

Introduction: Welcome to the Enchanting Lawyer Podcast. The show that walks you step by step to improving strategies you can use today to grow your business. We show you how being kind, useful and, of course, enchanting will bring you more clients and build a thriving community. Now here's your host from sunny San Diego, Jacob Sapochnick.

Jacob: Hello everybody, this is Jacob Sapochnick, host of the Enchanting Lawyer podcast. This is a show where we interview the most inspiring individuals from all over the world who share their stories with us and help us be better at what we do.

I definitely have to say that today I have a guest that is very, very unique and special. He's very different from a lot of the guests that I had recently. We talk to a lot of inspiring business people, attorneys, and ... I always look into athletics and sport into my own inspiration because I feel this is one of those areas where you can ... If you can pass those barriers, you can do anything.

Today, I have Jason Smyth. He's one of the stars of the Paralympics Games and he's in fact THE fastest Paralympian in the world today. Jason has an amazing story.

I would like to read a quote that was about Jason by Tyson Gay who's one of the top athletes in the world. He says, "I believe that Jason is very talented. I honestly think that he's running technique is better than mine. Sometimes when he runs he reminds me of Maurice Greene. He would be in my top five when it comes to technical guys running – Maurice Greene would probably be the number one. I think Carl Lewis may be in there, Asafa Powell, Leroy Dixon and then Jason." This is from Tyson Gay, one of the greatest sprinters of our generation and one of only three men, in history, to beat Usain Bolt.

Jason, welcome to the show. How are you today?

Jason: Thank you very much. I'm very good. How are you?

Jacob: I'm doing excellent.

How do you feel to get such a compliment from one of the greatest sprinters in the world?

Jason: Yeah, it's quite incredible really to ... I don't really feel like my technique's one of the five best in the world. But to get a compliment from such an impressive athlete, and someone who's been right to the top, and has achieved great things is something that I'm proud of I suppose.

Jacob: Right. Well, I can only imagine this is such a great honor.

To our listeners who are listening right now, why don't you explain a little bit about your story. We talked a little bit before the recording about your disability but why don't you tell us a little bit about what do you have and how you were diagnosed and your journey.

Jason: I have an eye condition called Stargardt's disease. I suppose, basically, the way it works it affects my vision. So I have roughly around 5% vision. The best way nearly to describe that is everything I see I can see outlines of images but there's no detail.

I suppose a good way that I've always found to describe to somebody, because it's hard to describe what I see, is if you've ever taken a picture or looking through a camera, when the camera is not focused you see colors and blurry images but you don't see detail. That's kind of to a little extreme of what I can see.

As I said, I was diagnosed with the disease quite young. I was 8 years of age. Probably – no probably – definitely too young to really appreciate and understand the impact and effect that it was going to have. I can always remember being at the hospital and being told that I have this eye condition and seeing the reaction of my mum and dad that they could see, I suppose, what life could potentially have in store.

I remember sitting in there, you talk to doctors and they tell you about all the things that you're not going to be able to do in life, all the things that are going to be so much more difficult. Everything's negative and that ... it's amazing to see and know what you can do if you break those barriers down and then pass them.

Jacob: To me it's very personal because we talked before the show and I shared with you that my daughter is a special needs child. She was diagnosed with a genetic condition called Muscle Dystrophy. As parents, we feel really hopeless and we kind of ... but at the same time wants to soar. And the feeling of sadness passes we feel that now we have to elevate our child and giving the best life possible. I think your parents did that.

What are some of the things that you remember as a child growing up as far as your parents telling you, making your life a bit easier; just trying to make your life normal?

Jason: Yeah, absolutely. And they said, "Jason, your parents are instrumental to what happens." When I think of my parents I ... everything was normal. I was no different or treated no different than any of my brothers and sisters. Yes, I required a lot of extra help and things but I was treated no different. I was taught like in everything I do is to work hard at it and to never give up.

I mean once I started going the athletics – I started athletics and training at 16 which is quite late – but they taught me principles of ... like I said, working hard. Once you start something you do something and you do something to the best of your ability. Those are things, as I grew up, I started to learn and then I was able to transfer down things into what I went on to do.

Jacob: Is your family a sporty family? Your dad or your brother and sister or something that kind of you took it forward.

Jason: In general we are a sporty family, no doubt about that. Nobody has done sport to a high level but in general everybody would be quite good at sport. And sports [one of them 00:07:10] things that it looks fantastic on TV and it looks ... Especially [unclear 00:07:17] sports it look very glamorous but there's a lot of discipline and a lot of hard work that goes in that people don't see and it's a lot. It just seems easier and looks easier than maybe what it is.

Jacob: Right. Exactly. It's only you who are kind of growing up within this. You understand really what it's like.

