

Interview with David Hall - Wheelchair Tennis Champion

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SPEAKERS

Larry Lauer, David Hall, Jason Harnett, Johnny Parks



Johnny Parks 00:05

Welcome to Compete like a Champion. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer, mental skills specialist with USTA Player Development and Coach Johnny Parks with IMG Academy. We're coming at you with another great episode this week and it's great timing as the Paralympics are about to start, we've got special guests coming on the show legendary wheelchair tennis athlete, David Hall. And we've got a special guest presenter as I was not able to be on the recording. Unfortunately for this great one. I've been able to listen to it since and it's a fantastic one. But Jason Harnett, who's been on the podcast Previously, we had a great chat with him. He's going to be filling in for me as Dr. Larry's co-presenter here and for those of you just just a short recap on Jason's role. He's the national manager and head coach of wheelchair tennis at USTA Player Development he does absolutely fantastic work many times when I was at USTA a walking around the center seeing the work that he does with the wheelchair athletes, just world class world class level, he's been able to bring on Legendary Aussie wheelchair athlete, David Hall. So it's a fantastic episode. I know you're really going to enjoy it. We're going to come back at you as we close out the interview here. So hope you enjoy it. We'll speak to you in a bit.



Jason Harnett 01:27

Alright, well welcome everybody today to the Compete like a Champion podcast. I know

Johnny Parks is normally your host. But today, I've been asked to be a guest host. My name is Jason Harnett. And I'm the national manager and Head Paralympic Coach of wheelchair tennis here at the USTA at Player and Coach development. And a big thank you to Dr. Larry Lauer. The other hosts of the show. He's who's who's amazing, and our mental skills specialist here at the USTA and we have a very special guest, a dear friend of mine that I've known for, gosh, almost a quarter of a century, which is hard to believe, kind of dating ourselves, David. But we have David Hall, truly one of the great legends of the sport of wheelchair tennis, International Tennis Hall of Fame member, I would be remiss not to go through your resume just a little bit. I'm gonna embarrass you a little bit David So, but it gives that thing some perspective on who you are, and the gravity of the impact you had on wheelchair tennis and tennis in general. David is a six time world champion Paralympic medalist in three different three different games gold medalist and Sydney, his hometown, which is an amazing what an amazing thing to have for you to do at home. 33 titles, major titles, eight US Opens, or six US Opens, receiving eight Australian Opens eight, Japan Opens, seven British Opens. Three NTC singles masters titles, three or four World Team Cups, and a singles career record of 632, and 111. So an absolutely remarkable career. And I've been blessed to have watched, you know, 20 years of that, and was always in awe, and he just one of the best guys ever on tour. And we're just so happy that you're here to share a little bit about your story and maybe answer a few questions that we'll have for you. So, welcome to the show, David.

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David Hall 03:09

Thanks, mate. I love it when you rattle off those numbers, you can keep going. I won't stop you at all. But no, look, it is great to be here. And it's funny actually looking back, because I had been, as you know, writing a book. And so I've been diving back into, you know, my tennis career and different aspects of it. And we go and we begin and the peaks and the valleys and the trials and tribulations of it. And I think that was you know, one of the big things that like you are chasing something like I'm always I was always chasing like the next title or the next the next medal or the next victory or whatever it was. But there is a beginning and I think that's probably the best place to stop.

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Jason Harnett 03:58

Now I would say if you could take us back to the beginning, when you started, you know how you found wheelchair tennis, what your tennis background was maybe before your injury and then and then share with us that journey.

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David Hall 04:08

I played tennis as a kid, like I started quite young, around 10 years old, but I was also playing soccer and running track as well. So I was quite sporty. But then, like for me life kind of got in the way a little bit. I left school at 16 moved to Sydney moved to the big city. I grew up in a beach town. So I kind of got away from sport a little bit. And I guess I did for a 16 year old, I looked a bit older than what I was and so I was kind of you could say I was enjoying the city life. Like I was kind of getting into, you know, nightclubs and pubs and all that kind of stuff. I mean, I'm going back, you know, this is like 1986 like you can imagine things are a bit looser back then. And then I traveled home because it was my mom's Birthday, and I did you know what teenagers can do. I made a dumb decision like I was at her party. But I wanted to go to another party that my friends were holding, like a couple of suburbs away. And so I decided to hitchhike to that party. And as I was hitchhiking, you know, it was the middle of the night, and I was hit by a car. And thankfully, the guy stopped. And that kind of sent me that night trains everything you can imagine. And I went to the local hospital, I was flown down to a big hospital in Sydney, and then spent the next well, gosh, four months in hospital, and that resulted in the amputation of both my legs. And our member for me, obviously, it was hugely traumatic, and a big game changer. And towards the end of that hospital stay, there was a nurse, and she was the head nurse. And she was an amazing, compassionate person. And she said, Dave, I want to bring in someone to talk to you. And this guy, his name was Alan. And he was also a double amputee. And he had years and years earlier been run over by a train and miraculously survived. And so she bought in Alan, and he would have been probably late 30s, I think. And I thought he was going to give me like some pearls of wisdom straightaway. And Alan pulled out this cassette tape of ACDC Back in Black. And I was like, man, I'm a Duran Duran fan. Like I had no, like heavy metal was not even on my radar. And Alan said, at some point, you are going to hit anger. And this tape will help you get through it. And I was thinking, okay, wow. And I hadn't really I hadn't reached that stage yet. I think I was, I was still, like, in the grief stages, I was still somewhere between sadness, and you know, whatever was next. And then he laid his pearl of wisdom on me, he said, the only person that can truly help you, is you. And I was like, what does he even mean by that I didn't really understand it. And because I thought, well, the doctors can help. The nurses can help the physios can help my folks, my friends, they can all help but ultimately, what he was saying, and it took me time to fully grasp it was that this is your life. Like this is your adversity, these are your decisions, these are your emotions. And yes, other people can definitely help you along the way. But ultimately, the quicker that you get out of the, this why me phase, the quicker you will get to whatever is next. And I thought that was a big moment for me when I fully grasp exactly what he was talking about. And so I had to kind of use whatever this energy that I was feeling, whether it was anger, negativity, whether I was sad, frustrated, whatever it was, like to use all that to kind of get back into society and to try to get to whatever was next. And that kind of led into when I got out of hospital. And I would say I was learning to walk with prosthetics. So I was

