

Carly Wopat - Episode 817

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SPEAKERS

James Geering, Carly Wopat

J James Geering 00:00

Welcome to the behind the shield podcast. As always, my name is James Geering. And this week it is my absolute honor to welcome on the show, former firefighter, elite volleyball player and one of the fittest women on planet Earth, Carly. Wopat. Now this is an incredible conversation because Carly has a unique lens, especially when it comes to the role of the elite athlete transitioning into the first responder profession, and getting an objective view on whether our environment allows us to thrive or causes us to fail. So we discuss a host of topics from her early life and journey into athletics, losing her twin sister Samantha to suicide, navigating her own grief, how volleyball took her around the world as an athlete, her transition into the fire service during COVID, which is a very unique conversation, how she made the bold choice to navigate back out realizing it was detrimental to her performance, obstacle course racing, sandlot jacks, and so much more. Now, before we get to this incredibly powerful and important conversation, please take a moment and go to whichever app you listen to this on, subscribe to the show, leave feedback and leave a rating. Every single five star rating truly does elevate this podcast, therefore making it easier for others to find. And this is a free library of over 800 episodes now. So all I ask in return is that you help share these incredible men and women's stories. So I can get them to every single person on planet earth who needs to hear them. So with that being said, I introduced to you, Carly. Whoa, Pat enjoy Well, Carly, I want to start by saying firstly, welcome to the behind the shield podcast, the backstory of how I first came across you is actually sandlot Jacks two years ago. So we'll get into that. But I watched you and some of the other athletes male and female. I think you weren't even competing. You were just practicing to compete. And I was you know, amazed by the athleticism. So here we are at I guess just over a year later, and we're having this conversation. So I want to thank you for us for coming on the behind the show podcast today.


C Carly Wopat 02:34

Thank you, James. I'm excited to be here.

J James Geering 02:36

 James Geering 02:30

So where on planet earth are we finding you this afternoon.

 Carly Wopat 02:40

Right now I'm in Santa Barbara, California. I'm actually in the house I was raised in. I currently live in Redondo Beach, which is south of here. But I like to come up to Santa Barbara every once in a while and visit my family. One of my brothers still lives here as well, too. He works for Santa Barbara County Fire Department. Both my parents are retired, living their best lives. But it's beautiful here. And it's really easy for me to actually do all of the training I'm currently doing in Santa Barbara. So I like to come up here for the mountains, the ocean and just a little reset. But I'm flying to Pennsylvania tomorrow for a competition.

 James Geering 03:27

Brilliant. Well, we'll get into the the gamut of sports and athletic endeavors that you participate in. But let's start at the very beginning of your journey then. So you said you were you born in this area you grew up in the house.

 03:40

I was born in Santa Barbara, California. We moved to this house when I was three years old. Okay, so pretty much all my memories are here. And your

 James Geering 03:49

parents are retired. What were the professions they were doing when you were growing up?

 03:53

They were both math teachers. My mom was a math teacher at the high school. I ended up going to those public high school in Galena. And my dad was a math professor at Santa Barbara City College. So we were definitely taught, I guess, really good study habits. And I remember them going over my math homework, and we'd have to redo problems that we didn't show our work for correctly. So it was it was definitely a blessing though growing up with parents who are teachers. They instilled really good habits work ethic, and they were good teachers. So

 James Geering 04:43

I missed the the question about siblings. You mentioned one brother now as a firefighter. Talk to me about your other siblings when you're growing up.

 04:57

11 04:52

So two little brothers, Jackson, he is two years younger than me so he's 28 And he's the firefighter for Santa Barbara County. We're very similar in a lot of ways. Also very different. But we both are passionate about firefighting. And we have another personality for it. And then Eli is two years younger than him. He's 26. And he lives in San Francisco. He went to Stanford, like I did. We also have a lot of similarities. But in other facets, we're kind of nerdy, and he ended up becoming a software engineer. So he sits at a desk all day and writes code, which is insane to me. Because he's six, six, and like 220 pounds and a built guy who'd be if you saw him, you'd be like, Oh, he'd be a good firefighter, too. We always joke about when he's going to get into the service, but and then I actually I was born with a twin sister, Samantha, and she passed when we were 19 years old. At Stanford. She was struggling with some mental health. And, yeah, it was a hard time.

J James Geering 06:18

Well, I want to get to that because I mean, that's, you know, sadly, such a frequent event. In fact, I was literally doing the research for you know, us talking today. And I was like, okay, you know, Carly's, this firefighter have watched her as an athlete, you know, we're going to have this conversation about volleyball and all these things. And then I get into your actual story. And I'm like, here we go again. And people look at this podcast and go, Oh, yeah, do you have a mental health podcast? I don't have a mental health podcast. It's just that every single person that I have on the show, there are mental health stories, loss of you know, loved ones, partners, family members, maybe not lost, maybe they grew up around addiction. But this is the human experience. And everything is maddening. You know, with so many distractions and the kind of the mainstream screens, that the mental health conversation is kind of washed away that's lost in the white noise, but every single human being, they may not be struggling themselves. They may be fortunate, but all of us know people that have been, you know, afflicted by it, some of them that we've lost. So I think it's it's ironic that this was never supposed to be a mental health specific podcast, but this is what it's like being in the western world in 2023.

07:30

Yeah, well, I think in general, the human experience is so full of ups and downs. And we all tend to broadcast the highs of it, but everybody experiences, lows. We just don't talk about it enough.

J James Geering 07:47

Yeah, absolutely. Well, we'll definitely get to Samantha, you know, when we get to that point, but going back to, you know, all of you when you're young, you've got two parents that are math teachers, there's, for example, when it comes to math, the common core math conversation, now these parents are scratching their heads going, I don't even know, you know, how to teach this to my child anymore. Have you had conversations with your parents about education and their perspective of, you know, if it's improved if it's devolved in, you know, in their time and beyond?



08:19

Oh, gosh, a little bit. They talk about how generally, generationally, it's a lot more challenging to teach students, I think, because there's so many more distractions with technology like cell phones. And then kids are just changing. My my mom and dad both still tutor. So there's a lot of high school students that come to the house. I'll meet them on occasion when I am here. And yeah, it's just it's a different world, which presents different struggles I think for for kids, learning wise. And I think a big part of it is distraction, learning how to focus and I think the self mastery of understanding your own brain and how it works. That just takes a lot of self awareness and time to develop. So yeah, that's pretty much me on my soapbox, but



James Geering 09:32

what about learning styles, you had all these, you know, these different siblings? It seems to me and I know within myself, I am terrible at math. I really am. But when it came to the fire service, and there was the medical math, you know, and the paramedic side and then the engineer math and you know, in the pump panel, it made sense to me, you put a real world solution all of a sudden, okay, this kind of stuff I get, but when we start getting into you know, yeah, just just just deeper out To break equations, and I'm not seeing the real world application for me, I'm very hands on, it was a hard sell. And then you have a lot of kids now that have the standardized testing that it's not really about their growth. It's more about justifying the school's budget, which I think is very sad. And what about that lens?



10:17

Actually, the last conversation I had with my mom, she was saying that they're getting rid of standardized testing. So they're getting rid of SATs and a CTS. And maybe it's for that reason. But I think like, there's a lot of people who say I'm more of a hands on learner, I'm more of a visual learner. I think that's actually a universal universal thing. I think people learn better hands on, like, in real world application. They talked a lot about this, when I went through fire academies, like you can read all the books you want, but you got to get out there and get the experiences how you're going to really learn. And I agree with that. So I already forgot the original question. But yeah, I think the most important thing you can do for learning is to learn through action. In person, and then there's always no books and reading and that'll help supplement your your knowledge and decision making but experience is the best.



James Geering 11:20

Yeah, absolutely. There wasn't a question. It was more of an observation, so you didn't forget anything. So, yeah, that's obviously the academic side. You ended up playing volleyball at a very, very high level, walk me through, you know, yourself, and Samantha's going to journey into sports and how you found that particular one.