Jason, I'm Israeli myself. Growing up in Israeli, a country with a lot of conflict, it does something to your character. I feel that I'm definitely much more grounded as oppose to people who maybe grow up in certain of America. We didn't have that conflict here. I'm wondering about you because you grew up in Northern Ireland where there's a lot of tension between the religions there. How do you think that affected who you are today and your abilities in sports?

Jason: Yeah. Northern Ireland, there definitely has been a lot of tension. So I think, to be honest, when I was growing up it was coming to the end of it. I didn't really see the full effect of it. I'm not sure if it has massively affected me in sport. It's affected on me on the way I look at people. People, regardless of their beliefs or race or anything, people are equal and people should always be equal. It's more affected the way I look on that way of life.

I think in sports, you know, you talk about ... I suppose you're talking about overcoming challenges and different things in life. I found my eye sight and been able to overcome it and the things that I've had to learn to be, I suppose, completely comfortable and confident and me, on the inside, have played massive roles on who and what I've become in sport.

You often hear it as the more the people have to overcome, the stronger they become as people.

Jacob: Right.

One of the things that I like about you is that while you have a disability and you live with it, you don't really seem to be using that to your advantage. You always want to prove yourself as who you are as a person.

I read somewhere in an article. When you first came to the US to train in Lance Brauman's training camp which is one of the top training camps for runners, you didn't really tell people about your disease, your condition. Why was that?

Jason: Yeah. It's something I've never really ... I've never done no matter where I go or who I'm with. I never just say that I've got an eye condition, an eye disease and this is how it affects me because I don't like to look at what I can't do. I don't really believe in what I can't do, I believe in what is possible. The more that I put that out there as an excuse for not being able to do something then the person you're talking to can use it as an excuse. You, yourself can use it as an excuse to maybe not try so hard or not do something.

For me, I know that my eye sight is a disadvantage but I've never used it or believe it in what I do to be a disadvantage. Since I was young it's never something I've looked at if I'm playing a sport. I don't see myself as any less likely to be well than somebody beside me. I see this is what I'm doing and this is how I'm going to do it and then I'm trying to achieve it.

Jacob: Putting that goal of achieving that is to me just mind boggling because you're competing with so many people that are brilliant, that are good, that are excellent athletes. We're talking about split of seconds that determines who's going to be number one and who's going to be the person that nobody's going to remember the name. And it's just a very, very, very stressful and complicated process.

Just for our listeners to understand your level, you are considered to be the Usain Bolt of the Paralympics. Usain Bolt is probably the ... Everybody knows he won the Olympics and so many records broken. So why don't you kind of tell us a little bit about some of the achievements you've achieved in your field just to put it in prospective.

Jason: Yeah. I've been in Paralympics sport just coming up to 10 years. I've competed at European World, Paralympic Games, won gold medals at all of them. At four Paralympic gold medals in the 100 and 200 that set world records. In fact, I haven't actually ever been beat as a Paralympic athlete in almost 10 years so that's generally the things that I've been able to achieve in a nutshell.

Jacob: You're obviously very humble and, again, I admire you very much, but another name that is known in the Paralympics world is Oscar Pistorius. He's the face of the Paralympics movement. He's been the face for many years. Second behind Oscar, in the media terms and everything else, is really you. But the difference is

so big because he's kind of like ... he became a celebrity and you are ... I would say as good as his but yet you are still a bit unknown to many people.

What do you think made him so powerful in the way he ... and what did he do to the sports, the Paralympic sports, to make it kind of known to people and people are accepting it as a sport just like the Olympics.

Jason: Yeah. I think, to be fair, obviously there's a lot of things going on with Oscar Pistorius over the last couple of years that's changed things [unclear 00:14:05]. To be fair to him, he has done a lot for Paralympic sport because he has pretty much put the sport on the map. He had become an icon that people started to watch Paralympic sport and learned a lot about it. I think Paralympic sport will always be grateful for him for doing that.

Why specifically that he was that famous, well, people, I think, are looking for people that push the boundaries, that go beyond what people believe as achievable and he, very much, was able to do that; competing the Olympic Games in London. Not many people in the world get to do that, never mind somebody with a disability and you think, "Well, that's not possible."

I think that's probably been the biggest difference between myself and him is I obviously just miss out in the Olympic Games by 400th of a second where he was able to make it. The Olympic Games is what everybody watches, it's the big event. Him being able to make it there does, without a doubt, elevate his position.

I think, to be honest, the other thing that he's got going for him as advantage is the branding aspect is people can look at somebody with no legs running as an amputated athlete and see a disability. Sometimes with the visually impaired person you can't actually see it.

Jacob: Right, absolutely. That's a great point.