getting back into society trying to get my old job back, like as a clerk. And then one day, I was reading the local newspaper and there was an article about a guy in a wheelchair playing tennis, and I was like, I couldn't believe it. I'd never seen wheelchair tennis. I've never seen wheelchair sports. I didn't even know it existed. This would have been 1987. And I have to find out who this guy is. And so we contacted him and his name was Terry. Terry Mason. And the guy looked exactly like Fabio, the guy on the romance novel, the cover. The Italian Stallion fell, he had the George ham on suntan, he had muscles on his muscles. I was like, Oh my god, this is like a Greek god on the other side of the net, because we'd arrange to hit balls that this coming Saturday. And so that was the moment that it sent me on a whole other path because that was an opportunity that I really had to grasp. And so that for me was my first introduction into wheelchair tennis.



Jason Harnett 09:49

And you played tennis before? Is that right? I know when you were a kid before you before you got injured you were a player.



David Hall 09:55

I was never I was a good local player. Like knew the group's swings. I'd had lessons, but I wasn't ever gonna make it as a pro. Like, I was good in my own little fish bowl. Like, we're out towns were our beach towns, like in that little area, I was good. But as soon as I went to say Sydney, like I was I was getting walked by, you know, the better kids. And so I had no grand illusions of doing what Pat Cash did at Wimbledon. You know, in the mid 80s, of, you know, becoming this grand champion, I was never going to get to that point. I was never gonna make it on the tour. But, but yeah, I was a good local player. I think I did win the Toukley Club championship as a junior, you know, 14, but I was never gonna, you know, get to play at the Australian Open or anything.



Larry Lauer 10:55

David, how do you move from learning about the sport and you meet this guy, Terry Mason, and how you get to a point where you're thinking about playing it's such a competitive, intense level and becoming this great player? You know what, what happens to really spark that passion and lead you down farther down that path?



David Hall 11:18

At first, it was just fun. My head, even even starting wheelchair tennis, even after Fabio had told me about the tour. And he told me about prize money. And he was thinking wow

you can win money doing this. I mean, it wasn't that much. You know, back in the 80s. But I was I was like, man, I was just doing it for fun. I was just doing it like as a reason to get out of you know, man, if I can get out of work for two weeks and go to you know, America or or hang out with, you know, my buddies like down in Obree, or wherever it was. And so I had no even grand illusions of maybe even like going to the US Open, I'd heard about it. But when I went to Japan, in 1990, the first time I went overseas, that changed everything for me, because that was I mean, Japan itself was incredible, because I was selling stuff out of vending machines that I thought was absolutely nuts. But that whole culture shock was like it wasn't a culture shock. It was like an electrocution. I was thinking man, this is like, I mean, come from a small beach town going to Japan was like going to another universe. But in the final was Randy Snow. Who would that that at that time I'd won six US Opens. And he was like this mythical God that people would talk about in like hushed tones, you know, because he was just so revered and, and he was playing the number two guy, Laurent Giammartini. And Laurent was the flashy Frenchman. I mean, is there any other kind? Or like every Frenchman is flashy. And so they're playing the final and I'm in the front row and half the town in Asuka City in Japan, half the towns that and school kids TV cameras, front row. Here I am and I'm watching this match unfold and Randy's absolutely getting crushed. This match is turning into a massacre six love people can't believe it. Laurent in the second set two love, three love, four love, five love, it six love, five love. And I'm watching it from the front row. And I'm thinking oh man, what's what's going on? What's going on with Randy and Ross Burgess was sitting next to me and he was a guy from New Zealand a player. He played all these matches wearing moccasins, which are these, you know, bizarre shoes. He was a real character. The guy looked exactly like Phil Collins on my dad. And Roscoe knows me and he said, Dave, this matches Nova. And I was like, come on, man. Come on. It's a massacre Randy's not coming back and he said no, no, you watch. Randy will fight this to the very end. Anyway at five love turns into 5-1, 5-2, 5-3, I'm watching it in the crowd is starting to get fired up. Randy's making this momentous comeback five all, He's saving match points. Laurent is getting frustrated. We get to a tie break. Randy saves more match points wins the tie break. The crowd is screaming, the yelling the school kids are tearing their hair out. It's unbelievable theater. And then Laurent mentally just fell off a cliff. And that was it. And Randy runs away with the third set. And I'm watching all this unfold. And I'm like the kid in a candy store that just can't get enough. And on match point. Randy raises his arms and he's pushing towards the net. Everyone's yelling and screaming and I looked at Randy and I said to myself, I said that's what I want. I want to be that guy, I want to be number one. And that wheelchair tennis from that moment on took on a whole other purpose. But it took it to a level that I did not recognize. And up until then it was it was fun. And I was enjoying it. And I wanted to win. But after watching that, I went back home to my job as a clerk. And I just knew that I had to tennis was took on a whole new meaning I had to try to find a way clearly know how I had to try to find a way to get to number one, how do I give myself the best

chance to try to make that transition from, you know, this is fun. I'm doing it, I'm traveling, I'm playing tournament tournament, but now I want to be a champion. I want that feeling that Randy had of winning that match point. And so that that was a whole new dynamic for me from that moment.



Larry Lauer 16:01

So interesting to hear how that passion gets ignited, right, you know, in, in different athletes and what that tipping point is that moment that really changes thing. That's a really vivid and cool story. So



David Hall 16:15

It was also driving for me because I think it was happening right in front of me. Like, you know, it's when you've got the visual and you've got the the hearing out, I could hear it, I could see it back and feel it. You know, it was it was like a feeling that was there was more, it felt at the time, like it was just more powerful than life itself. And it was it was like an all consuming moment, even though I had no idea how to do it. And it would take me years to work it out. But I just knew from that moment just laid that level of commitment. And I think once you have that level of commitment, like so many things can spring from that so many drivers know like in anything, it just doesn't have to be, you know, being an athlete, it can be in any field. But once you have that level of commitment that that's what I want, then that can be the driving force behind. Yeah, so much.



