



## Bruno Bosnjak - A Winning Mindset Transcript

**Andy Stevenson:** There is a definite to my mind anyway, a definite unique spirit between snowboarders isn't there. Is it fair to say you do like to mark yourselves out as being a different breed to Alpine skiers for example?

**Bruno Bosnjak:** Yeah for sure but nothing the case like we're better something like that. I'm not in this skier vs snowboarder. I don't hate I think skiers, it is also quite cool, but the thing is also my parents said because I took them to the world championships last year. They were watching all this in there, also watching skiing world skiing and they know how focused. They're really like everything everyone is just focusing on themselves and they're not like another kind of family. But we're opponents and we want to beat each other, we're fighting and training for it. It's a serious thing, it's a very dangerous thing, but still we are like a family and we are celebrating together. I think it's maybe also because it's dangerous bordercourse bordercross thing where we all know that we can die at any moment and that's something that connects us, this knowledge about how dangerous it is. Every moment we fight against each other we also have to take care of each other a little bit, so if the guys come down off the slope after the race, even if you lose you're happy somehow. Like 'yeah, we made it!' You high-five each other and you celebrate that you're down the slope even if you lost the seat. Something connecting I don't know it. I didn't know that yet so much but even in the disabled world, it's even a little bit more I think we are different.

**AS:** You said there something very powerful. You said 'we all know we can die at any moment' and that brings us onto the day of the qualification event ahead of the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, again at this point you were aiming for the Olympics. How high were your hopes of an Olympic medal perhaps before you had that crash?

**BB:** I didn't think about the medal yet, because I was still young and I was like on the road to the top but I knew I could not make a medal at the Olympics. I knew that I can qualify and that's what I aimed for and what I was trying, so I didn't think on the medal. Just thinking on qualifying for the Olympics because it's the biggest thing you can be apart of. That's what I was aiming for. I was always dreaming of being a professional snowboarder even though I knew it's going to be very hard to come to this dream. So that's why I never quit school and did really good education, so I was quite safe in this area. I just tried to do my best to join and be of part the Olympics.

**BB:** And what do you remember about the day of your crash?

**AS:** Oh, I remember everything, I never lost my consciousness, so yeah, I remember the situation. How it started, I think also what did I already know was

the problem. I know everything. It was the last jump and we were three guys going on this last jump together and one was behind me and then he came under my board I think, and he spins me forward with this and when I was in the air, five or six metres high and like coming with 60 km per hour or something. I was flying over the landing and the air and was like 'okay, I know this is going to be a big crash'. And the strange thing is that when I saw it, it's going to be a big crash, but I had time to look. I was looking left and right, I had a good position on the board that was compacted and I don't understand why I have this forward spin. And then there is like a moment where I don't see anything like losing consciousness for a moment and then the next thing I see just crashing into the ground. Because of this moment in the air I didn't even put my hands in front. So I just crash with my hands in the ground, sliding through the finish line and while I was sliding, I recognised something is wrong. Just recognised something's wrong. Then when I was lying there in the finish and I wanted to move, I can't move. The craziest thing about that was I just... It's not that I could not move, the body was not here. I just felt my head. It's really crazy and you can't describe this to someone who hasn't experienced. I felt that I'm just a head and I'm already crying. They all come running to me because they think that I'm dead because after my head crashed into the ground, my goggles were torn off the helmet and flying metres through the air because the crash was so hard. All people are running here my ex-girlfriend was also watching. She was a physiotherapist and I heard her crying from far away like 'don't touch him, don't touch him'. And everyone else around me and then it was also a doctor, a helicopter in the valley. So they turn around and then it was this first moment I started to feel my body again. That was really nice! Then I heard the doctor telling on the walkie-talkie that they're coming with a QS for the thing in your vertebra. The spinal cord and this is probably cut and it was a shock for me, but then my girlfriend says it's incomplete and it was something that I was hanging on. I just wanted to fall asleep and let the doctor do his job and wake up and then everything's fine. After I woke up it was not fine I could just move my shoulders after operation and everything started from the beginning. The prognosis just was the surgeon and one nurse who said that they think that I'm going to be able to walk someday maybe. I'm sat here just completely stunned listening to the level of detail you can remember about the accident. Just going back to that moment when you're lying on the ground and you're hearing your ex-girlfriend shouting from the crowd as she races towards you.