11:39

Okay, so I grew up playing a ton of different sports. My first was gymnastics, I started that around the age of two. And I think foundationally that's a great sport for every kid to learn. It just teaches you your own body, how to move it, how to build flexibility, balance, coordination,

just teaches you your own body, how to move it, how to build flexibility, balance, coordination, everything, and then started playing basketball around the age of five. My dad played basketball and football and decathlon, and I knew that's a sport. That's a sport he wanted us to, to learn any I remember he coached us a lot on our younger teams. And around the age of 10, was when volleyball was introduced. We did a lot of dancing as well like hula dancing, tap dance. But started playing volleyball at 10. And then, through junior high in high school, were kind of we were basically three sport athletes. So basketball, track, and field, and volleyball, and track and field. We were mostly field events, all the jumping, high jump, triple jump, long jump, and then this gets in shotput, or my strengths. So I was a very explosive athlete, and long and lean, but my dad taught me how to throw discus. And I got pretty good at it. I actually held my high school discus record for a while. And, but around the age, I think 15 years old, I got pulled up to the we were doing club volleyball by this time. And I got pulled up to the 18 year old club team. And it was kind of terrifying. I was surrounded by all these girls who were way older than me. But I realized just how talented I was in this sport and the potential that it held for me. And I got a lot of exposure to college recruiters early on, and it just blew up from there, which was really exciting. I had a lot of different opportunities and offers to go to colleges all over the US. But I knew Stanford. Stanford I just heard of, it was kind of like a distant like dream school. I always heard people talk about it in reverence. It had such high academic standards and athletics. There were amazing. A lot of national championships. And I remember thinking, wow, that would be the coolest school to go to and it sort of just became my number one, dream school. And I remember calling the Stanford coaches, we had to reach out to them first set of them contacting us and letting them know that I was interested in And things just started rolling from there. And I realized, at a certain point that it was very real and very much happening. And I was gonna get to go there, which was the coolest experience to see the things just manifest into reality. Yeah, my senior year we won state with my high school volleyball team. I think that was the peak of those pueblos High School's volleyball program. We had of a phenomenal team. It was really fun. And then I went to Stanford, start playing there.

 James Geering 15:47

To go state in California is more impressive than being another the Alaska State champions in volleyball, I'm assuming.

 15:56

Yes, it was very competitive. Actually a fun story. Right before the championship match, we would have dance parties to just get fired up. And I decided it was a brilliant idea to do the worm on cement. And I smacked my chin into the ground and stood up and I hit the ground pretty hard. So I was a little dizzy. And I like wiped my chin and saw blood. And I turned to my coach and tilted my head back and said, Hey, did I cut my chin open in his face just went like white. And I had totally split the bottom of my chin open right before the final match was about to start. So they put butterfly band aids and kind of like I had this huge Band Aid covering the bottom half of my face. And then we went and crushed it. One, then I got searches afterwards. So

 James Geering 16:53

So what about you know, when you hear siblings, especially twin siblings, you know, there can be that rivalry them in the I know, they're not twins, but the Williams sisters, for example. What was that? Like? Was Samantha you were both excellent. At the same sport. What was the the friendly competitive competition element as you were growing up?

 17:13

I think it was, it was sort of like having a Well, first of all is great because he always had a training partner so we can go out. And she poops in the front yard, we could go pepper with the volleyball in the backyard. And then it was like having a mirror of yourself. So anytime she excelled at something or demonstrated that she could do something really well. I was like, Oh, well, maybe I can do that, too. So it just kind of kept stepping up and stepping up. The I don't know, performance markers for us. And it was fun. But it was also challenging at times. I remember feeling like we were compared. And that's hard. Just, we were also kind of perfectionist. So I think we were hard on ourselves. I still sometimes struggle with that. I'm just holding myself to really high standards. But it definitely created a competitive drive for both of us. And I think is a big part of the reason why we excelled in so many arenas. Just having that built in, built in support system and Buddy, but built in competitor as well. That's fun.

 James Geering 18:53

So what about from a career aspiration point of view, when you were in the high school age, obviously, you were very good at the sport and it was going to take you to college. Were you dreaming of any careers at the time as well, either of you.

 19:07

We were both in the Engineering Academy at my high school. So I remember going to Stanford thinking maybe I'll be an engineer. But I wasn't really I really didn't know what I wanted to do for the longest time. And I've been thinking about this a lot recently, actually. Because some people like they know what they're going to be when they're five years old. And it's just set in stone. They know their path. I don't think I knew I I knew if athletics was going to be a part of my career. I was just super active. I love my being I love competing and performing I think is really fun for me in front, like the aspect of putting everything you've been working on on the line in this moment in front of an audience and You just have to do it or die. That's like, exhilarating for me. But I wasn't even I wasn't sure of what I wanted to be. I just knew I had the Engineering Academy under my belt, so I went to Stanford and took math 51 and decided that engineering was not for me.

 James Geering 20:25

I did the same on the road to medicine.

 20:27

Yeah. I was like, No, this is not it. And then I just took I took. I've always been very artistic as

Yeah, I was like, NO, this is not it. And then I just LOOK I LOOK, I've always been very artistic as well. So I almost minored in art at Stanford, I was taking painting, one sculpture, film, photography, literature courses, I just loved self expression in so many different mediums. And then, I've always been really into performance, and the human body. And they actually have a major called Human Biology, which I don't think a lot of universities offer, which is the pre med route. And once I dove into that, I realized that that was what I wanted to do. It was really interesting for me, we covered everything from human evolution, exercise, physiology, and metabolism, psychology. Just basically everything relating to the the human body and experience. Even though I don't think I was certain I wanted to be a doctor, though, I just knew that that's what I liked studying. So that's what I majored in human biology. And my concentration was human performance. But my senior year, I started training with the national team for indoor volleyball. And before I graduated, I also had an offer to go play professionally overseas. So that kind of lined up before I even graduated. And I knew that I was going to start a professional volleyball career.

 James Geering 22:11

When you look back now, so many of the people that have come on the show, especially people that got to the point, and obviously, they were still with us. So they were able to tell the story, but they were there, you know, they plan their own suicide, and in two of them actually did the attempt, just thank God, they survived. They're so often our elements, you know, way, way early in childhood that contributed to it in 2012 is obviously when he lost Samantha, but now the 2023 lens, you know, the conversation around mental health is completely different. 10 short years later, when you look back, you know, are you able to identify any of the struggles or things that she was going through that led to her taking her own life?

 22:56

Yes. It's been hard to look back and with different perspective as I continue to grow and evolve and my understanding of life evolves as well. But I think high school was a challenging time for us. There are a lot of different pressures we were in in club volleyball, still in high school, high school volleyball, high school, track basketball, so we had all these sports and practices we had to run around to, and then the Engineering Academy. We basically we would be at school all day, then we'd be in the Engineering Academy. Working on, we built robots, so we'd be building this robot during the after school hours, then we'd run a track practice. Then we go back to the Engineering Academy rooms in work until like 7pm, then we go to club volleyball practice, then we'd go home into our homework and go to sleep. And it was just a lot for 1617 year olds, and I think we there are some unhealthy habits develop or constructs I think developed around food because that was one something that could be controlled.

 24:38

When we did go to Stanford, I was a starter on the volleyball team, my freshman year and she wasn't a starter in the starting lineup for playing and I think that was hard for her again, coming back to the comparison of being a twin and just the standards we held ourselves to, I think that was a mental struggle for sure. And you can see, she continued to struggle a little bit with eating. So she was to lean at times. And that's just kind of like a physical cry for help all the times when you see physical manifestations, I think of a mental struggle. The coaches saw it,

my parents saw it, and we did get, like, start taking the steps for help. So she was seeing a therapist and realize, we realized that she or she was diagnosed with some depression. So they put her on medication for that. So all this was known, I guess, that she was struggling, and we were taking the right steps. I, it was hard for me, because I don't think I was equipped with the understanding or the skills to really know what to do for my sister at that time. Other than just be a sister, I don't know, hang out with her do all the normal things. But I didn't have a lot of conversations with her about eating disorder or depression. I know my mom did a lot more because there has been some other mental health struggles and on her side of the family. So that's hard, because if I could talk to her now, I would know exactly what to say. But then, back then, I didn't.

 27:14

There was Yeah. She was just going through a hard time in school.

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There was some other manifestations or, I don't know, things that popped up that were definitely signs of struggle. She went off her medication, and that was the one it's one of the worst things you can do. If you are on antidepressants. I'm kind of a personal I'm against antidepressants unless you really need them. But I think that's a whole nother topic. But she went off the antidepressants without telling anyone and

 28:00

that's just very unsafe, if you are on them for a while. So that's when she ended up taking her own life. And I was the one who found her I was getting an MRI of my knee. Well, actually, I spent the day with her at a coffee shop. And then I had to get an MRI of my knee. And I was going back to my place to study some more but I just felt like stopping by her apartment. And seeing if she was there. I wanted to study. I don't know, I just had this intuition or I know gut feeling to go stop by. And it was traumatizing for sure. But I ended up having to initiate the first responder response and get other students to try to help me resuscitate?

 29:09

I think that did influence part of my decision to become a first responder. Just the feeling of helplessness in that moment. But it was definitely not something we saw coming. She didn't talk about how seriously or are how seriously she was struggling in that moment. I just don't think she had the tools. And I think she was embarrassed about the struggle. So it was it was hard because I was with her pretty much all day. I didn't know any any of that. Yeah.