Jason Harnett 17:18

Would you say I mean, looking back, we talked about professionalism a lot. Who was the catalyst that made such an impact that changed the way the sport was approached by all the other athletes. And from what I saw from the beginning, in the men's division, Randy may have been that first town, but I felt like you were the first guy. And I know you talk about that it took you a few years to kind of figure it out. But there was a turn in you that was noticed by the whole tennis world, that you know, your level of professionalism and the level of organization, your habits, your routines on and off, the court changed. And when that changed, you know, your reign of dominance really began and I can say Esther gear had the same flip right on the women's side. And I would say Rick drainie in the Quad division was probably the first quadras show that level professionally, I would always say there was the three of you, that kind of changed the way athletes in wheelchair tennis, look at the way they operated. And was your behaviors that everybody recognized. You want to keep up with Dave, you've got to become Dave, and again that a lot of players couldn't. They just didn't have the discipline and the wherewithal to recognize

what they really needed. You figured that out? And maybe it did take a couple of years. But once you did, there was no looking back. I mean, it was a six, seven year stretch of absolute dominance by your Can you talk about those routines and habits that you've formed over maybe a few years, getting a coach? You know, all of that is part of the ingredients to it?

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David Hall 18:52

Well, I think I had reached I reached the ceiling, like I was, as the years went on, I was always winning some tournaments, my ranking was going up, you know, always getting stronger. I was lifting a lot of weights in the gym. My tennis was getting better. I mean different. There are different reasons for that. Like I started playing more tournaments. I started traveling more, but I had reached some kind of ceiling and back then, like I'm talking 92', 93', 94'. I think in 94 was when I hit number two in the world, but I wasn't. I kind of reached I think I think as far as I could go in terms of being a player, and I was still beating some of the top guys but I was losing more often to other top guys. And so I think I knew that I needed something else. I just didn't really know what that was. And the funny thing is that life just has a weird way of putting you together with someone that you may not have ever gotten together with for that one specific reason. And the funny thing is I fell in love. There was a girl on the tour that we started dating, and she lived in Boulder, Colorado. And so I thought I have to I want to be with this, this girl. And so I moved to Boulder. And it just happened to be that I had to find a coach. And I was just flicking through the phone book and there was an ad for Rich's tennis school. And I thought he had worked with a couple of local wheelchair tennis players, but but no one like at the level that I was playing at. And so we did have some, you know, experience with wheelchair tennis, but Rich was the one that really showed me. Okay, this is what you need to do. And we we kind of had agreed that you had reached the point now we're going to try to get you to the next point. And part of that was gear, changing some aspects of training, by playing more practice sets, doing more two on court sessions a day, or being more ball machine specific, maybe tailoring the weights a little bit better, doing more pushing hills, that kind of supplement, we tweaked some of that stuff. But he wanted to test me, he wanted to find out how committed I actually was. So he said, I want you to push stop pushing to practice. Now his tennis school, where I was living in downtown Boulder. His tennis school was on the outskirts of the town. And so it was, gosh, I don't know, three four mile push. And so I would push to practice, like before the session, just as a bit of a warm up. Now if the weather was bad, I would catch the bus. One day, he called me on the phone. He said, Dave, I want you to push the practice today. And it was snowing outside. He said, I want you to show me how committed you are to being number one. And I thought oh man, okay. So I said alright mate, I'll show you my commitment. So I hung up the phone, grabbed my beanie, put my gloves on my jacket, and my my racket

bag and I started pushing Well, those little romantic snowflakes started getting harder. So I pushed up the first Hill, bypass the university, I kept going, and all of a sudden the wind picks up and it starts driving the snow in my face. And I see buses going by and I'm thinking oh man, crikey should I'd catch a bus or so I just turn around and go back home? Like what's what's happening? And I thought no, I have to show Rich that I'm committed to being number one. And so I kept going well, then it was kind of turning into a bit of a blizzard. And I was like, Man, this is nuts. I completely missed my lesson, like that time had had long gone. And so I kept going I kept going. And then finally I see the road that Rich's tennis school is on and oh man, finally, I've reached it. And I start pushing down the road. And I get in to the front door and I push the door open and snow blows in from behind me and Rich comes running over. He's like frantic Oh, my God can't believe it. I've killed him. No, I collapse on the court and I look up at him and he's looking down at me man, I didn't believe that you would do I thought you just go home. I sent out a search party for you. It was it was absolutely not. And I said, nah, man, I'm committed. This is how committed I am to try to get to number one. And from that moment, it just that even took it to a whole new level because I realized that to fully get what I wanted, I had to suffer. And sometimes that is what it's going to take. Because as you know when you're in a highly competitive sport, the margins at the top. So swim. And sometimes it's the guy that wants it just that little bit more than the other guys that that's what it will take to win that that last match at the tournament. And so for me, I realized that that yes, I had to suffer. And it was months after that, that I won the US Open and got to number one in the world. And that day, not only did I win the US Open and get to number one, but then I realized I had tickets to Van Halen that night. It was it was like the greatest day in my history. Emma and our member of BCD Welsh down in the pit at the Racquet Club of Irvine in a third set, tie break. And it reminded me of Japan five years earlier because the crowd is screaming, yelling when I win the match have become number one and everyone's congratulating me and then I get out of the pit after the ceremony. And I push out out of the rock club of Irvine. And I, there's a payphone. I picked up the payphone. And remember the goal that I moved out about the goal that I moved to Boulder for she was back in Boulder, and I called her on the phone. And my voice was trembling. Like, I was so excited that I thought I'd finally done it. It taken me, like five years to get to this moment. And I said, baby won't believe it. I won. I won the US Open. And she was like, I'm so proud of you. And our voices were trembling. And it was such like, it was such a big moment, because I just I realized that I'd done it. And I'd suffered to do it. And I think that's what you know, made it all the more worthwhile.



Larry Lauer 25:57

Wow, that's, that's unbelievable story, David. And you got me fired up right now. Let's go. So this is great. You're a great ambassador for the sport. I'll tell you that much. And and

the fact that you're a Van Halen fan just wins you more points with me. So but

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Jason Harnett 26:17

You're saying the same thing. Van Halen in the pit at the racquet club of Irvine. Legend right there?