**AS:** At that point there, I'm assuming you weren't actually feeling any physical pain at that point because you describe yourself as not being able to feel your body. Were you feeling pain at any point through that process until you woke up in hospital?

**BB:** No not really, no pain. The first thought that I had when I recognised the situation that just happened to them lying. Not able to move and the first thing

was 'ok wake up, it's a dream, wake up', and they really wanted to wake me up, come on wake up. But the more I recognised it's not, it's true. I don't know what I thought it was just like Make Me whole Again.

**AS: Have you ever watched the accident?**

**BB:** No, I heard that there is a video of it and I've talked to people that know the one who has filmed it and they promised me to bring me the video but I didn't get it yet and I've lost contact with these people so I would like. Because I would like to understand what happened exactly but I did not.

**AS:** I find found that fascinating you actually want to actively want to watch the video that's amazing. You know I've heard interviews with Formula 1 drivers and there's another daredevil sports people who have terrible accidents life changing injuries in some of my third say they never ever want to see what to them, but you really do.

**BB:** It's just more because of understanding. I don't want to see me crashing but I'm also not scared of it because know what I do and I know how dangerous it is and you have to be aware of every moment because this is the base you make your decisions on, to risk more or less.

**AS:** When you woke up in the hospital and I imagine your memories of the actual crash itself are as vivid as they are now, so you woke up knowing what happened to you and how bad things were. Can you talk through some of your emotions lying in hospital bed? Were you feeling that life has been unfair to you where you feeling angry? Were you trying to go into denial about happened. You are in hospital for several months in going through obviously rehab continues when you get home and probably even to this day. Were you feeling that life had been unfair to you?

**BB:** The first thing is you always think the things happen to others and that's the first thing that you recognise. 'Okay it's you and something really, really bad is happening. I was aware that something like this can happen and I was ready to risk this, so I wasn't so angry or 'why me' or something because yes, some kind. I have decided you to that you cannot do anything about it. I was ok with that was because I knew my spinal cord was not cut through, just crushed and I knew the nerves can grow together. I thought ok. It's going to be fine. I will be pleased it will grow together and as crazy as it sounds, already on the first day in hospital I was just thinking how much it will take me to be back on the slope. And then through the time when recognise and heard that spinal cord is not like a nerve and it doesn't mean anything that it's not cut, that I can stay like this forever. The more I recognise this and the more I knew about this, the more functions I got slowly back. So it was not this moment, not this one moment. It was everything developing. And then the more I knew it's not going to be better than some point and the more I saw saw this point that the doctor's weren't referring me to this point, the more I was already used to my functions and okay, it's not that bad. And yeah, it was kind of a progress. The worst time then was

when I left the rehabilitation centre. There I was the star, I was the guy who can walk again. I was wow, something very special. But coming out into the world, I was the disabled guy needing help, not being able to do some things. Not being able to tie my shoes like before that needs five times longer. I can't prepare my food and then I recognised like before it was then the time where 'okay, I'm in a shitty situation right now.' The sport took me out of this again... coming back to sport.

**AS: Who were the people around you at that time you were where you supporting you this and would you have been a difficult person to be around at that time in terms of them trying to help you and maybe you not wanting help?**

**BB:** No, I was taking help. I was I was really happy about it because it was just really really a big part of my rehabilitation that I had loving people around me all the time almost. I was in a different region in Austria in the hospital, but my ex-girlfriend and my parents were, someone of them was all the time in Innsbruck near the hospital and visiting everyday. So really I had not much time to be alone and be sad and be depressive and I also knew that if I want to be back again, if I want to have a rehabilitation, I have to do something. There was a very funny situation in the in the hospital first or second day. The psychologist came to me and I didn't know it. She started asking questions and I said answer 'Are you a psychologist? Then don't I need you.' She was wondering why but I told her 'look, I know I'm in a really, really bad situation that can't be worse and I know that if I wanted to get better, I have to do something. I know that in this situation, I have to move my ass and do something. Then she looked at me and said Ok, if you really don't need me, and that was it. Just my kind of attitude if you want something you have to do something for it and I didn't and hope for the best.

