so I was in a hospital bed in St. Petersburg. So it was a miracle that I survived through those conditions in itself without getting an infection and dying. If there's a higher power, it's right there.

And shortly after that, I was moved to orphanage number 13. And they're all numbered in St. Petersburg. They're not labeled anything specific. And during that time, my birth mom could not

financially take care of me. Remember, Russia was also going through a shift in that time as well. And so yeah, I lived in the orphanage for six years without any medical treatment, no education, no doctors. You're just in an orphanage with a lot of other kids, only a few caregivers.

And so yeah, when my mom came in, I was like, and people constantly came through the orphanage always, but they were looking for that healthy, perfect child. I was not the example of a healthy, perfect child. I was sick. I was anemic. My legs were atrophied behind my back. When they saw me, they're like, "Oh, there's no chance of life in her." But my mom saw there is a chance, this is my daughter.

And I felt the same way when she came in. I remember her coming in with gifts and candies and we call lollipops (inaudible). So I was grabbing all the lollipops from my mom and just started handing it out to all the kids (inaudible), and I just knew in that moment. And so she told me in English, I didn't understand what she was saying, that she would come back and she would adopt me. She'd get all the paperwork going and started. And so that just was the beginning of my journey.

But it was also, it was an unknown journey for me too. I remember after I was adopted, we got into a cab and we were going to Moscow, and I was screaming because I was leaving with a random woman I didn't know. And I was very nervous and scared because my environment was the orphanage. It was not great there, but it was my environment and I was going into an unknown environment.

And I remember getting to Moscow and I thought we were in the United States because everything was so bright and everything was so beautiful, and there was lots of food and just people, and I asked my mom, I was like, "America?" And she was like, "Nope, not yet." So yeah, then my journey started into the United States, and I couldn't sleep on the plane ride back, and I was going up and down the aisles walking on my hands, and my poor mom didn't sleep the entire flight.

And then coming into the US, yeah, my parents, they got me into not only the sports program, but Girl Scout camp, the Girl Scouts in my own community, and I was the only person with a disability, but they're like, we're throwing her into everything and she'll pick what she will like and what she won't like. And so that's always been their attitude. They've never said, "Oh, she needs to go to a specific group," or, "She can't do this because she's in a wheelchair," or, "I'm afraid she can't get around." They've always been like, we will integrate her into society and we're going to figure it out together through that journey.

So having that mental aspect was huge for me growing up because without me knowing, I had that in Russia where yes, I couldn't walk and get around that way, but I got around by scooting above the floors or walking on my hands because I wanted to be where those kids were. I wanted to go play with them. I wasn't going to be left out. So my automatic inclusions kind of without me knowing started there. But then my parents obviously enforced it when I came into the US.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: Your story is just miraculous on so many levels. It really is miraculous to see where you were and where you've come from. You must just have such a sense of, I don't know if it's good fortune would be the word, or certainly gratitude for what your parents did for you, because from where you were, the chances of you being where you are were mathematically negligible. That was just not going to happen. And here you are.

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Tatyana McFadden: Yeah, exactly. When we say, is there a higher power, I'm like, yep. Because my chances of like everything was at a 0%, but somehow I was supposed to be on this adventure, continuing my adventure, surviving through the worst parts of my six years, making it through, surviving all of it. And here I am, being ready to make history in Paris and continuing my journey through LA. So yeah, it almost feels like a movie. It's just sometimes I'm like, oh, it does seem impossible. And I think that's what helps me.

00:39:19

Rob Simmelkjaer: (inaudible)

00:39:19

Tatyana McFadden: Yeah.

00:39:19

Rob Simmelkjaer: I think it should be a movie. Honestly, I feel like there's a movie that needs to be done here, so we'll have to talk. It's unbelievable. No, it's great. And I'm also just thinking, Tatyana, about you passing it forward as well. I know that you care a lot about the development of Paralympic sport. I know you've been active in all kinds of ways. Legally, you brought a lawsuit against, I believe your high school at one point, which I'd love to hear you talk about, in terms of really pushing this sport forward. And is that your way of paying forward this unbelievable gift that you've been given?

00:40:01

Tatyana McFadden: Yes. I wanted to give back because looking back in my own journey, I was given so much and I wanted to continue to pave the way, but it almost happened, it almost happened I wouldn't say accidentally, but in high school I wanted to be part of my own community. So coming home from Athens with a silver and bronze medal and having that silver and bronze around my neck, and I wanted to be part of track, and it's a non-tryout sport. You just have to have good grades, you have to show up to practice, and then at the end of the year, if you're fast enough, you make it to states.