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David Hall 26:27

Yeah. This was this was the this was the semi hygeia dice. Yeah, these were these were good days. good days.

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Larry Lauer 26:36

Yeah, definitely. I remember that tour. So well. know, when you think about you, you showed so much determination and motivation to get to that level. And, you know, it's your professionalism is renowned. But I can imagine there were times where you weren't feeling that motivated, or that inspired. David, you know, and because all athletes, I think at some point deal with that. But did you feel that sometimes? And when you had those moments, how did you deal with that?

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David Hall 27:08

Yeah, I think just because I had that, that base to work from like that, that level of commitment. I think there was, there were times when I didn't feel like training. Like there were times when the wind was howling, and I didn't feel like going out and hitting 100 serves. But I'd reached a point in my mind that it was never a question of not doing it. Like, no matter what was happening outside of that, that see, like, it was never a question of I'm not training today, or I'm just gonna blow it off, or I don't feel like it, I'm going to make up an excuse in my own head or whatever it is. And so from that point, there was never a question of not doing it. Now, if I was on the tour, and I was a bit jaded, or that I'd been playing a lot of tournaments in a row, then I made sure that when I when I got home, that I would just get away. Like, I wouldn't touch a racket, you know, maybe for weeks on end. Like at some point, along the way, I bought an old 66 Mustang, and I'll just get in the Mustang. And I'll just drive and Oh, just go stay, you know, in a nice place, or my auntie's place, or wherever it was, and I just hang out there for a couple of days. And then I drive, you know, a few 100 kilometers, like back to Sydney. And I'll just forget about tennis. Like always quite good that when it was time to switch off, I would switch off and then when I came back to tennis mentally I was like fully fully in and so that part of it was if I wasn't motivated for training, it was never a question of not doing it and it's funny when if

you do feel not that motivated once you start training the motivation just switches on it's almost like you have to get over the hump of not feeling it because then when you start doing it it's like man I can't believe I wasn't feeling motivated like half an hour ago it just it just all all those all those fibers you know within your being just switched on and they all just come back all of a sudden because then you realize oh man Yeah, to love this sport, you know, to have a connection to this sport. And so that was that was that part of it? But yeah, if I was on tour, and you know I was coming back, back home, then I would just get away. I would just get away from the game recharge, whether that was you know, going to see bands or whatever it was. By the time I came back to, to practicing for the next block of tournament's then always I was good. I was good to go.

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Larry Lauer 29:53

That's a great message because I think our young players sometimes feel guilty. Taking time to recover, right? And maybe parents or coaches think well, maybe you should just get back on the court, right? We need more work more work when the recovery might be the best thing that you can do in those times. So you, you come back recharged and ready to go. Which is a good kind of into my next question, because you clearly physically you needed to recover. But it sounds like a big part of that was mental emotional to write that taking that time away from tennis, doing other things. Mental Health right now I'm sure you've been following the Olympics and you follow tennis and everything that's been going on talked about in mental health. Naomi Osaka, Simone Biles, you can go like the Michael Phelps, you know, everybody's talking about mental health. But what was the experience like for you? Being a wheelchair athlete? And one of the great champions of all time? What was it like to go through your experience? And how did you deal with that in terms of your own well being, you know, you talked about the recovery after tournaments, which I think is brilliant. But there are other things you had to do to be able to, to stay healthy to stay happy? You know, what are your thoughts on that?

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David Hall 31:18

Yeah, you're exactly right, it is a big issue. And to be a professional athlete, it is stressful. I mean, there's no two ways around it, you have your goals, and you have you dreams, and there are times where sometimes it can be overwhelming, and then that you feel like you need a time out. And some players do take a week, some take a month, I mean, some players just take a year, like they need time away to kind of try to get through or get around whatever they're feeling. And I think I mean, beyond trying to get away from the game and recharging, I think just trying to surround yourself with the best people, I think is really important as well, because you know that if you have people in your team, and family members, friends, whoever it is that you can trust and that you rely on and that,

you know, we're there for you. But I think that is that is a really big part of it. Because even though you know, an Allen, when he said that in my hospital room all those years ago that it's up to you, that is true. But on the other side of that you can't do it alone, that you do need good people around you. And part of that is from the mental well being aspect of it as well. And so there are always times where you do need a timeout, and you need a break. But I think it is a bit of a combination of different things. And not only not every formula works, I think for every athlete as well, you know, some people need different things to help them through it. And I mean, if players want to take time away from the game, then I think they definitely should, they should never feel pressured to compete for whatever reason that is whether it's pressure from other people, pressure from the to off pressure from federations, sponsors, whoever it is, if players to definitely if I need to take time off, time off, and time out, then they need to stand up and say, Look, I'm just gonna get away from this for a bit, and then do it. But again, that's not for everybody. And it really is like a personal decision, I feel as well. And so everyone's gonna hopefully make the best decisions that they can for themselves.



Larry Lauer 33:47

So that, you know, we're talking about well being and mental health. You know, Jason has been such a good source of understanding for me and working with our wheelchair tennis players, and then spending time with them has really been eye opening, but you talked about the trauma you experienced. Sorry, David, I'm going off the script. So the trauma that you experienced at a young age where you were hit by car, and then you found tennis. But what what did tennis and this that, that drive to be the best? How did that impact your perception of yourself because in one place, you're stuck in a hospital bed and you're a double amputee. And the next you know, I know it doesn't happen that quickly. But now you're striving to be the best in the world. What did that do for you as an individual?



