



TRANSCRIBES FROM JONNIE PEACOCK'S PODCAST

Andy Stevenson: Tokyo postponement came at a good time for you following knee surgery in December 2019.

Jonnie Peacock: I was probably one of the few people praying for a postponement. I had an unlucky end to 2019. About six weeks out from the World Championship in my final race of the season in Newcastle, in a warm-up the day before the race, I landed funny on my leg and my knee twisted. We thought it was a strain. It swelled up badly that night and I just about managed to race on it. It probably wasn't the best thing, in hindsight. It turns out it wasn't a ligament strain. The swelling wasn't swelling it was blood from a piece of cartilage that got knocked out. In December, I went under the knife. It was going to be quite tight for Tokyo, but we'll never know now.

I want to take you back to your childhood. You got meningitis when you were five and were put into a coma, and there was a real chance you might not survive.

Yeah, it was a strange time I think for my family you know, and obviously it's one of those things being five years old. I'll always look back with little memory of it, so it's one of those situations I always feel like was probably harder for my mom and my dad and all the people having to watch and understand; it's really weird.

So, I was actually speaking to my mom about this recently, and I know so many people are going to just be so 'ah standard sigh', but I have two dogs and recently one of my dogs had to go in for an emergency surgery. And I've not had them neutered because I can't bear the thought of them having to go under the knife. It panics me to this day when I had to take her in for emergency surgery, just the fear that I had, and the feeling was unreal. It was at that point where I really just was like 'geez like I am so in pieces now about my dog who's probably going to be fine, I cannot even imagine what it must feel like for a parent to go through something like that for just for like that to be your child.' I can't, I must have only felt one percent of what my mum felt and what my dad felt.

You know it's, it's that uncontrollable, having to watch somebody I guess you love go through something that you just don't know if they're gonna be okay and I think obviously yeah, that's what the doctors you know, that's what they told my parents. Like you say, as soon as they put me into the coma is that 'it's on him now, the chances of you taking him home is slim and if you do we don't know in what state he'll be in.' You know



obviously meningitis is something that can attack the brain too, so there's a large potential for lots more damage to be made.

Do you have any memories of having both legs?

I don't know whether it's just because I was five or whether it's because just the mind decides it does not want to remember that, but yeah, my memories are very, very, very slim of that kind of time. I think I might have a couple kind of almost picture moments in your head where you kind of visualise maybe being in a bed and kind of the environment around you, but they're so vague. I actually probably have more memories of kind of, because I had to have some revisions. So obviously, anyone who gets amputated when they're young knows that your bone will continue to grow, so if they don't basically have to go back in and chop that that end bit of bone off, then it's just going to go obviously straight through your skin because your skin can't stretch.

And so obviously as I was growing I had to go for quite a few of these and I think I went for one probably when I was about seven or eight, so not too long after the amputation and I do remember them trying to put me to sleep that one. I obviously just had this huge fear of operations and hospitals and fear, just going to sleep. So, I think when they were putting me to sleep, there were about five or six people pinning me down just fighting. It's all instant just trying to get everyone off and just a seven-year-old boy going crazy. I can't imagine. I'm sure they probably get it all the time but yeah. I don't know if it was just obviously the memory that the last time that happened to me, obviously I woke up quite different so probably wasn't really wanting to do that again.

Now you're exceptionally close to your mum. Is she where you get your fighting spirit from? And I've heard a story about your sister Becky lifting the sheets of your hospital bed to see your leg before they amputated it and you having gold glittery toenails?

I've never heard that before! That's amazing I'm going to be speaking to her about that later now! Yeah, it does sound true. Oh yeah, really good. Yeah, we were very close, really close family. Becca's three years older than me, Hannah is two years older than me. So, for both of them obviously seven and eight, at the time of me going through all this and obviously parents just very concerned about this, the nurses were really good with them.

You know they kind of I think played around with them like show them a few bits and bobs and just obviously try and distract them and get them thinking, because Becca is such a caring person, she just almost wanted to be the nurse as well probably. I would imagine that painting the toenails was one of the lovely distractions to try and yeah, I don't know. Maybe, if painted it gold, it would stay quite well. I could talk to her about this actually yeah.