 James Geering 29:57

Well, I mean, thank you for for sharing that number. These are the uncomfortable stories that people need to hear, because it might be someone listening now that, you know, looks at the person that they love, and they're exhibiting similar issues. And I say 10 short years for a

person that they love, and they're exhibiting similar issues. And I say 10 short years for a reason. 10 short years ago, we were all oblivious. None of us knew how to have this conversation if you weren't actually in the mental health profession. You know, none of us really knew how to understand the signs, especially when you're 19 years old. But then, you know, when you've listed all these different layers, everyone has their own perfect storm to get to where they did. It's not one thing, but like you said, I mean, you've got the stress, you've got the fear. I've had Mr. Bond Benoit on the show, who was a very popular cheerleader in high school. But then there was some bullying as well. But it was the fear of, you know, these children are in school for, you know, what is it if they started kindergarten, 15 years of their life, and then you're like, and then we give you a piece of paper, and then you got to go out and get a job and a house, you know, so like you said, if you know what you're doing when you were five, then you've already registered for fire academy or the military or law school, you've got your path marked out. But there's other people that don't, you know, and then, you know, you add the high workload, maybe the sleep deprivation, if you're not able to sleep because of the stress, and eating disorders of psych meds, the side effects of the side mags, the cold turkey, or the psych meds. You know, there's, there's all these elements, and then the weight of gold documentary, you know, the stress of being an elite athlete, and then even the twin element. Why?



31:31

Sorry, that stress, I think the stress of Stanford being an elite athlete, a lot of that is not talked about a lot. But there's this fear of failure, I think, that starts to arise in a lot of it. Athletes are students of that caliber, and they just feel like if they don't perform to a certain standard, they're letting people down. And that creates a very unhealthy mental space. And yeah, mostly they're, they're just afraid of letting people down.



James Geering 32:10

Yeah, well, the identity piece as well, if you, since you were a small child have been pegged as this elite athlete, and whatever happens, your body changes shape, you know, you just, you hit your glass ceiling. And you are now in your late teens, someone's told you, you're not going to be the best volleyball player. And you know, that's a struggle in itself, because all of us have an identity and if that's poured from you, and you've been invested, you know, whether it's other people, whether it's yourself into this is going to be my future, and then it's changed for whatever reason, mentally that in itself can be crippling. i Right. Now, I have twin brothers and sisters, and they're not my twins. They're both younger, and they're not identical twins as a boy and a girl. But I've watched that that perceived inadequacy, for lack of a better word from my younger brother, how he viewed my older sisters quote, unquote, success, when actually the everyone else on the outside looking in, he's equally successful, and you know, and loved. But again, it's bad enough with siblings, but when it's twins, and you come out at the same time, pretty much, you know, that's another layer and it's not anyone's fault. But again, it's the perception specially like you said, if you're identical twins in the same sport, that's another layer to this, you know, saddening, perfect storm that leads some people towards that path of depression. Yes. So you lose your system in another leisure system, but you're there. Talk to me about how you navigate the grief yourself. And we've been talking about Samantha's mental health. What about your journey from there? I mean, I'm assuming up till today

 33:57

realize that people have very different grieving processes. And you can see that within my own family. For me, I remember I was I saw therapists, and he said that my way of dealing with things was to spit in the face of fear. And that's always stuck, stuck with me a little bit. But I just got, I mean, I went through the full range of the whole grief process. I think there's seven stages like anger, depression, denial, bargaining. I can't remember all of them, but definitely experienced all of those at different points. But I was, I was mad all the time. I didn't I couldn't understand why this would happen. Like if I had to imagine a worst nightmare. I was basically living it now in my whole life. The world and everything I needed to be true. All of it just came crumbling down. So I had to question all my contracts and truths it's really hard when you're born or born with someone coming it coming out of the womb, and then they're not there. Like last night, for example, I she was in my dreams. And so every night and my dream is a lot of the time, she's still there, doing things with me. Just because I think I'm, it's, I'm programmed. And my brain is so used to having a twin and someone next to me and doing the same things. That will always be a little bit of a part of me. Initially, it was very, very hard. I didn't want to be alone. So I just surrounded myself with friends. And my perception of time changed, I felt the need to make the most of every single second of every day. Almost dising anxiety or urgency, and I still feel it, like, pretty much every day. But yeah, there's just no time to be wasted, we never really know when our last day is going to be today could be my last day. And I didn't want to succumb to the sadness or the loss. I wanted to succeed and persevere in spite of it. And I wanted to live the best life for her. For both of us, even though she wasn't there anymore. So that inspired me in a lot of ways to keep moving forward. And that year in school was definitely challenging. I didn't have the patience to really sit still in a lot of my classes. The university granted me a little bit time and some freedoms, a little bit of a shorter course load, I think for the first quarter after that, because I was definitely struggling, just focusing on school. And it seemed kind of pointless to me, honestly. I I'd be sitting there listening to a lecture and I'm like, why am I why am I listening to this, but I could be out doing something else. But got it. Oh, little more under control. Finished. Stanford is a three time First Team All American. And graduated with my degree in four years, I didn't have to do any extra time. Since then

 38:19

became more independent. Part of that, I think, too, was going and living overseas. I was forced to be isolated in foreign countries. And that was challenging. But I grew to really appreciate lands solitude and independence. And I don't feel as much of a need to fill that void that she left.

 38:52

Yeah, time definitely heels. But I think I am who I am today, largely because of that tragedy. And the way I responded to it.

 James Geering 39:12

Where you talks about working overseas, I spent 15 months in Japan working as a stuntman in Universal Studios in Osaka. And I know that Japan was one of the countries that you worked in. So talk to me about that. Yeah, I guess the highs and the lows of the places that you did end up

living for months at a time.



39:31

So I lived my first year I lived in Cannes, France, which is beautiful. It's the French Riviera. And when I was at Stanford, I never got homesick. But I remember flying to France, and this was I did not expect this but the first week, I cried pretty much every single night. I think just the shock of being in a foreign country realizing I knew no one there Oh Um, I couldn't speak, I studied French, so I could speak some of the language. But still, I wasn't fluent enough to understand everything, or communicate, it got better as the year went on, for sure. But I didn't know where the grocery store was or how to fill up my car with gas, just all these basic things we take for granted. Now, it was like living in an entirely unlike a new planet, just a new world. And it was very uncomfortable. And I had to figure it all out by myself. So that was tough, but I definitely grew so much in those experiences. And there were other foreigners on my team. So I became close with them explored a lot in my free time, that's where I found a lot of joy, I would just go I went hiking all around Can I would find trails I, they didn't like the club didn't like this, but I would, on weekends we had off, I would shoot up into the mountains and go snowboarding in the French Alps. That was so fun. Walk along the beach, there was a ton of yachts with really interesting people. So I met a lot of them and they would invite me on their yachts. A sound much good food. So I think the joy of just immersing myself in any place really made the experience fun for me. But the isolation and the novelty of everything is challenging from the start. And then there was the volleyball to basically they're hiring you to to win. So there's certain pressures to perform. And the coaching styles were definitely different. Like my my first coach in France, he was a yeller. That's how we communicated. And he was Chinese. So it was like a Chinese French combination of yelling, which I didn't understand anyway. So I would just stand there and be like, okay,



James Geering 42:30

good point.



42:31

It doesn't really hurt me when I can't understand what you're saying. Yeah. My next year was Turkey. I love to Turkey, I was in Ankara, which is the government capital. The people there were so nice. I became really close with a lot of my teammates, I would go to their homes and have dinners with their families. Ankara was challenging, because there was a lot of bombings while I was there, they were kind of they're at war with a Kurdish. And there was some other government issues going on, for sure. So it wasn't a safe place to be. But overall, my experience was good. Some more really beautiful places, Istanbul, it's gorgeous. And I went to kappa Tokyo, which is this place famous for hot air balloons. And I got to go on a hot air balloon at sunrise with all these other hot air balloons rising. It was so pretty. So just these sights and experiences that most people only get to dream of, or like, look at pictures of and I got to do it. My third country was Japan, which is my favorite. The people are so welcoming and so nice. And then it's just clean and beautiful. And I respected so many aspects of their culture. Just it's different than the way they acknowledge people. There's an aspect of respect and courtesy. The work ethic was really fun for me to be a part of, because there's no other teams there's

always players who don't want to be there or they're lazy, but every single girl showed up for practice and, and brought 100% all the time, which is the way I like to operate and it was just fun to be surrounded by that to the food. Oh my gosh, the food was so good. Just so fresh. I wish America a little bit more like that in some ways. Yeah, that was my favorite country by far.

J James Geering 45:10

And which, which set you know, in Japan, where you based in?

 45:13

I was in ISHIYAMA, which is a town just outside of Kyoto. I could hop on in on a train and be in Kyoto in like, 20 minutes.