David Hall 34:48

Well it's almost an unbelievable thing to say. Like even you saying it just feels like it's such a big jump and the cost was because all of a sudden, I'm transitioning back into society. And then I'm trying to, as I said before, learn to walk with prosthetic, some trying to learn how to navigate, you know, being a clerk and getting up steps and what my friends think of me. And although I all these things are flying, like around in my own mind colliding with each other, and then all of a sudden, I discovered this thing. But I think, oh, man, I could go down this path. And then when I see Randy and Laurent, it takes it to a whole different level. And so that is quite a big leap, like to get from that to that. And so, it was almost like that, that negative energy that I was feeling was all of a sudden kind of filled. And that

that feeling lasted for like the next 15 years. And so that was like the big driver of that. And so that, for me was, was fantastic. Because, like, it didn't need to be tennis, I think it could have been something else. It just happened to be, you know, tennis. And so whilst all these other things were happening, that I was trying to transition back into society, it was almost like that driver of tennis was kind of was there, like that was always there. And it was jumping up a level at different moments, you know, throughout the next few years. And so it was, it was fantastic for me, because white people would ask me about it, like the local newspaper was all of a sudden interested, like it took it to the, to a different level. And then all of a sudden, ABC TV, were interested. And they were interviewing me and I had like, you know, long hair on the TV and could barely say, two sentences in the interview. But it was kind of all these great things were happening. And I was like, Man, this is just nuts. This is happening and always like a surfer on the wave that was just along for the ride. And so that wave, just as I said lasted 15 years, which kind of leads me to the next point, because when that wave stopped, then I just fell off a cliff. And that was the next big transition for me. You know, because I'd had something that was so driving and that I was so passionate about for so long, that all of a sudden wasn't there. And I'd won a lot, which was fantastic. Then I won everything multiple times. I mean, there was nothing else that I could do in wheelchair tennis. And in 2005. My life had started to, to spiral a little even before I stopped playing, like a long term relationship had ended. And it was the middle of the year, and I just won the British. And I was number one. I was in a race to finish the number one. And it was with Michael jeremias, another Frenchman, flashy Frenchman, and Robin. And the three of us were in a race for the next four or five months to finish the number one. And I won the British. And I came home to Australia. And remember what I said there was never never a question of not training while I was hitting with this Canadian coach back in Sydney, and he was having lessons out of a girl school. And I would park the car and get out of the car and push across the field to the tennis courts to where he was holding the lesson. I remember driving into the school, and I was in the car I didn't want to get out was the first time like in 15 years that I just I seriously considered of calling James and canceling. I actually had the fun wine in my hand. And I was like, oh man, what is this? Because like never was never I never got to that point of I'm going to cancel and I forced myself I got out of the car. With all my energy. It took a lot of energy to have that lesson. And I thought, Man, this isn't a good sign. I get to the US Open the tournament that meant the most. And I'm still in this race this this big race to finish number one I have to win the US Open to keep it alive. But I did everything I could that week. I stared at the trophy the US Open trophy with the names on it. Randy Snow. Brad Parks My name I was trying to will myself to this this title or hire the local club pro for the week. I did everything I could I listened to a lot of Van Halen and Slayer, I was always trying to find myself up for this one big victory. And I was playing Shingo Kunieda. Number one in the world now, currently still playing great champion was playing him in the quarters, we get to a third set. And Shingo wants it more than me, which is rare, because I wanted it more than anybody that's that

was my thing, my desire level and Shingo wanted it more. And I remember going through the net, and thinking, that's it, I'm done. I'm done. I'll never This is it, my tennis career is over, I just I don't have that drive, I don't have that desire. And I played one more tournament, a doubles tournament in Italy, the next month, and after that I never played again. And after that, my life really took a tumble, always in a downward spiral. For I would say the next year. And it took a lot, it took a lot of therapy, took a lot of pills, it took a lot of soul searching to get out of that, because I think I was just so committed. And so like, I wouldn't let anything, anything else in. And that was the reason for me for so many victories. And as Jason said, like that kind of domination. And I would never change that. But it was just the fact that now that it was all over, I had to go through that transition. And I kind of do relate to when I was in the hospital and had my legs amputated. But all those years later, like 17-18 years later, I felt the same like you when you feel like your life is on the line that you do you dig like you reach into your own soul almost. And you don't realize what you're capable of like the strength that you've got to pull yourself out of that. And so when I was able to do that, then you almost feel like man, I can cope with anything. And that, for me was like a big moment. And I was able to get out of it and then transition into the next phase of life. But the way I did it is obviously not for everybody, but I wouldn't change it. I mean, as crazy as that sounds like that hell that I went through after I retired, I necessarily wouldn't change it. Because that level of domination that I had was, was a wonderful gift for me. So that's, that's the Yeah, that's the crazy part of it, but and not every athlete will be able to change, though they'll feel the same way that I do. But some will transition better, some will find something else that interests them before they retire that they can sink their teeth into and, you know, move on to and that's great as well. And so everyone will find their own different way of transitioning, you know, out of their sport into something else. But But for me, yeah, that was that was a very difficult time. And but I look back on it now. And it's something that I'm actually proud of that I was able to dig my way out of that and to get to the next the next point in my life.



Jason Harnett 43:33

Wow. I mean, because I, you know, I can say I mean, I've known you so long that can so many athletes talk about that initial trauma, almost like a death. Right? I died that day, that part of my life is over. Now I'm transitioning in back, like you said back into society back into life. And for you, it seems like it really wasn't maybe a death, but a transformation. Because you I mean, your transformation as an athlete in the person was is amazing. But then, like you said, at the end of the career, it's like you're on the abyss. And it's almost like another death when the career ends. And now, like you said that, that ability to dig deep and soul search to find purpose again, you know, now that I'm done is this great champion. Now what? That's all I've done for 15 years. So it means that's something. I mean, I think most athletes will go through that. Obviously, there's only a

handful of you. Handful, great champion and Shingo like to talk about communities coming to that point in his life. It'll be interesting to see how he transitions into the next phase of life. You know, going back to the differences between someone like you who made the true commitment, in all aspects your life to be the best. What is the difference that that magic does between you and the next guy who's right there but just doesn't cross the finish line like you did. There's got to be some something there that just maybe you had and they didn't have. And maybe it's an eight, that's something you really put your finger on.

D

David Hall 45:07

Yeah, was funny, as you very well know, I didn't have the best technique. And that was, I loved it.

J

Jason Harnett 45:17

I loved everything about it.