And so I loved track and I wanted to meet friends in high school. I wanted to be part of my own community, and I thought this was such a great way to be part of everything and to have the best four years of my life. I had no idea what it was about to come. I always showed up to practice. And when we got ready for my very first competition in ninth grade, I was denied a uniform. I was denied the right to race alongside with others onto the track. I had to take a separate bus, and no one, only a few very close friends of mine rode on it. Everything was just so separate.

And I thought, wow, this definitely feels like segregation, and it feels like I'm being segregated because I have a disability. And I thought, can I do something about this? And so I went home and I talked to my mom and I thought, okay, this is what happened today. And she thought, this is not right. So she went and talked to the school system and said, "What can we do to have her more involved? Just give her a uniform. Can she run alongside of others onto the track as the only female wheelchair racer at that time?"

And they said no. So after numerous calls, I mean Rob, we tried for so long, and finally we ran out of options. And the only thing it came down to was suing, and suing for no money, but for opportunity. And it was the opportunity for my whole community, for all people with disabilities in the state of Maryland to have the right to participate in high school sports. So it really wasn't about me, it was about the state of Maryland and the people with disabilities in Maryland, like my sister Hannah McFadden, who would eventually go into high school and if she wanted to do track, she should have that opportunity to walk onto the team, to wear her uniform with pride, to ride the same bus as everyone, and to get out to compete at the same time as her competitors, being the only female wheelchair racer.

And it was hard. It was really, really hard going through that lawsuit in high school because again, when we talked earlier about people understanding why I did it, I got so much hatred. People wrote into newspapers and magazines saying, "Tatyana McFadden should be part of her own club. There are clubs for people of her own kind. We don't understand why she wants to be involved in wheelchair racing. It should be separate."

And it was so hard, and I thought, wow. So right there, people don't really understand. They don't really understand disability. They don't really understand what wheelchair racing actually is and providing that education. I mean, when I showed up to track events and right when I finished, I was booed at every single track meet, booed by parents and the athletes.

00:44:38

Rob Simmelkjaer: That's unbelievable. That's unbelievable. It is just hard to believe that someone would boo a girl in a wheelchair trying to be an athlete.

00:44:46

Tatyana McFadden: Yeah, I mean, just to be an athlete, just because you're different, just because you look different, you get booed. So I came home crying a lot in high school, but I kept it strong and I kept it together because I wanted to finish that fight, and it was my choice to go through that lawsuit. It was my choice to go through the county and then the state of Maryland and then make it federal law through the Obama administration, and I wanted to make it all the way to federal because it is happening everywhere in the United States. It's not just in Maryland, looking back today. And it was the right thing to do, and that's why the law passed quickly. I mean, laws take years to pass. It passed relatively quickly in Howard County and then in the state of Maryland and then becoming federal as well.

But looking back today, I get so many messages on my social media platform saying, "Thank you so much. My daughter was able to compete today at nationals in high school, and she was awarded points and she was able to race with her friends, and now she's going to college on a track scholarship and wheelchair racing really changed her life." Or another one was "

Wheelchair racing changed my son's life. He really built confidence. He felt so shy, he didn't make a lot of friends because he was worried that people wouldn't accept him for his disability."

So it was a lot more than just getting a national title, it's much more. So when kids join high school track, it's about being part of their own community, making friends. So that's why it's so important for me to give back, going back to the original question, through my local sports program in Baltimore, through the NYRR Kids on the Run. It's so important for me because that community, it will last them a lifetime. They will look back on it and it's going to change their course of direction by just being involved with sports. We're not saying be an Olympic and Paralympic athlete, we're just saying be part of your community. Build that confidence. You can learn many different skillsets from just being involved with sports.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: I want to thank you for mentioning New York Road Runners' wheelchair training program, and thanks for this segue because I wanted to talk about it before we let you go, and it's just something that we are so proud of at New York Road Runners. Our adaptive sports program is incredible. I want to give a shout-out to Stephanie Herrick, our youth program development director, and especially to Arianna Moliere, who is our specialist, who really works specifically on the wheelchair racing program.

And I just get so much joy when we have races and we have the wheelchair component and the kids are out there doing their thing. It's just awesome to see. What's your message to them? I know that you have worked with them. If some of them are listening to this podcast, and I think Arianna will make sure they do, what's the message to them as they start the journey that you are now so far along in?

00:48:41

Tatyana McFadden: Well, I first want to thank NYRR for starting the wheelchair program because nothing brings me more joy than seeing the kids together. It's across all walks of life, and I love that. And I think the kids also really enjoy it together because they learn from each other. Kids with disabilities are interacting with kids with not disabilities, and they both can learn so much from each other.

So as they get older, they can say, "Hey, I met someone with a disability and they're awesome. We raced together in Times Square. We did the 100 meter dash, we did the 400 meter dash, and gosh, they were fast and they were really cool, and now they're my friend." And so it really teaches such a really important skill and that acceptance. And so I really, really thank New York Road Runners for that.