J James Geering 45:23

Yeah, it was gorgeous. Because you go there and you know, there's still Geisha walking around, and it just looks like a an old samurai movie.

 45:32

Yeah, I did a lot of so much exploring when I was in Japan. It was so fun.

J James Geering 45:39

Did you go to NARA as well. It's the one that has the deers and the monkey or deers, deer and the monkeys that are going around. But it's near Kyoto, I think kind of between Kyoto and Osaka.

 45:51

I went to this place famous for monkeys. There was also bamboo forest.

J James Geering 45:55

That might be I think that's Nora, I think.

 45:59

I think it is too. And then my last country I went to was China, that was the most challenging for sure. I lived in Beijing. And the air pollution was hard for me, because you just walk outside and you can see it and smell it. Everything was always coated in like a layer of dirt. The food wasn't


well regulated. Or a lot, it was challenging. I felt like my health was deteriorating while I was there. But I mean, the coaches and my teammates were great. Communication was hard, both in Japan and China. I had translators because they, they didn't know any English. In Turkey, I learned some Turkish and the girls spoke some English, the same thing in France. But in those few countries, I had to have translators, and communication was hard.

 James Geering 47:04

Maybe that's what your Chinese French coach was showing, it was like coffee is so clean, and the food's amazing. He wasn't showering.

 47:14


I think one of the challenging things, when you don't understand a language, you just feel isolated or left out all the time. So like, I could be hanging out with my team, and they'd be talking and you just don't know what they're talking about, or any kind of jokes they're making, you're just kind of feel on the outside. So that's definitely one of the harder parts of being a foreigner on a professional team.

 James Geering 47:43

Now on the loneliness point of view, because you left your tribe, your you know, the team that you train with the longest time you find yourself in France, you immerse yourself in that culture, you learn the language. So now you can afford another tribe. When you go to China, though, you know, culturally, there's a lot of things that you don't feel like you're a part of. And again, the communication thing is a big element. Did you find yourself lonely? Yes. When you were back in China.

 48:11

There's always an element of loneliness. I don't know if I was my loneliest in China. I still had some friends in foreigners, I could relate to. But a large part of my time overseas was alone. I was alone in my apartment every day. Yeah, it just became something I got more comfortable with over time. But I didn't like it. I'd rather I would so much rather be in the United States. closer to family and friends.

 James Geering 48:54

So you did those four countries? What made you return to the States after that?

 48:59

So during the summer, that was with the indoor national team, I was I would be overseas for nine months of the year. It's usually like August or September through May. They have we don't

have a professional league in the US for some reason. So we all figure overseas, which is why I was signing contracts with these teams. And then we all come back. And we do the summer with the national team and go through all these different competitions World Championships, PNM cup, that kind of stuff. So I played China, I came back and I had a couple of weeks before I started up with the national team and I went and visited my brother in Hawaii. He was going to school there. And I was out surfing. And it was just kind of a freak accident but I went to I finished riding wave and went to push off the board and the water pushed up back into the board at the same time. I was Pulling off my left foot. And my knee just turned. And I felt a pop. And immediately, I was laying on the board and I was just like, No, no, no, no, no, no, no, I thought I tore my ACL, for sure. And I started paddling into shore. And I was bending and straightening my knee trying to see if I could feel anything and it didn't feel right. Something was off. So paddled in in the second I stood up, I just had excruciating pain, I couldn't bear any weight on that knee. And I started bawling. Because all my, I was in a good position that summer to



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compete and earn a solid spot with the national team, you kind of have to serve your time. And there's veterans who are on the team and I had one serving my time and that summer was basically my opportunity to get my foot in the door and earn to earn my spot for sure. Especially coming into the Olympics. So I just saw that going down the drain, but I went. I remember crashing into the gym. And it was really challenging to see my coach. He was super supportive, though. Is cart cry. A lot of people know know that name



James Geering 51:35

I do from the beach volleyball scene.



51:37

Yeah, Coach cry. And his I remember his response was that basically he He wants us to go live life and do fun things. And he was not upset at me for surfing. And that things happen. So I rehabbed there for the rest of the summer, I ended up tearing my ACL, my MCL. Your medial collateral ligament, which is a lot better than tearing your ACL is a secondary greed tear, but I didn't need surgery. So it was basically hanging on by a thread, but you have decent blood flow to your MCL. So it can heal itself, I guess. Took a long time, though. to rehab and get back to play and I wasn't healthy enough to sign another contract to go overseas when that time came. So I ended up staying, I was renting an apartment in Hermosa Beach. And I ended up staying there. And now I had these nine months that I would normally be overseas. And I wasn't and I was just sitting there not knowing what to do. That's basically the beach volleyball mecca of the world. Hermosa Beach and Manhattan Beach, that whole area. So I was like, alright, I'll play beach volleyball. I'll just like continue honing my skills, and it'll be great. But I ended up getting really good really fast. And I some opportunities came my way. And I got asked to try to get to the Olympics by a veteran player on the beach. To that point, I was trying to go the Olympics with the indoor national team. Now I basically had the decision. Alright, do I continue on this path? Trying to get the Olympics for the international team or do I make a detour and try to get the Olympics on the beach. It was a really hard decision, but it was pretty cool to be in that

spot. And I ended up deciding to go with the beach. So started playing beach volleyball. I was two years in my first year was it was basically getting baptized by fire. I was just like thrown into the heat of competition. And it was definitely challenging because I don't think I built a strong enough beach volleyball foundation yet. I relied a lot on my athleticism, which is what all it coaches told me to do. And that can get me so far, but you really have to learn different games, indoor volleyball and beach volleyball, and you really have to learn the intricacies of beach volleyball to win at the highest level. So first year was was tough. I learned a lot. Second year I started working with Anna Collier who was the USC women's beach volleyball coach. Up to that point she had just retired. And I remember calling her up and asking her if she would coach me because I I



55:01

knew I needed someone. And she said yes. So I started working with her and she changed my whole game.



55:11

I started to get good really fast. And I was in a great position. I actually was practicing with April Ross, who was an Olympian. At that point. A lot of I was getting the opportunity to practice and train with a lot of elite players. And then COVID hit can ruin everything. So they, yeah, it basically ruined sports. But they took down all the nets, all the courts, volleyball was banned. competitions were canceled. And it was really challenging. I came back to Santa Barbara, because if I was going to quarantine I might as well quarantine with my family. All of us were here. And I didn't really know what to do. I was trying to like, continue training, stay in shape. I would pepper against the wall in my backyard to try to maintain touch. But I didn't know when the quarantine was going to be over when sports would come back. It was just this big question mark. And it made it really hard to know what to do on a daily basis to I think it was the same for everyone. So I remember doing a lot of introspection and asking myself some tough questions. I'm big on journaling. I write a lot. And I was doing a lot of writing then too. And firefighting was a career I'd been thinking about for some time. I think the first first time I remember saying out loud that it was something I wanted to do was in college, I remember telling some my teammates, I think I want to be a firefighter. And at first they looked at me weird, and they're like, why? And then they're like, Wait, actually, you would be really good at that because I just had kind of this crazy personality. And they could see me running into fires. So it maintained I know my interest in it continued, I guess even though I was playing professional volleyball, and I went to a recruitment seminar for a la city that they were holding one day after training with national team I there was a recruitment orientation at a college. So I just went there. And I remember walking out after learning more about what the job actually entails. And I was just like, This is it. This is what I want to do. So I got my EMT license. Once I started playing beach volleyball, I actually had an offseason beforehand. With indoor I didn't have any kind of offseason. So I had an offseason and I was like, I'll get my EMT license. Really enjoyed it. Actually, emergency medicine, emergency medicine is really fun for me. And I could easily apply. I liked how I could apply my degree and everything I learned with human biology at Stanford, because I can apply it to myself with my own performance and sports. But now I could actually put it to practical use in another field. And then so got my EMT than the pandemic hit. And I reached a point where I made the decision to become a firefighter. It was hard because I knew I was gonna have to step away from volleyball, and I wasn't gonna be able

to train or compete like I'd been used to for years. But it was a pivot in a risk, I guess, that I was willing to make. I could also make tangible progress there. Even when everything was volleyball was shut down. I could immediately start taking the steps to become a firefighter. And again, I don't like wasting time I feel the urgency to make the most of every second time like if I can't do this here. I'm going to start start this see where it takes me. So I took four online fire science and technology courses that were prereq It's for a private Fire Academy El Camino Fire Academy. And completed those. It was actually a course over. It was an of course overload and I had to get it approved by El Camino College. And I remember just sending them my trance, my Stanford transcript, and they're like, Okay, you can

 James Geering 1:00:20

ask them to say, that's kind of the game changer, isn't it?