Jason: Yeah. So, for a branding the sport it looks more attractive, it's looks more disabled maybe is the word.

Jacob: Right, absolutely. Because visually people have visual and they see it which is easier to identify, putting all posters and all these [unclear 00:16:21].

Jason: For me you've got to come and see me or talk to me or watch me do things to actually see. "Oh, this guy can't see very well," rather you can just see it straight away.

Jacob: Or see running with your glasses and wonder why you're running with the dark glasses.

Jason: Yeah. And there's no sun.

Jacob: And there's no sun, exactly. [Unclear 00:16:40] you're glasses. You're trying to game the system here.

Jason: (Laughs)

Jacob: I'm kidding. But I think in you, and I'm wondering, when somebody like Tyson Gay gave you a comment, and you actually were training with him. He's an all-time great athlete. What did he do to you to train with somebody of that caliber to your abilities, to your state of mind? Do you think differently now as you trained with somebody at that level?

Jason: Definitely. I think it's not just in sport but it's in general life is if you can surround yourself or be around the best at whatever it is in the field you're involved in, you know you learn, and that's exactly what I was able to do. I was able to learn and watch on a daily basis on how top, top, top athletes did it. I was able to learn and put down things into practice.

But there's also a mindset that comes with being around them athlete is they're always thinking more and more, higher and higher and higher. That's the way that, you know, I suppose had taught me to constantly look to the bigger picture, look beyond what I've achieved and try, push myself as far as I possibly can. That's often I tried to do is ... So by trying to reach your full potential that, for everybody, isn't going to be winning gold medals but success is about being the best you can possibly be.

Jacob: I think that hopefully listeners that are listening to the show and get inspired that's exactly what it is. It doesn't mean that you have to be Jason Smyth or Pistorius or any of the Carl Lewis' of the world. But as long as you know you've done the best and you reach your potential, this is a great feeling and this is where we have to strive to try to do every time we do a task. That's why athletes are so admired by people because they feel that this is really ... If he can do it I, at least, can strive to try it and I love it.

Jason, what is the future holding for you? I know that, on your site, we're talking about the goal of you competing in the Olympics but why don't you share with us some of the future plans and future goals that you have?

Jason: Yeah. Well, I suppose on a year basis we have a major championship we're working towards. This year is the world championships there in October in Doha, Qatar. So that's very much where my goals and mindset is at the moment. Obviously, this year, is very much a stepping stone then onto next year because next year we run into the Paralympic and Olympic Games in Rio. For me, that ...

Again, Paralympic Games want to retain the titles; able to win double gold in Beijing, double gold in London. So to come back and do it three consecutive Paralympic Games for me it would be something I really want to achieve so I work towards that.

Obviously also is the goal of trying to make the Olympics and be the first visually impaired athlete to do so to make both games. Being so close in London just ... I know I'm very much capable of doing it. It's just trying to make sure that I do everything right throughout this next year. [Unclear 00:20:25], get a good base down and train and stay injury free. Hopefully, I can go on to achieve that.

You know, as an athlete, we work kind of on 4-year cycles because that's when the Olympics and Paralympics are. Once this year, year and a half ends and we start looking beyond that but that's very much my goal for the next year, year and a half.

Jacob: I think you will get there. I believe in it and I know you believe in it as well.

As we come to the end of our show, Jason. Is there one thing that you can share with our listeners who are facing difficulties, who are saying, "I can't do it. I'm going to give up." One piece of advice that you can share with people that you do when you feel down or when you feel like, "You know what, I'm not going to be able to do it," what would that be?

Jason: I would say just simply believe. I believe that we, as in everybody in this world, is capable of achieving and overcoming greater things than what we imagine. We always stop ourselves from what we're able to do. I think if people are struggling or having difficult times is to believe and see what you can achieve and can accomplish. Forget about the won'ts and the can'ts, look at what is actually possible. For me, I believe that as anything.

Jacob: Beautiful. This is great advice, Jason. I wanted to thank you for taking the time to come on the show.

Jason: No problem.

Jacob: If people want to find you, I will give them the website and put in our show notes which is www.jason-smyth.com. Do you use Twitter or anything like that?

Jason: I have Twitter. It's @smyth_jason.

Jacob: Perfect. We'll make sure that we have those in our show notes.

Once again, thanks Jason. Have a beautiful day. You are in Ireland right now and I'm recording this from Israel so we're almost in the same time zone.

Thank you, our listeners, for tuning in every week. We hope to bring you more exciting guests like Jason in the future. Signing off here, Jacob Sapohnick. We'll see you at our next episode.

Closing: Thanks for listening. You can find even more resources, including the show notes for this episode, at enchantinglawyer.com. That's www.enchantinglawyer.com.