**AS: How did your loved ones feel about you wanting to get back onto the slope?**

**BB:** Well I didn't know about the Paralympics, I was thinking about able bodied sport but this time where I told you they recognise that I'm going to be disabled, snowboarding was over for me. I just knew I want to come on a snowboard again. Because love I it. But the first question you asked it's interesting because I think that it was much harder for loved ones watching me in this situation than for me. Because the first thing is they knew the full truth, how bad it looks because I didn't know fully bad, just how bad it could be. The other thing is they were watching me in this situation. I did not see me. I just I was there but I did not see me lie in this bed. Not being able to move with this with this face full of drugs and when I saw the videos and pictures, I just thought woah... It must have been so hard for like parents watching their child. It was worse for them than me. Also I thought it was a nerve that it will go together everything's going to be fine good yeah. I think it's time for them.

**AS: And what about you? What about when you first stepped on a snowboard again? How are you feeling?**

**BB:** I waited a long time to do this because I was a quite good snowboarder and I did not want to just slide down the slope just be on a snowboard. I wanted to feel ready for making some turns as well, so I waited some years and then the first day it didn't work that good and I was getting nervous and shouting and yeah. It was not that fun, but I saw the potential that it can be fun again and then I try and then it work better and better and was fine It was the first time in my life I could snowboard for fun when I want, not having to go on a bad weather, just when it's Sunny. I really enjoyed this time. After sometime a friend told me there is Para Snowboarding. I saw this as new opportunity to try to be a part of it, but I saw it's mostly amputees and it's probably going to be hard with my functions to be competitive there, but yeah, it works... somehow it works.

**AS: When you're on the snowboard now, whether in a race or for fun, is your crash always in your mind? Have you just been able to block the crash as you snowboard now because I can't imagine putting yourself through the potential danger and risk again.**

**BB:** No, I'm not thinking about it. If I would think about it. I could not do this because one thing is you have to have respect. You have to be aware of what you doing about the danger, but you should never have fear. If you have fear, you will make a mistake, that's for sure. You will make a wrong decision. You will react wrong so you're not allowed to have fear. There are moments I don't like because the courses are getting faster and faster, bigger and bigger and bigger. They're developing our sport with the best ones for impairments. Almost able body riders, but people with less function and the courses are getting already a little bit too fast and too big, especially for beginners, because we don't have low level entry races. And there are situations which I don't like. I don't like big jumps. I'm better now but at the beginning I had quite a struggle. I wasn't thinking about my accident. I was not thinking about the crash, but I just did not want that big jump. Then I had to talk to myself to motivate myself when riding and I was talking to myself. 'Yeah you want it, you want this jump, yeah!' Because I knew didn't want it but I made myself want it! That how it works. You can not have negative thoughts before the jump. When you're in the air it's fine, then you can really enjoy but yeah, it's a psychological work.

**AS: I think one of the most amazing and unbelievable elements Bruno is just at the point you find snowboarding, you have another accident of a different kind and you break your back again.**

**BB:** I was mountain biking and I have some special construction where both brakes are on the right side. I can try to hold the steer with my left hand then. I was a bit too motivated, going downhill and there was a rock, I flew over the steer and hit the ground with my head. First I thought it was nothing and then I was lying there and my neck was hurting, something was not good. I was lying

on my back and then I started feeling tickling in my body and it was a bit similar to the first accident when I started to feel my body again. I called my ex girlfriend and told her what happened, I will call her in some minutes and maybe she should start to drive up the mountain to pick me up. If I don't call her in some minutes, she should call a helicopter because I am not able to move anymore, I have my GPS on and they can find me in the forest. And then the tickling went away and I felt okay, I can move and stand up. My neck is so stiff because all the muscles around stiffened up. Nothing can happen, I can try to push my bike out of this and then the parking place should be here or around the corner. I did this and really luckily I did not fall again because it was a bit wet. My walking is also not that secure. I went to my bike again, rode to the parking place and then saw oh, the parking place is not that near. But I was already on the bike. So I could slowly roll down, although I had one situation where I almost fell and my blood pressure was not that good, but I made it down to the parking place, lay on the floor and waited. When the doctor came I felt quite confident but he said unfortunately not, you have two vertebrae broken and it's dislocated, and it's stuck in the dislocated position. Boom. Then it was okay... fuck. Not again. But I could still move so it was different. It was okay, they will make another fixation, my neck will not be that movable, I will lose one more segment. But it's not that bad. But this dislocated situation was really bad because they didn't know how to put it back. It ended in a very dangerous surgery where the doctor said that I could die again, I'm always fearing death in my life. If someone could do it he could though, so I was going to risk it because I didn't want to stay in this dislocated position. I'd rather risk my life than have a life where I cannot do anything because I have to take care of my neck all the time. They made the surgery and it was fine! Then I had some problems during the first year of snowboarding because of this new fixation. I thought that I had to take it out because I couldn't stand the neck pain, but I got used to it and I'm fine.