And my message is to have fun while you're out there. Life is not about what you don't have, it's what we do with the gifts that you're given. And to really enjoy every minute out there. It's

not always about winning races, it's about just having fun and just really enjoying what you're doing. And maybe it's about goal setting and having that courage and taking that risk and having fun with your friends that you're doing it with.

00:50:15

Rob Simmelkjaer: I love it. And I'll tell you what, Tatyana, I challenge anyone who is listening to this podcast to not want to tune in and watch you in Paris this summer because there's just no way you can listen to this story and not want to see how it at least concludes for these Olympic and Paralympic Games-

00:50:35

Tatyana McFadden: Thank you.

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Rob Simmelkjaer: ... in Paris for you. I wish you all the success in Paris, but I think for me, what's amazing about this conversation is the medals, and I'm sure you're going to get some more and they're great, but it's not the real story. The real story is everything that got you to this point. It's amazing.

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Tatyana McFadden: Thank you. Thank you so much.

00:50:57

Rob Simmelkjaer: Thank you for being with us.

Today's member moment is featuring a man who has run 77 races with NYRR on his own personal race to better health. New York Road Runners member Pat (inaudible) was inspired to begin running as a way to join his brothers and sisters in honoring their mother as she battled cancer.

00:51:30

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

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Pat: I'm doing fine. I've got to tell you, I'm honored to be invited just to share my story and my running journey.

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Meb Keflezighi: Awesome. We are so excited to have you on the podcast at The Pace. Your running became something that is special to you because of your mom's battle with cancer. Can you tell us more about that, please?

00:51:53

Pat: Sure thing. What inspired me to run, and I've got to tell you, I hated running. Back in high school and college, maybe it was because of the grueling training that I had massive pain to running. And when I got out of school, I said, "I'll never run again." And because of that, I got so heavy.

But then when my mom got diagnosed, well, actually, my sister Angela ran her first marathon for Team in Training in Disney. And I thought like, what the heck, man? But we went down to support her, and it opened up a whole new world of like, wow, people can actually run 26 point, a marathon, crazy. And then shortly thereafter, our mom got diagnosed with cancer and we all decided, hey, me and my siblings decided to run to honor our mom battling cancer. And I've got to tell you, 12 months later, she came to every race to support us. And our greatest gift that we could give our mom before she passed was to witness her four children cross the finish line together. And when we met up with our mom, we all gave our mom our medals. And 16 days later, our mom passed away.

But that experience started our journey as runners as a family. My brother, too. My brother has multiple New York City Marathon experiences. My sister is a charity, actually a charity athlete manager for Team in Training, American Cancer Society, and where she's working at right now. So just by her example, she has inspired me and my family to maintain an active lifestyle. But throughout the years, my weight went up and down and up and down. When I wasn't running, then I got (inaudible). So my health was much like the stock market. It went up and down, up and down. But when I was running, and I'm very grateful for New York Road Runners because it gave me the vehicle to get back on track, you know what I mean? But that's how it started, honestly.

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Meb Keflezighi: And a great way to honor your mom, and you got the whole family running. And to be able to just know something change your life, and I believe you lost a hundred pounds in March from 2020 to where you are now.

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Pat: Oh, that's a crazy story because what inspires me is people who overcome adversity. So I see other runners, like for instance, when I started running again, because I was heavy, I was in L Corral, the L Corral, right? I kid with my siblings, L, that means last because I'm slow, but hey man, I get off the couch. So that's cool.

But what I found most inspiring was everyone has a story to tell. And the people in L Corral, these are the big, what do they call them? Clydesdales, Athenas, new guys that are just starting to run. And even the seniors, too, and their stories are so inspiring. I asked them, "Why are you running, man?" Because, "Well, I went through a divorce and this is a way to feel alive again." And he's talking about me. So these are the people I root for the most because I'm one of them.

And along the way, so check this out, so March of 2020, I was running through Washington Heights and I was a hundred pounds plus heavier than I am today. And then because of my high blood pressure, I collapsed from a stroke and I said, "Well, I'm done, man. I'll never run again." You know like a kid touches a stove, hot stove, and says, "Oh, I'll never do that again." But that's not what it was. It was my lifestyle.

And then fast forward, that's March of 2020. This is the year of COVID, right? Fast forward to November 2021, I get an email from New York Road Runners basically saying, "Hey Pat, you had a guaranteed entry for the New York City Half that they canceled." Now, they're basically saying either claim your entry or give it up. And here I am, I haven't run since the stroke. I said, "Well, maybe I could do it." And I didn't know. I said, "Let's just do it."