D

David Hall 45:21

He wouldn't you wouldn't call my technique, like he wouldn't hang it in the Louve. You know, it wasn't, it wasn't like a thing of beauty or anything. It was like, you know, it's like a lot of heavy metal bands. Like they're a little rough around the edges. But there's some, there's some deep seated, you know, passion and drive in there somewhere. Yeah, look, the margins are slim. Like that, like, there's no, there's no way around that. I mean, once you get to that level, I mean, even if your technique might be might be a little ragged, but you still, you know, physically, you're a beast, you know, physically, you're some kind of monster. And maybe it's just that you have that drive that desire, just that that edge more than the guy across the net. And I don't necessarily think it's any one big thing, I think it's a combination of a few different things. And I think also, obviously, you know, in the moment in the third set breakers, you know, like, for old break point, you just able just to hang in that point, you know, just that little bit better, you know, you're able to track down that bowl, you know, at the end, you're able to dig out a shot that the other guy just will not be able to dig out. I mean, I mean, like, they're the kind of margins that are slim. I mean, there are so many moments, like in my career, like, especially, you know, when I've had to kind of for the bulk, like delve into my results and think about different matches, and you know, how I was able to win, you know, different titles, and there's no, there's doesn't seem to be a common theme. Like, it's almost like every grand victory, like as opposed to every crushing defeat, like, there's always that little reason, at the end, that you're able to do that. And I think the victories are probably a combination of maybe my level of desire was

just that little bit more, but also that I was able to dig out that one shot or I was able to make that, you know, that backhand up the line, just that that one moment when it mattered the most. I think they're the moments that if you get through those, and if you make those, then that's the reason why you can win, you know, 4,5,6,7 US Opens. I mean, that's that's the point. And it's interesting, because not only did I want to win that first US Open, but that wasn't enough. You know, I wanted to win another. And another, like in another for me, it was just, it was never enough. Like I didn't like even though back in Japan, I want I wonder what Randy had, I wanted to be number one. But that was like that was the beginning of I didn't realize that was the it was the beginning. It was only the beginning of getting to the next point. And the next point was the 95. Winning the US Open becoming number one, then there was another beginning. And that that next beginning was now I want to dominate, like all and I want to be one of the best champions that have ever played wheelchair tennis. And so that was also a meeting with Rich kind of reinforced that. And that was like the climb up the next round of I want to be one of the best ever. And that was the feeling of winning was never enough. It was just the drug that just kept on giving. It was like an insatiable need to keep winning. I go home and I don't watch the Mustang. I think about winning. Like I vacuum the carpet, I think about the next tournament of winning it. It was like a presence that was always there. Like in my mind. Like it almost felt deeper than that. And always kind of related to, you know, if you're a chocolate lava, and you're in a back street in Paris, and you just wander into a cafe, and the waitress comes over and she's like, what would you like, and I see chocolate souffle on the menu. Why? Yeah, I'll try that. And so I ordered that chocolate souffle. There's no tourists in the cafe. They're all local French, like it's like this one place that no one knows no tourists has ever found. All of a sudden, the chocolate souffle arrives on the table. I dig my spoon into it. And that thing just melts all over the spoon and I put it in my mouth and it's like, oh my god, this is the best thing I've ever tasted. Like my taste buds dancing in my mouth. It's like glorious. That's the taste of winning. And I just wanted that taste over and over and over again, it was never enough. And then finally, at the end, I'd had enough the taste just like it wasn't there anymore. And I knew that once the taste was gone, but I just didn't want the chocolate souffle anymore. That was it. I was done. It was time to start eating vegetables and all the all the foods I didn't want to eat because there was nothing. There was just so chopped chocolate souffle anyway, just never taste for it. And that was it. So that was like that was the driver of trying to become considered, you know, one of the greatest ever. And that was why I was just able to keep going and keep going because it was just, it was never enough.



Jason Harnett 50:54

I would ask you, Larry, a question. It's a common theme, right? With champion in all sports, whether it's able bodied sports, you know, parasport that level of will is found

commonly in the greats, meaning they're willing to do that little bit of extra, they're willing to go a little bit further in the most difficult moments. Right? The most difficult moments you're there, because I know a lot of really good wheelchair tennis players during your era and post have never done that. And you look at their skill set. You look at their their athleticism like why why why can't they get across that finish line? And you get? And I would say, Larry, is that something? I mean, we talked about the Jordans you talk about the Gretzky's you talk about the legends and all sports, they all seem to have that ingredient, David being one of them, Shingo being one of them. Esther being one of them, they all seem to have that that common ingredient that makes them immortals, almost a common man just doesn't seem that

L

Larry Lauer 51:59

The desire for for greatness, and constantly looking for the next thing, right, and that you described it so well, David, and, you know, I think about how, you know, it also sounds like your personality is one where you're really super into it with every fiber of your being or you're not. And I don't know if that's true, but just listening to you, it seems like you're, you're gonna go all in to it and do everything or you're not going to do it. And

D

David Hall 52:30

And that is true, that is true. And I think I've just, it doesn't really matter what it is, like at the time when tennis was was the strongest part of it, but like me, I love heavy metal music. And so I'm right into it. And so I will download it, I will read about it, I will obviously listen to it, I'd buy I've got black t shirt, I mean I got so many black t shirts like to check out some of these Old Motley Crew t shirts. But I'm just right into it red wine. I mean, I like at 30 years old, you know, my taste buds changed for some weird reason. And I discovered you know, olives and blue trees and red wine and all of a sudden I'm like I'm reading magazines about red wine and having like get a wine rack and all that kind of stuff and like it doesn't matter what it is muscle cars love muscle cars, got a Mustang Oh, let's go out and join a club and go on these you know tours but I'm also good. Like if I'm thinking about something I need to get something done that I've got blinkers on like I'm focused on that there's nothing else exists I mean, it will drive some people to despair like you know, I need to talk to you but I'm I'm doing this I need to focus on this like this is and tennis was at such a level that it was like as I said, all encompassing. And that was Yeah, that was part of a but like I felt that was what I needed. You know, because I needed to try to beat the Brett Parks, the Randy Snows, the Laurent Martinis, the Kai Schrameyers is the Ricky Moliers. The Robin Ammerlaan is the Shingos, the Jeremias is I needed to compete with these guys, I had to be all in like I had to be all in there was no other way to do it. I felt that deep within once I realized that once that that kind of that switch went off in my head,