**AS: Bruno, on this series I've spoken to lots of Paralympians who had to overcome amazing things and before this I've interviewed lots of Paralympians for radio and television. But it is staggering to think you came through two life-threatening spinal injuries. I don't even know how I'd come through the second injury because you must have just thought, 'Why is this all happening again? Am I destined to keep having these traumas?' I know I'm meant to be a lucid journalist here asking questions but I cannot get my head around how you come back a second time.**

**BB:** Yeah it's a good point that you mentioned. I really started to think 'okay, maybe I have a mission.' Things happen to people who can stand it. You always get the portion of shit that you can stand. It seems that somebody or something meant I could stand it and the story shows I can. This is maybe important for other people to see my story, to motivate them and this kind of view helps me to say 'okay, I'm going through this for others.' Things are not so bad as they seem. People were close to me at the first accident and they just said 'wow, after

seeing this, I don't have any problems. Why am I complaining?' and it's a situation where it has a meaning what happened to me. I motivated people and the bad things that happen to me are doing good things to others. Maybe it's the reason I had to go through all of this. If it's this, I'm okay with it.

**AS: What are the biggest barriers you face as someone with a disability?**

**BB:** For me, it's maybe the thing that for the most people, I don't look disabled the first moment - especially if I don't use the wheelchair and I walk around. People don't look exactly or if I don't do something with my right hand and not my left, people think that I'm fine and there are situations where for example, if I fall down on the street, the people think that I'm drunk. But I'm not, I'm just disabled and I fell down and they are looking at me like I'm a drunk. It's more this kind of situation where people look strange or a grandma on a bus wants me to stand up for her. It's hard to explain that I'm also disabled and need this seat. It's more this situation kind of situation which makes me different to other disabled people.

**AS:** I'm laughing Bruno because you're bringing it back all to me. I've been on a train where I was me and I was sat in the seat and then a pregnant lady arrived and needed a seat, and then an old man with a walking stick arrived. And the three of us looked at each other and obviously the other passengers were looking at me because you couldn't tell I had an artificial leg. And there was this really funny moment where I stood up and then I think the pregnant lady recognised I might have some disability with my legs and she said 'no no, it's fine!' The old man went to take the seat and I said 'no hold on I'm not standing up for you, I'm standing up for her!' This real comedy scene. I know exactly what you mean when a leg disability is not obvious or visible. You can have all these embarrassing situations, you just made me remember that and laugh.

**Would you agree that getting back on a snowboard and doing things that you love and you can hear the passion for this sport, and you can hear your excitement about the danger of your sport as well. Do you feel as though that's actually bringing you back full circle and was a crucial part of your recovery from the trauma the accident?**

**BB:** It's all about patience. I love snowboarding that much and I really enjoy it. In the beginning I needed that time to be competitive again. To be honest the beginning I saw the potential in Croatia for if I was successful, I could secure my future with a pension and with some monthly payments as long as I'm riding. I was thinking of this stuff like securing my future and I thought that is going to be easier because honestly, I was watching Sochi and on the TV you don't see the slope for real and they had much easier slopes which weren't that good. Then the sport developed and then changed and it got harder and harder and then I got more competitive. Like, 'okay you're training, you're getting better. Okay. I have to train and get even better and I want to beat you. Many people say a

medal is a medal but for me, it's who did I have to beat for this medal? And if some of the best riders are not at a particular event and I win gold... I mean it's nice, I love it, but I know that this gold is not worth gold when everybody is here. So that's my kind of competitive thing pushing me forward again to competitions. Especially after the Paralympic medal it got much easier because I lost kind of a pressure. The thing is that I kind of achieved something very, very, big and I can say that if I don't achieve anything more, it doesn't matter I have this medal. With this attitude I went into the next season like 'ok, now I just have fun and just enjoy snowboarding and racing without any pressure because I don't have to anymore. I mean I will fight and I will try to do to be successful and do more medals and I am going for a gold in Beijing but I don't have the pressure and I cannot make give myself any pressure. I mean nobody else can give you pressure because I don't care that much about pressure from other people. But for me it made it much easier and then the next season it worked well. I love it.