So I trained every single day, every single day. I just walked and then walk, jog, all the way to the New York City Half. But along the way, I ran the same exact 5K in Washington Heights, and no joke, I told my siblings, "Hey, if I don't make it, it's nice knowing you."

But sure enough, I did that. I was nervous, but I did it. And then two weeks later I did the New York City Half and I amazed myself. And ever since then, I run every single weekend because you know what it's like? I feel like I'm going to die, but at the same time, I feel the most alive because when I cross the finish line, I feel like I won. Because the reason I say that is because I beat the stroke and I'm willing to (inaudible) the ball, too.

00:57:53

Meb Keflezighi: You have overcome so much adversity, to being close to having a stroke and then running was not your thing. You said, "I'll never run again. This is done with." But now to be able to just do marathons and to not give up on what your circumstance was, but you want to prove people wrong. And now I just heard that yesterday you got announcement (inaudible) streak, and not only just you run one marathon, TCS New York City Marathon, but you're going to go to the 2024 and 2025 with a 9+ 1. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

00:58:23

Pat: Oh, that's right. Yesterday I had eight under my belt, and I already did my volunteer at the

expo at the New York City Half, so I needed one more. So I said, " Oh, (inaudible) ." The virtual has a 9- 1 qualifier. So I said, " Let me get this in." And now I'm 9- 1 qualified for 2025. And so I did 9- 1 qualified for 2023, 2024. So I'm training for that. And then now I'm 9- 1 qualified for 2025, and now I'm streaking. So I'm 60, right? So I'm thinking to myself, what else am I going to do? I want to stay healthy because I've come to learn that health and fitness is not a seasonal thing. It's a lifestyle. It never ends.

By the way, my sister, Angela, looking at that photo of her, it says Team in Training on her singular. And I was staring at training, and it's training, training. This is why now I'm going training for the New York City. But the word training, it's a double edge. There's two means because we're always in training, either training to be a couch potato, get diabetes, high blood pressure, or we're training to be healthy. So we're always in training. We just want to make it a good training.

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Meb Keflezighi: Absolutely. It's a lifestyle, something that a run is seen as a punishment, but once, what they call, my run, my sport, your punishment, or something. But at the same time, running is something that we can do one step at a time, whether it's walking or one mile, and then 5K and 10K and stepping stone to a healthier lifestyle.

01:00:07

Pat: That is so true.

01:00:10

Meb Keflezighi: You have an amazing story. Once a runner, always a runner. No matter how slow or how fast we come across the finish line, you have a story to tell, and we're so just grateful for you to share your story with us.

01:00:22

Pat: Thank you.

01:00:23

Rob Simmelkjaer: Pat, thank you so much for joining Meb and for being a member of New York Road Runners. Incredible story indeed. Now to the final part of our show, the Meb minutes.

01:00:33

Meb Keflezighi: Thanks, Rob. As the runners or other sports, cross-training is the less utilized. Cross-training is so important as running is, as recovery is. But people wait until they get injured to be able to jump into cross-training, I usually like to say prehab instead of rehab. You want to be able to just control what you can, know when the hard days are, know when the easy days are, and if you need to do cross-training, Tatyana McFadden is our guest for this podcast. Imagine being her, whether it is riding a bike or her speed or cross-training in an elliptical and things like that is very, very important.

The reason is no impact or low impact, and it's a great cardiovascular training for me. Even when I was running at a high level, I always rode a bike or go on my elliptical to go to be able to just, sometimes when I was in Mammoth Lakes, it would take me 35 or 45 minutes to go up the hill, and then it takes me 10 minutes to get down. So it's fun to play speed.

At the same time, just have fun, enjoy being outdoors. And if you have to do indoors, then you might have to jump into the elliptical machine or something. But for me, it is important to do cross-training as part of your training, not when you get injured but beforehand. And for some, whether you want to do swimming or elliptical or whatever that works for your favorite is great. I think it is important to be able to just have a little bit between sessions, or if you think it's going to be hot or nasty weather, it's good to jump with the cross-train.

01:02:06

Rob Simmelkjaer: All right, we've reached the finish line of another episode of Set the Pace. I

want to thank Team USA's Tatyana McFadden, and New York Road Runners member Pat (inaudible). If you like this episode, remember, subscribe, rate, leave us a comment, leave us a question wherever you are listening. Thank you so much for joining us. Enjoy the miles. We'll see you next week.

01:02:27

Speaker 8: Did you know that incorporating strength and cross-training is one of the most important parts of a runner's routine? Well, the Peloton app's got you. With a collection of workouts you can easily add to your race training regimen, reaching each goal just got easier. Track all your movement, from strength to yoga to running, all in one place. The Peloton app, try it now for 30 days free, no equipment needed. Find it in the app and Google Play stores. New paid memberships only. Terms apply. Peloton, the official digital fitness partner for New York Road Runners.