like with the help of Rich, then that took me to the next level. And I had I had periods of like, Oh, we wouldn't lose, you know for six months or I wouldn't lose for eight months. And I felt invincible. Like I felt no one could touch me. But then I'd lose or something had happened and then you know it was that was constantly striving to get that feeling back. Because when you feel like you're invincible, like when you feel that I'm on a court with what some I would consider another legend on the other side of the net and I'm crushing this guy. Man, that is the best feeling in the world. And I was always striving to get to that point because it's funny, you'd go by you go, I would go maybe a year or two years without reaching that, that, that fine level of invincibility by when Ricky Molier came along, it took me. It took me two years, he became number one. It took me I think, two years to get back to that point. But once I got back to that point, it was no, it was the best feeling ever. It wasn't just enough to win, tournament's and, you know, to defeat these guys, I wanted to try to get back to that level of invincibility. You know, because that was, I mean, that that was that was like, I feel like I'm the king of the world. Like that. I mean, in some strange way, in your own mind, you do actually feel bulletproof, invincible. And as an athlete, that is, like, it's rare. You know, it's a rarefied air. I mean, I would have felt great to feel that once. But I was blessed enough to, you know, different moments. Throughout my career. I was kind of now I just, I can't I feel no one can touch me. And I think that's, yeah, that was, that was like, that was like eating to chocolate souffles. Back to back.



Jason Harnett 56:28

It's funny, it's funny, you say, you know, when you start talking about all those names right. Now, for some folks on, you know, listening in, those are names. I've never heard of rights, wheelchair tennis, and that those are all, you know, quote unquote, legendary players. You're one of those guys who, because of when you started your transition, like we've talked about through kind of generational things, and I know you've talked in the past about these players pushed you right, you always had the next generation coming. That forced you to stay sharp. I know Shingo Kunieda has kind of said the same thing. Where that was kind of the carrot right? Here's the next guy coming. I gotta knock him down. Next guy coming. And so you've seen this for over a 20 year period. Grow. Professionally, the tour transition of Brad leaving, you know, Randy young transitioning out Randy Snow. Then here comes Michael, Jeremy is and Shingo and Robin Ammerlaan and Ricky Molier. Where's the sport going now? From what you see, you know, you've seen everything. You know what the tour looks like now? Money, you know, the Grand Slams, the Masters, everything has been enhanced. financially. What do you what do you see the future of the sport at this point? You've seen most of it. And you're still watching closely. I know that. What are your thoughts on where it's going? And how good could it be?

D

David Hall 57:44

Well, I wouldn't, I wouldn't change my ear. I as you said, I mean, I really my era was like a transitioning era. I think it kind of because I got on the tour in 1990. And then I was done. 2005. Like there was a lot of change, like a lot of the sport through went through a lot of different transitioning phases from doing camps or clinics in Africa and South America. And like a lot of trying to get into the Grand Slams doing exhibitions at Wimbledon or at the Australian Open, the more of a marriage between the sport itself and the National Federations. Players becoming more professional taking it. Now the sport kind of morphing from like a recreational part into the more professional part. As you say the more prize money was coming into it more sponsorship was coming into it, there's no doubt that once wheelchair tennis was fully integrated into the Grand Slams that that took her to another level, like in terms of exposure and, and the rewards that the players could get. Like I would say most of that has been positive, positive positive. I would say parts of that probably haven't been great. I think sometimes we would agree that a sport is really only as strong as its base. I think sports need the constant numbers of players coming into the sport, which I think is a vital thing. Because I mean, that's really where the strength of wheelchair Tennessee's like the more players that can. I mean, just like you know, my story is like a classic story of a guy that's had an injury, but not sure where to go. I'm not saying wheelchair tennis is the answer to everything but it's just another part of the transition people into the next phase of life. Like whatever that is and sometimes, you know if you're a young girl or a young guy and you're in South America or in a small town or whatever When you see something about wheelchair tennis, or there's a clinic at a town, you know, 50 miles away that you want to attend, when that moment can change everything, and it's a take back that could put your life in a whole nother perspective that can take you in a whole different direction. So I think that part of it is probably, like, I don't know, the inner workings of what Federation's are doing now, but I would say that part needs to stay strong. That development part that finding new players, part of wheelchair tennis needs to be a prioritized part of, of where the sport is, and where it's going from here on in. And I think now as well, when I came into it, the social element, it can't be denied. Yeah, that's a huge part of it. When you transition from being an able bodied person into someone that's got a disability, like to be around other people that have a disability and the all their personalities and all their strengths. And ah, man, that guy does that. Or that girl does that. Well, I want to do that. And I how do they drive their car, or how do they have that job, or whatever it is, like that's a whole nother part of it that sport can offer because you you're introduced to a whole new world. And I think that that all falls into within the develop developmental aspect of the sport. So I think that's, yeah, that's where that needs to stay strong. from here on in.

L

Larry Lauer 1:01:37

Grassroots. The grassroots. Yeah. Well, David, you know, thank you, man. And this has been unbelievable interview. And now that I know your musical interests, we'll have to get together and go to a concert. So either me coming down there you coming up up here, so

D

David Hall 1:01:55

Thanks, man. Appreciate it. Thanks. Thanks, guys. You guys are the best.

L

Larry Lauer 1:01:59

Just enjoying listening to you can feel the passion through the the screen here and that that moves the game forward as much as anything. I think.

D

David Hall 1:02:09

That's why we love it as well. We love tennis.

L

Larry Lauer 1:02:11

Awesome, man. Well, thank you. Thanks for getting up. And we'll go ahead and close now. And again. Thanks, David. Jason, thanks for standing in for JP. You did, you did a great job. And you made JP proud.

J

Johnny Parks 1:02:25

Alright, righty. Well, I hope you really enjoyed that one that was absolutely fantastic to listen to and what great stories that David has. Larry, I mean, what's your, what's your initial thoughts on that fantastic interview right there?