 1:00:24

Yeah. So I got them all done fast, and then started the fire academy, and they were still holding fire academies even during quarantine.

 James Geering 1:00:36

What was that? What was that like? Because I'm in Florida. So we, we were very fortunate they took it seriously. But then they slowly started to open the faucet, you know, bit by bit and reassess. Obviously, la always could be California as a state, you guys were, you know, was a lot more stringent for a lot longer. So what was a fire academy like during COVID? That must have been quite unique experience.

 1:01:00

It was hard. We had to wear masks the whole time. And basically, I mean, it's already hard enough to breathe when you're in turnouts, running up flights of stairs, doing all the things we had to do dragging hose. But now we had to do it with masks on her face that were basically suffocating us.

 James Geering 1:01:21

So you dragon hose and moving ladders outside, but you're being asked to wear a mask that we're being asked to wear masks. Okay. And I just want to clarify,

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it wasn't our academy instructors. And so many people knew it was kind of ridiculous. But it wasn't their decision to make it was policy. If we wanted the academy to run, we had to follow the rules. There are times where I remember we were polar masks down. And they would

remind us constantly like you need to keep your mask up need to keep your mask out. But they would let us have them down sometimes. Just so we can breathe. A lot of hand sanitization. So every morning when we came in, we would have to sanitize your hands there was just like bottles of sanitizer everywhere. If you felt sick, you had to get your temperature taken, go get COVID tested, if you did get COVID or come up COVID positive, you would have to let the main instructor know they would tell the class and then obviously miss some days, there were a few people who might have had COVID. But there was never a big breakout in our academy, which is actually really fortunate because there's typically huge outbreaks, we're in that kind of proximity together. We also burned our academy down within the first week. So yeah, that created an N second layer of adversity but linseed oil on rags. A lot of people don't know this can create spontaneous combustion. So we were learning how to maintain tools. And for wood handles of axes, you want to use linseed oil on them to finish it. And there is a pile of dirty rags piled clean rags, I think some some student accidentally put a used rag in the clean pile. And then they were put in the app Bay. And later that evening, our epic was on fire. There was an inspector who came in that's what he said. He's he said, spontaneous combustion of some rags. But there are other theories, our main instructor thought it might have been electrical. Anyways, all of our equipment was kind of destroyed. So there was a big question of if we would be able to continue the academy and I was devastated. Because I'd worked so hard to get to this point, like I took the course overload. I want to I this is what I wanted to do. I didn't want to do anything else and I wanted to get this academy done. So that was challenging to know that it might not be happening but a bunch of local fire departments donated equipment, old breathing apparatus. Some engines because our engines were pretty damaged hose ladders, basically everything we needed, and we were able to do continue, but we had no, we had no bathrooms or structures. So our academy was basically outdoors in the winter and it was freezing at times. And we had porta potties, it was rugged, for sure. But that's part of the training anyway. So yeah.

 James Geering 1:05:23

Now one thing I didn't ask you, you know, we're gonna get obviously get into the strength conditioning side and you know, the obstacle racing some of the other things that you've done as well, you are training for this one sport. Now, you're obviously in the fire service. What about your strength conditioning side? Because, you know, you've ended up being a very well rounded athlete, whereas, you know, volleyball, like you said, very short, explosive movements. I mean, there's definitely a cardio element, but it's a sport specific training. We Have you always had this kind of more broad general strength conditioning program. Was it that come later on?

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Yeah, so I've always been just interested in being an athlete overall. And I've trained in more avenues and facets than I think the typical volleyball player does, for sure. And up to that point. I got into CrossFit a little bit trail running. But once the pandemic hit, and I decided to make this pivot into firefighting, I really got into the cross training, and I knew what I had to do, I started running a lot more. A lot more CrossFit across, it's a pretty good way to prepare the energy systems for your body. functional training, there was some friends I had, who were also in the process of becoming firefighters. And we would put together workouts which would include like sledgheammers on tires, dragging hoes, Hill sprints. Sandbag carries all kinds of functional

fitness that would suit the career. So I changed the way I was training, for sure. But I think up to that point anyways, I just enjoyed training across the spectrum. So I was already in in really good shape. And now with my focus on firefighting, I was able to lean into that even more. And I'm competitive. So the physical part of firefighting was super appealing to me. PT was really fun. Every day. I was basically it was me and 48. Guys, and it was just one big competition. Yeah, it was fun. But yeah, I was definitely physically prepared. Once I got into Academy. I think the more challenging part for me was just learning the culture. The fire service, especially the paramilitary aspects, I'd been used to speaking my mind and standing in formation. Agreeing to things that aren't always reasonable or make sense, was hard for me. Just doing what you're told. But I did Excel, I finished his top recruit. In that fire academy, it was El Camino class one by five. And then I became a ambulance operator for Torrance Fire Department, but that was only for a few months. I hadn't worked as an EMT officially. So I kind of wanted to get a little bit of experience there and also do shift work. So we actually worked 48 hour shifts, and we slept in the fire station and worked with other firefighters, which was a really good experience. We got Rocco eight hours straight for eight hours,

 James Geering 1:09:37

and it's tolerance still, the disease still have the same high up tempo, violence that it's used to have. And I think of tolerance, I think and like the ease a lot of gang activity there. Is that still the case? Or is the shift different than

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it's shifted a little bit. There's still it's on the cusp of like, Central LA ish area. Like once you get into Hawthorne and those other areas, it's definitely more questionable. There's a lot more crime and violence towards this kind of a mix now. But we were the first ambulance Operator class. And we had three ambulances for six stations, and we just got rocked, it was 48 hours of no sleep, literally. They had to issue like a notice to let the ambulance operators take naps, because that's kind of against fire culture, especially as we were considered sort of like probationary members. So you don't really get those kinds of freedoms.

 James Geering 1:10:57

I don't know. You don't get it's frowned upon for a new person to be taken in that.

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They're good enough. Yeah. But we were so sleep deprived that they were like, You need to let them take naps. Yeah, so I got a lot of experience there, even though it was a couple of months. And then I got hired by LA City Fire Department, which was my top choice. I think LA city is known as being one of the top fire departments in the nation, in terms of standards, procedures, and the amount of call volume. It's pretty insane. But the the variety of calls to and the kind of experience you gain is unparalleled, I think there's some other like New York City Fire Department, Boston, there's some other big city departments that are right up there, too. But LA City was my top choice. got hired by them, and I had to go through their fire academy,

which is another five months of boot camp is definitely a notch up several notches up from my first Academy, there was 74 of us to start 54 graduated. It was I mean, you're basically fighting for your job. So you had to take in all this information, digest it, and perform. I really enjoyed it at fire academies. Were fun for me again, because I like challenges. I like learning new things. And the competitive drive in me just thrived. So I was just like, Bring it on. Let's go finish his top recruit again in that class, which is pretty cool. I was the first female in the department to finish as a top recruit. And then I started working in the field. And yeah, that's like my intro into firefighting.

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James Geering 1:13:22

So you've got a very unique perspective, I mean, super high level athlete at this point. You know, you now are serving shoulder to shoulder with arguably super high tactical athletes, you know, what we're asked to do, especially in you know, high call areas like LA you know, that there's a lot of people listening, whether they're suburban urban, you know, that, as you said, you know, the modern fire service we run constantly in a lot of times, it might be more EMS Focus, but then you get the call where it's, you know, 20 storey building, the elevators are out and you got to take 100 pounds of gear, you know, vertically with the training, the rest and recovery, the valuable or the conversation about the value of sleep. What was your perspective as you started getting deeper into the world of shift work on the environment, to allow an individual to perform at the highest level physically and mentally.