**AS: Yes, Beijing 2022 lies ahead. That medal you won in the slalom was the first time a Croatian athlete had ever won a medal at the Winter Paralympics. As you say something that will be alongside your name for the history. I just want to return something you said earlier. You said my whole life is a rehab. What do you mean by that?**

**BB:** It means that with a spinal cord injury, it's never over. It can always become at least a little bit better. You can always improve you can always get some new functions. Even if it's just a little bit more. Just a little bit can help you a lot. So that's why my whole life will stay rehab and I really feel it, if I do less, I get more spastic and have more problems with walking. I really have to stay moving while on the otherside being careful not to do too much because then I would also get more spastic and it will be harder to move. So I have to find this kind of balance of doing as much as I can, but not too much somehow.

**AS: Do you meet other people who have had accidents and are paralysed in some way, do you meet them or talk to them? Do they get in contact with you? Because I'm sat here listening to this thinking, wow. If I had gone through something similar to Bruno or I was the wheelchair user for whatever reason, I would want to meet you and listen to you and get all of your expertise if you like, and all of your experience, because you're such a powerful speaker. Do you do that kind of thing?**

**BB:** No, not yet. I was thinking about it because after the medal people say, 'Now you have some kind of responsibility. You can do something, achieve something, you can move people, you can enter minds and they can listen to you.' But I was not thinking about the medal, who cares? But more and more people told me like 'you know something, you know how to talk to people and what they maybe need to hear to make something easier.' So I began to think about something like this to do some motivation stuff and help people, but nothing concrete yet. But if you asked me if I talk to disabled people, wheelchair people, yeah. Because in



Wheelchair Rugby there is a lot of time and you know a lot of people. Yes, my story is kind of special, but there are a lot of special stories.

**AS:** To turn the question upside-down were there people you spoke to going through tough times and either met them or spoke them or even just had a somebody in your mind, that you thought 'I look at that person and that's where I want to be in a few years' time. They're where I want to be.

**BB:** Not really. I have never had some role models because I always wanted to be individual somehow. When I was able body racing people were asking the same questions and 'no I don't want to be like someone else I want to be better!' It's quite strange to say that but no, I didn't have a role model. I just knew I had to do my best and that's all.

**AS:** I admire in a lot of ways that you want to be yourself and make a name for yourself but in a very modest way. One of the aims of this podcast is to highlight some of the barriers that society puts in the way for some people with disabilities, so it could be accessibility issues. It could be inclusion problems, it could be discrimination. Either in a sporting context or actually possibly better away from sport... Just in your ordinary life, what are the biggest barriers you face?

**BB:** For me, it's maybe the thing that for the most people, I don't look disabled the first moment - especially if I don't use the wheelchair and I walk around. People don't look exactly or if I don't do something with my right hand and not my left, people think that I'm fine and there are situations where for example, if I fall down on the street, the people think that I'm drunk. But I'm not, I'm just disabled and I fell down and they are looking at me like I'm a drunk. It's more this kind of situation where people look strange or a grandma on a bus wants me to stand up for her. It's hard to explain that I'm also disabled and need this seat. It's more this situation kind of situation which makes me different to other disabled people.

**AS:** When you look back over your life, would you change anything or would you take it again?

**BB:** (Long pause) I think it's a really hard question. But I think I'd choose my life as it is again. I had hard times but good times and the hard times make the good times better and more intense. We are all going through what we have to. There is nothing I could have chosen different because you cannot. It's quantum physics for me. Everything is following the rules and even if you have this free choice, our choice is already set up. There is no 'I should have done this', I have no chance to do it different. It helps me live with it and get the best out of it. I will take it as it is again. Sure, it could be better, but it could be worse. I could be dead. Or stayed in my situation after the first accident. I don't know if you know, I assume not, but I broke my neck a second time biking, so I was lucky again, so it could be worse.

**AS:** It's absolutely mindblowing to hear from you Bruno. Some of the things you've said will stay with people for a long time. Thank you for your time and I'm sure you will have helped lots of people listening who might have gone through tough times.

**BB:** I like to help. And I really hope people can listen to some of the information and use it to fight for your dreams and not give it up.