Sport and learning to run with a blade?

And so, you know five-six years old you get your first artificial leg, and do you start running around on that leg immediately? Are you playing sports? I mean how did you feel about playing sport as a child? As soon as I was walking, I was running. So, it was as soon as I kind of got that first step done, then yeah it was straight to the next one. It was no stopping me now.

You know I remember my mum wishes to talk about how she could never take me shopping or anything because I'd just be running off, running everywhere, and she'd always be trying to chase me. I think it was one of my games to be like 'right I can outrun you now so you're not going to catch me!' You know I wanted to just play with my mates in the playground and I did.

I remember the first time when I was trying to research disability sport yeah, like you I was just you know, in an able-bodied secondary school, 1800 other kids with me. So, it was just almost to get on with life as normal yeah and play football with everybody else. That was all I was doing at lunch time. I always remember going back into my maths class on a hot summer's day there was a fan in the classroom and I just used to be stuck to this fan because I was a sweaty mess just running around or lunch!

But yeah it is, I think like you say the first time that I tried to research into disability sport all I could find was the local disabled football team and I was basically told that 'you're gonna have to take your leg off to play' or you know the other option was a learning difficulties football team and I was just like, well you know I don't really fit into either of those. You join the normal football team I guess at that point and you just; you're just trying to live your life as normal, but I guess it's one of those things. I'm sure it's similar for you, you just, you don't want to do the different things either, but it doesn't look as fun does it?

You know you just want to get involved like everyone else, camouflage in and so what was the shift then what was the moment from sort of feeling like that to suddenly getting to a point where you're like 'oh crikey I'm looking at the Paralympics all of a sudden' or I'm you know now a runner but in a disabled sort of sense. I always obviously loved sport and I was okay at it, so it kind of made me think one day how good am I?

And I remember I went to the processing centre obviously where I get my legs made, and there was a little poster on the wall that said you know 'do you love sport? Are you aged between 14 and I think it's 25? If so speak to your prosthetist' and so I did and she gave me this leaflet of a talent day down in Mile End in London where basically it was run by Paralympics GB, and you got to go down and try out a bunch of sports.



So, I remember I got the day off school which was a massive bonus at the time, and I got to try out yeah a bunch of sports, a 60 metre sprint as part of the athletics team was one of them. I didn't like my first go so I did it I think three times until the coach said to me 'you're not going any faster now'. So, um it was all from there I guess. I got contacted and set up with a coach from then and I never really knew, I guess this is where I'd end up but it was a lot of fun. The first two years I was just running on my standard day leg yeah, and the times were okay - I think I got it down to it was 12.5 and I remember I went to ask these people, I guess I would call them leg people at the time because I had no clue they were just the people standing there with all these blades outside. When I walked up to them I was like 'oh like can I try one? You know, I feel like I need one of these.' And I remember at the time one of the guys was like 'you don't need one yet, maybe when you're a bit quicker.

My coach at the time Hayley, she was, well she didn't say no and she basically pursued further and ended up getting her contacts, and yeah they agreed to basically let me try one out. And that was in mid-2010 and I still remember the first time, it was a very, very strange feeling because suddenly you're used to this thing that is basically a shock absorber.

It's whole job is to just suck all the energy that you put into it out you know, and give you nothing back. To suddenly something that can actually give you something back and it can actually allow you to build and flow. It was really, really cool it took a long time though. I think it took about six to eight months until I was actually starting to get anywhere normal on it.

I think if you could go back and talk to me when I was probably in 2010, I'd just started kind of getting in first internationals. I remember Paralympic World Cup and the winning time was like 11 seconds and I'd run 12.2.

It was a PB for me at the time, I was instilling my day leg on the start line and I just felt so out of place almost. But it was so cool, it was so great to be there obviously. But yeah it was one of those things like 'wow this is it's a long way to the front here'.

I remember I wrote the times down on my mirror, top 10 in the world I think at the time was 11.9 I think it was and that was always the hope. I guess it was if I could get the sub 12 then I'll be amazed, but it didn't happen like that. I just kept running PBs. I remember my first coach literally it was like 13.2 was my first race, and then it was 12.8, 12.5 12.2 and then I got a blade. I trained on it for six months and it was 11.8 and then it went down to 11.4 and then I remember 11.4 is when I went to Dan Path in 2012 and it went from 11.4 to 10.8.