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Sleep was one of the things that I struggled with the most. Once I started doing shift work, and they talk about it and LA City and many departments are trying to shift away from the old school culture where you just kind of tough things out. Mental Health, sleep deprivation, unhealthy eating habits, all of that. Used to kind of be the norm And you just didn't talk about it, you just swallowed it. Which leads, or has led to a lot of cancers, a lot of chronic illnesses, a lot of mental health issues. So that's being acknowledged and talked about a lot more. And with LA City there was pushes to have more reasonable mentalities I guess surrounding sleep. But it's is hard because you're, you're a firefighter, and you're there to do your job. And if you get five calls at night, and you don't get any sleep, that's just the way it is. And with that department in the typical call volume, you're not going to be getting a lot of sleep. That's what you signed up for. So it was just hard to swallow at times. That's what I was willingly doing was basically sacrificing my health. Even though I was getting a great paycheck and getting to do a lot of the other things I loved, I questioned, is this worth it? And I kept questioning it. And I had a lot of great conversations with my captains and the people I worked with, about the things I was questioning, and I loved all of them, I got to work with so many great crew members who I really respected. And they took the time to teach me a lot. But it was hard, even just looking at them, and knowing a lot of them have families to support. And I don't, I'm not married, I don't have kids or anything yet. And I can only imagine how hard it was to work that 24 hour shift, get no sleep and go back home, have to engage with your one year old and three year old kids and you're and your wife or husband or whoever. And then you're getting ready to go back on shift. And you could just see like, sometimes there were zombies, just not there. You're only functioning as a small percentage of what you're really capable of as a human being. A big part of that is sleep deprivation. So it was tough. There, I would have to work. We worked the Kelly

schedule, so 24 hour shift, then you have 24 off 24 on 24 off, 24 on and then four days off. And we were also in a hard time of low staffing. So we would get recalled our force hired a lot and working a 48 or 72 would just wreck me like,

 James Geering 1:18:14

as it should be doing for two or three days straight would be

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delirious by the end. And I hated that. Just I that kind of sleep deprivation, I would feel I would get nauseous I couldn't think straight. It was scary at times. See because then you're responding to these calls and you're expected to be at your best and perform and solve everyone's problems. But you're like I feel like I should be on the gurney. Not you like I'm sick. I haven't slept for two days straight. You have toe pain, my shimmy gurney. So it's hard. Working the normal schedule, I would I would work 24 hours then I'd get off go home immediately sleep. Then I get up, go to the gym, train study. Maybe train again, training became basically my freedom, like we weren't allowed to work out as probationary members. And because you're learning your job, there's a lot of other things to do. And they would take us out training which was basically a workout. So a lot of there's a lot of physical stuff going on but I miss just being able to workout in move my body in ways that I choose. So that became like my freedom on my off days.

 James Geering 1:19:48

Were you still playing beach volleyball competitively during this?

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No. So I still wasn't playing. I remember one of my captains actually he was having a disk I shared with him and he suggested that I start playing again, just for fun. Because it's something, probation is hard. You're, everything is new. It's designed basically to overwhelm you to overload you. So don't show up on shift, and you just get all this information hold at you, you have to give drills, which are super stressful on equipment, procedures.

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You get calls, you get your first fire, you make a lot of mistakes. And when you screw up,

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people yell at you, and then you learn and then you keep going. So it's a lot, a lot of pressure, and you're just not going to be good. You're not going to be good at it at a lot of things. And he suggested I just start playing volleyball again. Because it was something that was familiar to

me, and it could maybe bring me some joy during probation, which is inherently difficult. So I started practicing again. And he was right. It was really fun. But realized, in the process, that I definitely was not done competing. And I felt like my best years competitively we're still ahead of me,

 James Geering 1:21:33

did you notice the impact of the shift work on your performance as a sporting athlete?

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Yes. That's basically where things got really challenging was when I started to play train seriously and compete again, and continue my shift work. And I was up and about everything with my crew I was working with at the time, they they were actually very supportive of me playing and competing, they think it's the coolest thing. And just that, I mean, if I have this talent, I gotta use it. But I would go on shifts, and it's like a whole nother professional sport firefighting. So I'd go on shift, do this professional sport, not sleep, then I'd get off, try to catch up on sleep and recovery, but then it'd be training for volleyball and my other athletic pursuits. And then I would have to go on shift the next day. And it was, it was really hard physically and mentally, because I basically had no recovery time. And I got to the point where I was just at risk of getting injured, or I know something bad happening in either sport, or percussion, I guess. So realize that I had to make make a decision to focus on one and put the other on hold for the time being, and I only have a small window really to compete for volleyball and in other competitions, as a professional athlete, whereas firefighting will always be there. So I decided to go for volleyball. Initially, I went for a leave of absence, I again, I was open. I think my communication and openness about this whole experience served me really well. Because I told my captain about everything I was thinking about and experiencing. Talk to my crew about it. And we decided to try for a leave of absence first. It ended up it got approved all the way until the end, and it was declined. So that I was put on the spot basically had to step away from the fire department or start working again right away and give up volleyball and everything else. Which it was so hard because I've worked really hard for this career for this opportunity. And I am just very passionate about the fire service and the kind of impact I can make. Again, there were things that definitely did not care for and parts of the health sacrifice that were They did not sit well with me. And I think that partly influenced my decision to but I decided to step away, and then I can get back into firefighting when when I'm ready.

 James Geering 1:25:21

So this is such an important perspective. And it's funny, when you were talking, I was thinking about Matt Chan, who's been on the show a couple of times. Now, when he was at the height of his CrossFit career, he was not in the fire service, because again, it was the same kind of thing. Now he's managed to juggle the two, but he's not competing anymore. He's coaching and then he's a full time firefighter.

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If you want to compete, it's just, you can't be your best in both arenas. So if you want to be

if you want to compete, it's just, you can't be your best in both arenas. So if you want to be healthy, and coach others, I think you can do both. But I would have to put volleyball and it's like, I could play volleyball, I just would have to accept that I'm not going to be putting my best self on the court.

 James Geering 1:26:03

Well, when you did human biology, you know, we learned I did exercise physiology in college. And, you know, you learn about when you process learning, which is when you sleep you learn that when you rebuild the body after breaking it down and training is when you sleep. And so you get I had this in my career, you know, the, the lack of a better word, the slogan, the Lazy Boy, saying, it's always the Fit guys to get her. Well, yeah, there's, there's a physiological reason why the men and women that take their job seriously and train on shift and train off shift get hurt, because they don't have the time to recover. There's a reason why we struggle to retain medical protocols. And you know, not because we're not sleeping, that's when your brain processes that. So this is what I find. So insane is, you know, you have everyone's favorite sport, sport and athlete. They will understand that they have nutritionists, they have certainly conditioning coaches, they have, you know, ice baths and recovery and people talking to them about sleep and sleep hygiene and they recover after each training session. You have, you know, the Special Operations Committee, I've had a lot of them on, they have those tools as well, you know, the seals and some of those groups. And then you have the fire service, where 56 hours a week is your minimum work week, because I've worked Anaheim for a few years too. And I think we had almost the same schedule as you, but then you have understaffing. So now that 56 becomes an 80 Hour Work Week. And you ask Drew Brees, Hey, are you going to win the Superbowl? If you work 80 hours a week and you don't sleep every third day, it's insanity. And we have to be awake at nighttime. But for me, the industry standard at a minimum should be at 2472. We need to give these men and women an entire 24 hour period extra to try and get somewhat back to baseline. But we are literally working our men and women into the ground, you know, literally and figuratively. Yeah.

 1:28:03

And it's just if you want if you want the best service, I guess for the citizens. You need to have first responders who are recovered and know in the best state to go and perform. It's just it's mind blowing to me that we're that we accept. Operating in such low levels of capacity as the norm in these kinds of emergencies, where you need to be able to think critically on the spot, make split second decisions, and do things that are extremely challenging. I mean, there's adrenaline and things that get going in it. It can kind of act like a band aid. But it's just not healthy. And it's not ideal for the first responders or the people we're serving. In terms of the recovery protocols, I think some departments are starting to realize that you need to treat firefighters like professional athletes, but yeah, that's kind of crazy to me that we're so behind in getting those recovery methods to the people who probably need it the most. That's I don't know what to say. But if it's like, it might be a funding issue. It might be again, like the old cultural mentality or standards of just like getting it out and accepting health sacrifice. But that's, that's only gonna get you so far. And I think everyone is starting to realize that there needs to be changes, and we have to make them fast. If we were to keep up,

 James Geering 1:30:21

James Geering 1:30:21

well, the truth sort of come become apparent to me. And you know, again, eight, nine years ago, I was just oblivious as the rest of us. But we first tell ourselves a lie, you know, and we allow the public and everyone else politicians to tell us a lie, which is the firefighters schedule was amazing. They have all these days off. So you know, one day on two days off, for example, well, a work day is an eight hour day for civilian with a one hour lunch or whatever it is, we work three days on, one day off, and we don't work, you know, 10 days a month, we actually work three days a month, if you're looking at a regular eight hour day. So we've been telling ourselves a lie. And then obviously we have that, well, you know, we're going to show up because we have that service in our heart. But then even from the financial side, well, we can't just we can't hire enough people as it is. Well, if you look at what it costs to destroy a firefighter, the workman's comp claims the wrongful, you know, lawsuits, the overtime covering vacancies, I mean, a shitload of money.