L

Larry Lauer 1:02:40

Well, I found it just completely immersing and in. So interesting, just to hear his journey and what he went through. And just the passion, the drive drive was a word he mentioned a number of times in this interview. And my sense was, you know, listening to him, you know, this is a guy who's either all in, or he's not in at all, you know, so if he's doing it, he's going all the way in. And that's what he did with wheelchair tennis after his unfortunate accident. He went all the way in and his idea was, I want to be the best ever I want to be the greatest and he made this life's push to to get there, which is unbelievable achievement.



Johnny Parks 1:03:30

Yeah, I mean, what really stuck out first of all, with the great story about him, you know, treading through the snow to get to practice. You know, it literally sounded like his own little Rocky montage right there. But as you mentioned, I was like, nothing was gonna stop him. Once he decided and committed this is what I'm gonna do when he said though, that those dreams and those goals like nothing was going to get in his way. He was going to be the guy. And that was a high performance traits of champions. Right, the high performing high achieving traits of a champion. So there's no no real surprise why he's the greatest greatest of all times in wheelchair tennis, one of the best athletes of all time. He committed everything, every fiber of his his body and his mind to being the best wheelchair athlete possible.



Larry Lauer 1:04:26

Yeah, and it wasn't just a matter of I want to win because the desire to win was clear and obvious. But I want to dominate, he said, and I want to keep pushing and do more and do more. And that fueled him for a good 17, 18 years, a long time. That fuel was there and then eventually, you know, when the next thing wasn't there, then he truly struggled which that's kind of the downside to that obsession. That strong passion for something that when you don't, you don't feel those rewards anymore, when you don't think there's something to achieve when it doesn't have the same meaning, then you then you kind of go off this cliff of what now, and, you know, life changes. And he went through some hard times again, when that happened, and then he pulled himself back out of it, and it will find new passions and really enjoy his life. But, you know, I think that the pushing in the snow, and then the chocolate souffle, which Jason had warned me about that story, that it was gonna be a good one, so to ask if he didn't mention it, but I didn't have to.



Johnny Parks 1:05:39

Yeah, I was gonna say, having to call him souffle now by nickname. But what's interesting is what he went through towards the end of his career was starting to see that flame like burning out, as you said, like he kind of achieved absolutely everything that he possibly could. And what's interesting to me is, is that we look at, we look at our sport, and we see maybe some athletes, I'm not gonna say tap out, but may there may be reached that eschelon, they, they win that Grand Slam, but they don't win another one. So it is really is something to be said, for athletes that do hit the mark, right, they do hit that they, they win that big tournament, but then they want more, then they want to keep pushing, then they start chasing the records, you know, but when you all unpack it all, it all comes down to kind of like a love and desire to do it to begin with. If they don't have that love and desire, I'd really don't know what does let you say fuels them to keep to keep going. And

David exemplified that and going, I set my dreams and set my goals to be the best I could, I was gonna do everything that I could. And once everything was exhausted once every trophy had been won, and multiple times. And once every record had pretty much been here. He said, you know, that flame started dying out. And obviously, when you've been through the grind, like he did for what 10, 15 what seven, you know, a career that spanned a long time, eventually, it does burn out a little bit. And I know this is probably things that you've seen as well with high level athletes that have achieved great things. But the great message in all of that was is that he was able to after all that happened, and he went through, you know, a little tough part of trying to like, discover what next he repurposed. Repurpose what he was going to do next. And then he found another path. And so, you know, I think that's a really important message. I think so many athletes struggle with that, what's what's after my career, what's next. And he was a great example about how he was always constantly striving, found a new path. And now he's, you know, now he's working towards that. So



Larry Lauer 1:07:45

Yeah, our friend David Radford, who's been on the podcast would say you have more than one mission in life. And one mission ends, what's the next mission? And I think we could have maybe explored that topic more with David, but certainly, you could feel his passion, his joy for life, and just joy for excellence. And it really was inspiring. And something you know, if you're a young athlete listening to this, you know, pay attention to sort of just that love for achievement and pushing yourself finding how good you can be and dedicating yourself to something that can be inspiring and and then once you know, whether your course runs its path that age 18, or 24, or 30, or 35, you begin to prepare for your second mission, you know, and whatever that is, and it's important to explore other things that you enjoy as you're going through this mission. I think that's one thing with David like, he was so all into his tennis, he said, was all encompassing that there really wasn't space, a lot of times for a lot else, but he but he did mention, you know, taking mental breaks, you know, going for long drives, he loved cars. So I think that with that passion, that almost obsession that he had, he knew he needed to take breaks at times because he was so hardwired and driven for his goals that if he hadn't, he probably would have burned out sooner.



Johnny Parks 1:09:25

Very impactful for all for athletes. I mean, not just in our sport for any sport, rarely that that is such a powerful messaging.



Larry Lauer 1:09:35

But if you want to look at an example JP of winning after winning, look at this guy, right? I mean, there's there's other people out there too, but if you want to know the mentality that it takes to consistently win, then you really need to listen to this guy.



Johnny Parks 1:09:53

Well, Larry, as we close out here, any any parting thoughts for your drop the mic moment?



Larry Lauer 1:10:00

Yeah, I think you know, for again, for the athletes listen to this, really try to connect with the things that you enjoy sport and be willing to really go for it to push yourself. And I think you're not everybody's gonna feel that desire that passion the same way but everyone can commit to their goals to their dreams and I think David had a vision for sure he explained the vision of what he wanted and then he made a plan and he went for it and that is something to applaud some him for and and for anyone so you know, young people listening to this if you have a vision in your mind, make your plan your push, and you're gonna have to do it day after day after day and it's not supposed to be easy. There'll be ups and downs and not everybody's meant to dominate their sport like David very few are. But I think the value that you get in making that push as you find out just what kind of person you are become a better person because of it.



Johnny Parks 1:11:04

Alright, well, thanks, Larry. And we thank you Jason, for filling in for me for this week's episode. For the listeners, the Paralympics is about to get way, starting the week of the August 23. The Paralympic tennis event, Olympic event is going to start on the 27th. So be sure to check that out on the TV. Just see the amazing work that these great athletes do out there competing. There's not a whole lot of exposure for wheelchair tennis. So this is one another great opportunity to witness it in the comfort of your own couch in your own home. So be sure to check it out. But for this week's episodes, Dr. Larry and I are checking out.