And I remember actually, my first coach Hayley sat me down when I was running PBs pretty much every race, and I got a bit unhappy because I'd only run a PB of like a tenth it wasn't a very big PB. But I was unhappy at that and my coach sat me down and she was like 'look you need to realise that you're gonna plateau very soon, you're not going to keep PBing!' She was almost preparing me to make sure that like it was more the mental thing preparing to 'look don't get so don't beat yourself up so much'. But I don't think even she realised at the time how untrue I guess that statement was that we've got a few more years in the in the tank!

How you coped with the pressure of home Games in London 2012.

Lack of understanding, lack of knowledge and complete naivety is what saved me. My progression was so fast I didn't have time to get stressed. It was one of those moments I didn't think about. I'm so technically focused and thinking about improving that I'm not thinking about the grand scheme of things. I remember the night before the final thinking, I know what I can say if I lose, it's cool. I'll just sit there and say "I'm 19 it's my first Paralympics and the pressure got to me."

Going into the race with losers interview I was ready and there was no pressure on me. I stood on that start line happy and confident and just wanting to do a job. There is a moment in the race, and it happens over a split second, that I lose focus and I realise where I am, and I'm in front of everybody in a Paralympic 100m final, and this happens at about 60 to 70 metres. Normally, I need a complete change of underwear. You can see it in my neck which starts becoming so vascular. When I cross that line, you think it's going to burst with the tension.

Putting finger to lips when crowd chanted Peacock and roar when you crossed the line. Was that spontaneous.

I had no clue what I was doing. That stadium that night was electric. I remember warming up and there was a little monitor with the live stream and Hannah Cockroft won the first gold medal that night and you could hear the crowd from the warm up track. That energy was incredible. Then I'm standing there five minutes before the 100m final, I'm standing underneath the stadium and they have walked us out like gladiators.

I remember Dave Weir going around and seeing Marcel Hug on the inside coming around that last bend and Dave Weir coming around his outside and the crowd going nuts. I have



never heard a noise like that and this was five minutes before I had to go out there. I wanted a piece of that, it was time to do my thing. It was time to enjoy it and put a show on for the crowd. When I was there on the start line, it was the third time of asking that the shoosh happened.

The tension was building, and the crowd was quite amped. Some of these people weren't used to athletics events and knowing it needs to be silent for the start. And then you hear them chanting my name as I get into the blocks. All I'm thinking is I didn't want someone to finish the race and say the crowd put me off that's why Jonnie Peacock won. I didn't want any excuses. I felt so good and prepared and I thought this is my time.

And I heard a story about your mum seeing a psychic in the run up to London and predicting a silver? But actually, the psychic predicted gold but your mum did it to motivate you?

That's what happened, yeah. Mums always know how to manipulate their children, don't they? Mum had gone to see a psychic a few times because her father died before I was born. But there was one time that she came back, and this was a year before London when I was running 11.5 and in my head it was 'no way, if I could win a medal I would be ecstatic!'

She said, 'I see a boy, a son, a stadium, almost an Olympics.' She tried to go in as a sceptic and she said, 'I see a colour, it's silver.' I'm there as a kid and like 'no way!' I just bought into it at this point like 'oh my god she's seeing the future, I'm gonna win silver!' But then the year progressed and I went to America and broke the world record and was the fastest in the world by a tenth or so. So, I was like 'wait a minute, why silver? What's going to go wrong? It's classic sports psychology.

Rio 2016 was a rollercoaster of a Games that features heavily in the new Netflix movie Rising Phoenix in which you star. You were very angry, why?

London 2012 raised the bar for the Paralympics and it showed you how amazing the sport can be and how big an event it can be. But when I saw the state of how close that Paralympic Games was to actually not happening - even now I don't understand how it got to that point.



After 2012 that's the Paralympics, they are there and it's a package deal with the Olympics. When you see what these guys went through to make it happen, the film made me realise it deeper. I wanted to go up to the guys from the IPC and give them a big hug because I cannot believe what they pulled off.