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If they're just reallocating money into the right things into like, the roots of these problems instead of trying to cover up the damage of it. We would, we would make



James Geering 1:31:38

headway. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So So you have that as well. And then even with the staffing issue, imagine now if a young man or woman was like, I want to be a firefighter, and they they research it, and it's okay. It's it's a 24/7 you two as a 42 hour work week, you know, and put the staffing back where it is because you attract people again, because it's not a work environment as you say them it took you a very short amount of time to go from and, and the Lee accomplished athlete and a human biology major to have this realization like What in the fuck is going on here? How are you working these people? So you change that now you solve the the understaffing issue, because you attract a lot more people, because you're showing the new recruits, we care enough about you that we're going to create an environment to thrive, versus you know, you're just a number show up, or you're going to be written up, you know, which I mean, I've worked for four different departments, I would argue one of the best in the country, and then one of the worst, and then, you know, a couple of great ones in between. So, you know, I've got to see it from a kind of gypsy lands, but it is insanity and no other industry works there people like the fire service does, and yet we're the ones that people call on their absolute worst day.



1:32:55

What just out of curiosity, what was your experience at one of the best departments in terms of was it a whole lot different? Or did you still have the same shuffles in terms of I don't know, hell sacrifice and sleep.



James Geering 1:33:12

So I would put Anaheim on the pedestal just because there again, it was at the front door for the beginning. Like they we lost 25% of every class back then through attrition through

Academy and then probationary year. So they set the bar and they didn't budge. Like if you if you didn't make it, then bye bye. You know, we'll find someone else. But the work week, they're horrendously behind still. So this is the thing. I didn't realize that back then. And when I was hired, they were to be fair, trying to fill all the vacancies that they had, and that the higher class which I think was a couple of years to three years ahead of me, those poor guys and girls have been getting their asses handed to them. So now is our time in the barrel. So as you were saying, moment, we hit six months on probation. Now we were overtime, you know, we were able to do the overtime for them. And it was you know, like you said, you got 24 on 24 or 24 on that became a 72. So immediately, six months on the job, you're working seven etoos all the time, or I mean, I my basic pay when I got hired was supposed to be 56 a year, I didn't sign up for overtime and I cleared over 100 grand of forced overtime. So, you know, this is the problem. If you lay that out to someone working in a supermarket or you know, a carpentry organization or you name it and other job and say yeah, you know, probably going to work 56 hours but I might tell you, you have to stay another 24 How would that work outside you know, so but we we have to take a step back and stop focusing on leather helmets and mustaches and smoothbore nozzles and talk about the real things that are killing us. That stuff is great, but those are tools this this is a fixable element but we have to rise up we have to get educated we have to get angry and we have to look at the sporting Well, for example, and say, Look, this is human performance. And this is how far away we are. I'm actually involved in a kind of research blue sky project in November with one of the country's leading research organizations to bring that very comparison to the fire service. Because what I keep getting told his will show me the data. And the My thing is really, you need me to show you research on why a 56 hour week is worse than a 42 hour week. The fact that you asked me that tells me I'm listening to the wrong person anyway. So go go look in a mirror and come back when you figure it out for yourself.



1:35:34

Other people who are working 48 there, what are they doing sitting at a desk? Whereas firefighters are it's extremely physical. you're exerting yourself for 56 hours.



James Geering 1:35:49

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. So talk to me about what's next then I mean, football actually, let me pull that question back for a second. You heading back into the beach volleyball world, as you said, your strength and conditioning road became more diverse. How did you find yourself in the obstacle racing and some of the other events that you're immersed in now as well?



1:36:11

So that's really interesting, because actually, my training for firefighting served me really well. I got invited to compete an obstacle course competition last year called Battle bunker. And one of my friends Hunter McIntyre, he was helping run it. So he, I went and trained with him one weekend, and he said, Hey, I think you would be really good at this kind of competition. So I was like, Okay, let's give it a go. Went there. And it basically, they had three events. And the first one was a rock and a row. And then you sprint it at the end of it. Second one was, it was short, it was a bunch of sandbag work. So sandbag cleans and squats, and then running around

the perimeter of a field. And then third was an obstacle course. And it was designed to test all different aspects of fitness, but in a functional way. It is the course was built based off of military obstacle courses. So the whole thing is very paramilitary and that appeals to me. But I went and I was competing against a lot of athletes who trained specifically in this hybrid fitness space, that's what they have started calling it as hybrid fitness. And leading up to it, I just did my best doing what I thought I would have to do a lot more running. I ran with a weight vest. But I ended up getting fourth and I won the second event which was the sandbag strength complex. And just realize I have some real potential in this space. So I immediately went and did a high rocks. High Rocks hierarchs is very popular in Europe right now and it's starting to explode in the US. Basically, it's a total of five miles of running you run around the perimeter of this arena. And then you go into the center every one kg I believe like point six two miles and you complete work at a station. i There's skier growing machine, burpee broad jumps, sled push sled pull, so it's all functional fitness stuff again that technically anybody could go do. But when did one of those and I think I finished third overall. Again, with not without any training, I was more or less just curious. I wanted to see what it was about. And just started this I started to stirrups and talk and other people started to realize that there was some big potential for me in this space. And as exciting because it was in the beginning stages of everything. Then this offseason, I really I became very focused on volleyball decided that this season was something I wanted to just go all in on it's also an Olympic qualification year. So I wanted to see if that would be a possibility for me. And in the first tournament of the year, in April, I hurt my foot and originally I was told I broke it, which was devastating. But I couldn't had to pull out of a tournament in Australia at a plot of all the next beach volleyball tournaments and I wasn't able to jump, Sprint, or do anything in the sand, the instability was the worst thing for it. I was told I could cross train, so I could originally like lift weights. bike, I did a lot of yoga. And one month from that first tournament, I had this opportunity to compete in the gueret games. i The gar games, we were sent a packing list. And we know other information about what we were going to do was given to us so we just knew it was gonna be 48 hours. We were going to be camping because they said no hotel is going to be included. And there was a tent and other items like that included in our packing list. Based off of the first one was first group games as last year, based off of what they did, that I knew there's probably going to be grappling involved in there was a mouthguard included in the packing list. So I was like, okay, grappling, obviously, there's gonna be rocking because go rock is a company that makes rocks. And other than that they could test this in any, any kind of way. The cadre is a group of Special Forces veterans. So I knew they were going to be basically testing us in ways that they, they were tested. And I just got in this pretty intense mental space. I realized the Olympics were off the table for me. It was just hard. Everything I'd been really working on and focusing was now. Not a possibility anymore. But I had this opportunity in front of me. And I was like, Alright, fine. I'm gonna go win the girl games. So I just went all in on it and read a book. They said, warriors creed. And it was really good. I trained a lot in any way I could, I was only able to run maybe twice leading up to it, which is kind of mind blowing, but I'm trying to do cardio and a lot of other ways. My foot still wasn't fully healed when I went into it.



1:42:46

But I was just I was ready to give everything I had. I didn't care, honestly. And I went in and I ended up wanting the whole thing and it was basically 48 hours of evolutions.



1:43:07

best way I can describe it to people is like Navy SEAL training. The first night. Well, the first thing we did was this baseline functional fitness test. It included a one mile run with 100 pounds on our back 100 pound ruck that was heavy, very heavy sandbag burpee tests, a push up test, and pharma carry tests and then they took us to the ocean at sunset. We all had rucks on. We got on the water so we're all wet. Then we rolled in the sand. So we're sand churros. And they tell us the next evolution we need to start running down the beach and we're not going to stop until they tell us to. It's a race. It ended up being 16 miles and we finished around 1am in the dark 60 mile run 16 mile ruck



James Geering 1:44:12

rock. Okay, then you didn't know how long you were gonna that's a lot of miles of not knowing



1:44:19

a lot of miles of unknown Yes. We ran four miles down and then there was a cadre member he told us to turn around so we turned around and started running back and I again like I was not able to run and train appropriately for for this and so for me I knew there was gonna be moments like this where I was just gonna have to get it out and we'll power my way through but it hurt. It hurt really bad. I was praying that we were going to stop where we started which would be eight miles But we got to that midway point and we kept going. And that was really hard. They thought more people were going to quit. There's 12 women and Tolman. Only one female quit in that evolution. But I think the CADRE thought they were going to lose more



1:45:24

finish that I wasn't definitely was not in the front. I was in the lower half of the rankings, but



