



Carlos Serrano – A Winning Mindset: Lessons From The Paralympics

A: Hi Carlos. Thank you for doing this interview with us. You have achondroplasia, in Paralympic terms you are a person of short stature. How was it like growing up with that condition?

C: This condition is genetic and it comes from my family; my grandma, mum and my aunts have achondroplasia. Growing up with it was a bit tough because of the discrimination (I was subject to), but little by little I got used to it

C: For instance, when I was a child some of my friends wouldn't want to play with me because I was too short, or they wouldn't pick me for their football team. But once they saw I had abilities to play sports, I overcame it and things changed.

A: Do you remember the first time you noticed your family looked a bit different?

C: Yes I do. I was playing with my friends on the street and they didn't want to play with me, so I went back home and told my mom. I was 6 years old.

A: How did it make you feel when you didn't get picked or perhaps people would stare at you?

C: At the beginning it's uncomfortable because I wanted to play with kids my age but they wouldn't let me. After I got used to it and started being good and better than them so they saw me as one of them.

A: A statistic I love about you is that when you were 14, you didn't know how to swim and yet three years later you had already won three Paralympics medals. That's incredible. How did you become so good so quickly?

C: Well, I often hear I have had quite a few achieved for such a short career so far. I think it all comes down to the sacrifices I made and the dedication I put into my work, and also my winning mentality. With my coach we train very hard every day and I never giving up.

A: Would you say it was swimming that made you find your place in the world and realise you were capable of doing great things?

C: Yes, it was swimming that made me realise I could compete with others, that I was very fast and I didn't shy away from any challenge so as I saw myself being good in sports, that gave me extra motivation to do what I wanted to do.

A: Is there something in the fact that when you are inside the water people can't really see you and can't tell how tall you are but can see how good you are, did it contribute to swimming being your thing?

C: As I first started swimming, I could already feel strong inside a pool, that I had a powerful stroke, a powerful kick so that made me feel big and strong.

When I got in the water, I felt a kind of love, I felt very relaxed and happy, I enjoyed being inside the pool. I enjoy it every time.

A: I've read a quote of yours, where you said...'Inside a pool, I didn't feel smaller than anyone. On the contrary, I felt bigger, more powerful'. I absolutely love that. Can you explain how the feelings you have in the pool compare to your feelings out on the street in everyday life?

C: Outside the pool I met other people with disabilities, some without a limb or in a wheelchair, and I saw them and thought they were happy with their lives so I started to embrace more and more my condition and that I even do more than someone who doesn't have a disability, so I feel very proud of myself, proud of being a person of short stature.

A: Now, you are one of the only athletes I've interviewed in the series who is a parent., which I want to ask you about....You're a very passionate and motivated person, and one of the things in your life that has given you even more purpose is your daughter Sara-Luna who's nearly 1...how has she changed your life?

C: She makes me very happy; I am very proud of her, I love seeing her grow up. Sara Luna gives me motivation to compete harder and to win more races. I want her to see me as someone who aimed high and was able to achieve his goals.

A: Has fatherhood changed your own personality or your approach towards life?

C: Not really, I am still the same joyful guy with lots of friends, I like to give advice to my friends. And I still enjoy life, even more with my daughter now while still working hard to achieve my dreams.

A: Do you think your disability makes you a different kind of parent?

C: No, it's a conventional parenthood. I am able to do anything my daughter requires, my family is a very nice family. I'm like any other father.

A: Do you think about how Sara-Luna will deal with your disability as she grows up?

C: Most likely, yes. I remember myself as a child asking my mom why I was that short. I think she will ask me that and why her aunts and grandma are also short. I will explain it to her but also tell her that is no impediment to achieve big things in life, and I will tell her that her father fought hard to be the best swimmer in the world.

A: Will you get Sara-Luna swimming as soon as you can?

C: Yes, because I see sports as something very important in life, I would tell her to embrace and enjoy sports.

A: Has she affected your commitment or training regime?

C: I manage very well my time between training and resting. When I get free time I spend a lot of time with my daughter, my parents and my family.

*"A Winning Mindset: Lessons From The Paralympics. RJ Mitte: "You can either be a weak, timid, fragile person or accept whatever this is and make the best of it. It's the latter we all strive for. I grew up with a mentality of **can't is a decision**." Take inspiration and enhance your personal and professional life by listening to A Winning Mindset: Lessons From The Paralympics.*

A: I've asked you about your daughter but now I want to ask you about your mother. She calls herself 'The mother of the World's Strongest Man'. How much of an influence has she had on you?

C: My mom has always been key in my career, always telling me not to give up, to work hard. And then when she saw I was being successful and achieving my goals, she felt immense pride and saw me as someone very strong, hence she feels as the mother of the strongest man.

A: Do you try to be a parent in the same style as your mother was?

C: Yes, they are a model. I would like to raise Sara Luna with the same values so she can be a good person, someone who will work hard to be better every day.

Have you always had high energy levels and how do you harness that energy in the right way?

C: Yes, as a child I was quite hyperactive. I would run around all the time, jump, climb on trees, kick a ball... So when I got into swimming I put all those energy levels into the pool.

A: Are you happy you had the freedom to do all those things and feel like an ordinary child?

C: I have great memories from my childhood. I actually would like to be a child again, those years were the base for the personality I've developed, working hard and being a champion. Also I use that to teach my daughter the importance of being free and being surrounded by nature.

A: You are clearly a very lively person. But you must have down days. If so, how do you pick yourself up?

C: When I have those days where I'm lacking energy or I'm a bit tired, I try to take deep breaths at night, think about the things that went wrong and say to myself 'tomorrow is a new day', and set clear goals for the next day.

My clear goal is swimming. I'm now focused on Tokyo 2021, where I'd like to improve my performance from Río 2016 with two gold medals. As for other dreams, I'd like to finish my degree in Physical Education, and to be a good father.

A: Do you feel like you have a higher purpose in life beyond sport for people with your condition? Maybe getting involved in society by increasing equality for disabled people?

C: I do intend to support sports in anyway possible, I'd like to continue providing motivation to disabled people, so they can work hard and improve. Maybe even guiding them and giving them advice.

A: Given your success, do you feel a certain level of responsibility for representing Para athletes or disabled people in South America?

C: I feel a responsibility of making all people of short stature proud, so that they feel I can be a role model, that I am achieving my dreams because I work hard. I tell them to keep the hard work up.

A: You've mentioned Tokyo before. Are you an athlete who visualises races, podiums or even receiving a gold medal?

C: Yes, I like to visualise who the race would be. For instance, I plan how the first 25 or 50 meters could go, I like working my mind so when I get there I am certain how I will carry out my plan to get the results I want.

A: This year has been so tough to many people around the world. What's the message for people to stay motivated and to keep fighting?

C: I tell them to try and find a solution to problems, because life is too beautiful so we have to enjoy as much as we can with our families. Once the crisis is over, think about how short life is, so you have to work hard to achieve all your dreams. And never give up.

A: Finally, you've worked so hard on making your dreams a reality, do you have any advice for someone who has a dream but feels they are being held back by something, either a disability or something else? Or even advice for yourself as child when you were facing difficult times?

C: To the little Carlos Daniel, I would tell him that life is beautiful. He should have enjoyed more. When he was facing discrimination from other, he shouldn't have listened and instead focus on being happy. There are some bumps on the way, sure, but we be able to enjoy the journey. And, above all, to enjoy life.

A : Well, what a nice way to end. Carlos thank you very, very much. And enjoy your first Christmas with Sara Luna.

C: Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this podcast. And Merry Christmas to all of you.