How significant is it that a proper film on Netflix is being made about the Paralympics?

It shows for me the hunger for the Paralympics. I don't know if Sir Ludwig Guttman envisaged back in the day. I bet he could have only dreamed of where it is today. I hope that part of that legacy of London 2012 is that it is now the norm and people can know about it, and actually it's really cool when you learn about it and there are some cool stories.

'Rising Phoenix' blew me away. I've got to talk about Jean Baptiste Allaize. I've known that guy since I started the sport, I shared a room with him, I've spoken to him about what he's been through. Seeing it in that film I was in tears. It's heart-breaking. It was at that moment the film taught me something.

I have always been someone who has always been about the sport in the Paralympics, I don't really want to talk about the story. I know it's important, but I don't want to talk about it because I think what the sport should be what we talk about. But when you see that you go wow, that's why the Paralympics are important. It's showing so many people these dark days and that you can turn them around, and he is one of those people.

In terms of the sport, Paralympic sport is still young, and people need to remember that. Most events should be progressing every year, and every four years especially. The T44 has progressed hugely. In 2008, people were able to win the Paralympics with 11:16. In 2012 it was 10:90 and then in 2016 it was 10:81. In that race we had multiple people running sub 11 and it's in my head. It will be the same in Tokyo.

Tokyo will be even faster. This event is going to keep on progressing and hopefully we'll be even more proud of that Tokyo final.



‘Strictly Come Dancing’ – you were the first disabled person to take part in that show. Why did you do it?

For me to do that show was about that I had a very specific way that I wanted to do it. I wanted to go out there and be the first disabled person and have people not talk about it. I wanted to be the person who every week didn’t remind people that I was disabled and tell them that this is why they have for to vote for me.

I wanted people to realise that disabled people can be a rubbish dancer that needs to get kicked off the show and we’re not going to keep him in because we pity him, we’re going to kick him out because he’s not very good. I wanted to go on ‘Strictly’ and show kids it was cool to have a blade and hopefully encourage a few disabled people who were scared to go and dance.

To do a thing like the jive with my blade out was so cool. But then the next week I wanted to come out in a pair of trousers and hide it and have people question which leg it is. Or when I was throwing Oti in the air, maybe people might think I was doing it better than a guy with two legs. I wanted to change people’s perceptions on how they view people with disabilities. I wanted to go on there and have people see me as me.

The Paralympics are all about showing the world that we’re all humans, and some of us are unlucky humans that have had something done to us and that it doesn’t stop a heck of a lot.

How are plans for Tokyo going?

The Tokyo schedule is in place. Because of the situation and it’s been pushed over a year the whole plans just shift a year. I’ve basically just lengthened this season out for me and the process of me coming back to the fast sprinting. We will still take a break at a normal time this season. I’ll start training probably around October, trying to lift heavy and run a lot with the hope to be slightly faster in September next year.

Why don’t you run the 200m?



I genuinely might in Tokyo. In 2012, it was an ankle injury and I couldn't run around the bends too often. I thought about in 2016 but for whatever reason we didn't run it. It's there, it's coming, we'll see how it goes. I'm just lazy aren't I! (Laughs) Maybe it's too far and I'm only built for 11 seconds of energy.

What are you going to Tokyo thinking?

Whatever the result in Tokyo I'll be continuing. I love the sport. It's really weird, I think since lockdown and this crazy year I've really found my love for running again. For me, it will only be an injury that forces me out. Touch wood, that's a while but in this sport it's very hard to keep on running these speeds. I am not going to be the guy that if someone beats me in Tokyo, I'm not going to hang my spike and blade up and say that's it. No, I'll be lifting heavier weights trying to beat them in Paris.

I love Paris, it's one of my favourite cities and I'm really looking forward to those Paralympics. Saying that Los Angeles would be a really cool place to go, especially given there is a lot of Americans in the 100m, so it would be a cool atmosphere. But I'll be an old dog by then and you'll be sick of seeing me. I might just be hanging on to the edge of these people, saying "I'm still here guys", finishing seventh. We'll see, who knows what life will bring.