1:45:39

did as well as I could have in that event. I know they took us to a campsite and we set up tents and got some people were able to sleep for a couple hours, I couldn't sleep. Woke up the next day and continued with evolutions. I think my training with fire if I'm used to I was used to sleep deprivation, I'm used to functioning when you feel like shit. So that second day was mine and I just crushed from the first event on it was a the first one was a sandbag. Or it was like a sand kettlebell. Snatch test. And I think I got the most snatches out of men and women. And then second event was we had to run with sandbags on our shoulders and the weight increased. I think it was like a 60 pound sandbag than an 80 pound sandbag than 100 pound sandbag. I'm really good at running with weight. So I ended up getting second in that. Versus competitors who would definitely beat me if it was just a regular run. But when you add weight to the mix, I don't know I thrive, evidence working a lot more on running specifically in endurance because I realized that after that competition, I started working with a coach and just realized that that's where I can make up a lot of ground in these competitions. That's probably my weakness. But then there was some shooting events, which was really fun. Dummy drag, there was a non event where we had to tie they they taught us three knots. But Boleyn clove hitch in a square

knot, y'all that? Well, they already know how to tie this knot. Yeah. So it's, I It's funny, because I was just like, I think this was what I've been training for for the past five years, is how I felt. Yeah. Then the last day was single elimination from quarterfinals on and it was you had to hold a sandbag static, hold overhead, one on one facing off against the competitor, which is definitely in my wheelhouse. And then there was grappling. And it's not like there's weight classes so and I have jujitsu experience. So nobody wanted to be pitted against me. And then the last the final event, it was me and my friend Calypso made it to the finals. And we had to carry a bunch of sandbags on one side of this cargo net up and over the net and drop it on one side. And then once all those sandbags were there, we ran around. And we had to get all these sand medicine balls and sandbags from one end of the field across this line. So again, it came down to work capacity and ability to carry weight. And I took it so one of the garage games and then that just opened up a lot more opportunities in this fitness space. I started working with a coach who is training me specifically for the stuff so I don't have to try to guess and make up my own workouts now. And we're doing we're building my training program a lot more intelligently. So taking a look at like what are my strengths now? What are my weaknesses? What do I really need to focus on? On instead of just training randomly across the spectrum all the time, if you want to make adaptations, you have to pinpoint one and periodized your training essentially. And now I'm competing Oh, I set a DECA strong world record. And then I got fifth place in the world for DECA mile. And this weekend I'm doing DECA fit. So there's this race organization called DECA fit that runs these three different races. And they have World Championships in December. I've qualified for two of them in our I want to qualify for the last one. There's high rocks, which is another race organization and then I did like grip games in Texas A couple weeks ago. So different gyms are, like the battle bunkered they'll run their own hybrid fitness competitions in invite athletes. They're all different. There's some that definitely will suit certain athletes more. Yeah, so it's fun to go compete. And every time I do I figure out more about

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myself and my strengths and my weaknesses. But my mental game is definitely something that serves me well in this space. And I think my training and firefighting built a big part of that.

 James Geering 1:51:43

That's amazing to me to go from the volleyball to the fire service to the hybrid, you know, fitness events now, is there still going to be a window in the future for you to go back into the beach volleyball, pursuit of Olympic teams, or is that kind of close now with this last injury.

 1:52:02

Um, so I actually I've started playing again, I played in the Manhattan Beach, ABP this past weekend, I was planning on playing the full season. But again, I hurt my foot in the first tournament, which was ABP, Miami and then this ended up being my second tournament of the season AVP. Manhattan. It was nice to be back for sure. I it's just a lot more challenging of a sport to invest in, honestly, because there's so many more pieces that are outside of your control. I with hybrid fitness, it's an individual sport, so I can train, prepare, go out and perform. And ultimately I'm in control. The results come down to me my performance, my preparation.

But with beach volleyball, it's a partner sport, and you can do everything to the tee. But unless your partner pulls their weight, and you gel well together on the court, and are able to put all the pieces together, you're not going to be able to beat the best teams and perform at the highest level. So there's also resources you need finances coaches, you need to set up practices with other teams, it's a lot more logistics and a lot more coordination and things you have to deal with. Whereas I can like I can train for hybrid fitness anywhere. I can go I can run I can go lift. So I don't want to write off volleyball. Just at this point, I it's a lot more challenging to invest in. And every time I I have really invested in it. I don't get much in return. But the second I've redirected my attention to hybrid fitness. It's really easy to gain traction there and get the results I'm looking for. So 2020 Olympics is a lay. I don't know, I don't want to write it off. But we'll see.

J James Geering 1:54:40

Brilliant. Well, I want to be mindful of your time. We're almost at two hours. Now. I just want to throw a few closing questions if you've got time. Okay, first one, I'd love to ask is there a book or other books that you love to recommend? It can be related to our discussion today or completely unrelated?

 1:54:57

I like the way was it wave the Peaceful Warrior by Dan Millman. That's one that I read. After my sister's passing, and it really spoke to me

 1:55:14

James clear. He wrote a book on habits. I'm trying to remember the name of atomic

J James Geering 1:55:22

habits, his book,

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atomic habits. I read that one before getting into the fire service, and I loved it. Yeah, really makes make sense. And I think if, if you're trying to make some life changes, and create new habits. It's a really I know, inspiring, right?

J James Geering 1:55:48

You mentioned warrior spirit is that Roger sparks his book. For one of the world's

 1:55:55

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largest sparks. I really liked that book. I read a lot of like sport books. I can't hurt me by David Goggins. I don't really agree with everything with everything he preaches, but I think he is very inspirational. And there's a lot of good takeaways from his book. Yeah, I know. Those are the top and the ones that are Oh, sevens. What is it called? Oh, it's the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen. Okay. Brilliant. Steven Kotler. I think he wrote one on flow state.

 James Geering 1:56:39

Brilliant. Now what about movies and or documentaries, any of those that you love?

 1:56:46

I like that maybe Gladiator? Just because it appeals to me. I'm not honestly, I don't watch very many movies or television in general. So not really the one to ask. But I recently watched a documentary called The deepest breath.

 James Geering 1:57:06

I just watched that. Amazing. So

 1:57:09

good. Yeah. My actually my ao I worked with last. He's He's the one who suggested it to me. He's like, I really think you would like this documentary. And I started watching it and I was just glued to the screen. My hands were sweating. Yeah, it was a really good about freediving.

 James Geering 1:57:34

It's hard because you want to tell people kind of what it's about. But you can't. It's kind of like The Alpinist you just got to say, just trust me watch this. It will take you on a journey. But if I tell you too much, it's gonna take you out of the journey. Yeah.

 1:57:49

I never really watched or knew much about freediving before watching it. It's just mind blown.

 James Geering 1:57:59

All right. Well, then the very last question before we make sure we're people that people know where to find you online. What you do to decompress your talks about all the the work that you do, what is your downregulation



1:58:14

I've been trying to get better at this actually. Because I realized that all the time, I'm always on. Like, always thinking about my next move or what I need to do. Problem Solving. And I've been trying to get better at just like, turning it off at a certain point during the day. Think being around other people engaging in social things. Doesn't have to be like even if I'm just go to dinner with one person or go play pickleball with my parents. play a board game, go on a walk with someone, just anything where I'm connecting with someone else, I think helps me decompress. I mean, I can always read a book, I can always watch a movie, but I'm still sort of on when I'm doing that. I'm like, trying to better myself, you know. So yeah, social connection is what works for me.



James Geering 1:59:30

Beautiful. I just came across an app this technology has been around for quite a while but only in the kind of high performance space and they've just been able to make it work on a smartphone now. I'll send you the link to the episode but the app is called New calm and new CLM and they have guessing about less than or recall that but they have modes where it down regulates you and you you can get into that relaxed state a lot quicker but they also have up regulation ones you know prior to event, but it was used by OR is still used by a special forces and a NASA and all these high performers. But episode 806 with Jim Paul, I mean, I'm, I'm a very hard person to impress specially when people use the word hack, you know, or a lot of these wearables and that kind of thing, it just I think the body is way more intelligent than, than a watch can tell you. But this particular thing has been game changing for me, especially, you know, people that are on shift and, you know, have the whether they're still in whether they've left the profession, you know, we have a lot of repairing to do even if your interest for a couple of years, but um, the downregulation on that has been incredible. So I'll send you that when we're done. Yes, I'd love to try it. Brilliant. All right. So then for people listening, where are the best places to learn more about you online and on social media?



2:00:53

So I'd say I'm most active on Instagram. You can find me at Carly Whoa, Pat. And that's pretty much it. I don't really use my other social media platforms,



James Geering 2:01:06

we are watching your website is amazing. So what is the address for that?



2:01:10

Yeah, my website is currently Wolf pack.com. There may be a new website coming soon. But for right now, that's my current website.

 James Geering 2:01:22

Brilliant. Well, Carly, I want to say thank you so much. It's like I said, you have a very unique perspective. And I have this you know, a handful of times on the show people that function at a very, very high level in the sporting world and then come into the first responder profession. And so whether they they stay whether they have a realization and you know, want to want to do what you did, which is make the most of their younger years before they commit to the the environment that we work in at the moment. But your perspective is unique, and I think is very, very important. So I want to thank you so much, not only from the, you know, the fire service conversation, but also the vulnerability about you know, your sister and that other conversation that needs to happen whether you're in uniform or not. So thank you so much.

 2:02:07

You're welcome. Thanks for having me on James. It was a pleasure to talk about all this and I do. Enjoy these conversations. So