



Episode 44 Transcript

Release Date: Tuesday, May 29, 2018

The World's Fittest Podcast Episode with Ross Edgley

Nick Collias: Hello everyone, welcome to *The Bodybuilding.com Podcast*. I'm Nick Collias and Heather Eastman is here with me as well. Today we're audio-only because we just had a Skype call with [Ross Edgley](#). He's a bestselling author in the UK, who, over the last ten years or so, has built his legend by embracing all kinds of crazy strength and endurance challenges. He ran a marathon pulling a Mini behind him, and I think a truck another time. He rope-climbed the height of Mt. Everest, and then he also did what he called the *Tree-athlon*, where he completed a tri while carrying a rather large log on his back. His current obsession is what he calls strongman swimming, which is long-distance, open water swimming, either on his own or pulling logs behind him. He does all of this while weighing in at a pretty jacked 220 or so, and he's staying incredibly lean and muscular lifting weights a lot.

Nick: He's a really interesting guy and he's written about everything he's learned in a new book called "The World's Fittest Book: How to Train for Anything and Everything, Anywhere and Everywhere". If you like books like "Born to Run" or "Four-Hour Body", it's really in that same vein. It's about him running with the bushmen in Namibia on one page and then he's deadlifting with Andy Bolton, the first man to pull 1000 pounds, on the next page. And then it's about how to add muscle and live the low, 10% body fat year-round. That sorta stuff.

Nick: We had just a fantastic conversation, so let's listen in. Start the podcast here.

Heather Eastman: Officially.

Nick: All right, so let's start with the basics. What did you do today? I remember looking a video you

did on Red Bull ...

Heather: Is that your intro to podcasts?

Nick: Exactly yeah. I remember watching a video on Red Bull where you kinda went over, okay, here's all the training and other stuff, here's everything I ate. It was pretty damn packed day from sunup to sundown. I'm just curious, what did you actually do today?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, today was a little bit extreme. It wasn't necessarily an ordinary day today, but I suppose since you asked, I'll tell you what I did today. I was up at 4:00 today, since we had a little bit of filming to do. This is gonna sound so weird, because we've got the book tour coming up, I'm doing a lot of filming, and they wanted to do a really cool time-lapse video of me swimming through sunrise. They just said, "Ross you can just swim 30k right? In the pool?" I was like, "I suppose I'm gonna have to." So today was, yeah, 30 kilometers today in a 25-meter pool, which got pretty boring.

Nick: Oh, my god.

Heather: It's 30 kilometers in a 25 meter pool?

Nick: Yeah that's-

Heather: Okay, I'm doing some rough math.

Nick: That's 50000 times back and forth? I don't know, what is that?

Heather: It's a lot, is what it is.

Ross Edgley: It was pretty bad. It was also as well ... I say with this, they're so kind down in the swimming pool, and they always just kinda rail off a lane at the end, and just go like, "Look, he's gonna be there for a while." And I can just bring what is essentially a picnic, and I just put it on the side of the pool, and I'm just nailing porridge oats and ... I mean you all know, Nick as well with your endurance background. It's an eating competition. It's not even a swimming competition. It's just how much you can kinda stomach.

Nick: I enjoyed ... you had a video about swimming 100 kilometers in a pool recently, and you had, you called it, basically an eating competition with a little bit of swimming.

Ross Edgley: Exactly, yeah.

Nick: One thing I liked about that one in particular when you swam 100K was, just 15 hours in, this is a 40-hour swim or whatever it is, you're already smiling to keep away the tears you said. You're out there pretty early in the process, kinda punchy, and by the end of it, you're out there. You make mistakes, you suffer, you kinda lose your mind. And I'm wondering, do you have to lose your mind? Is that part of the strategy in all this?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, I think with swimming ... I mean with all endurance events, I find swimming's a little bit different. I mean I love trail running, fell running, we were just talking about that, and I think it's you against the elements. Some of the scenery is amazing. But with swimming, sometimes you

are staring at the bottom of a pool for, in that case, it was 48 hours. It's just the sheer sensory deprivation, and if your mind can wander, and that can be a good thing or it can be a bad thing. If you've got any ... and I was chatting with the Royal Marines about this. I did the 48-hour swim down at Lymestone with the Royal Marines, and what was really nice, is because it played with the parameters of conventional sport, it was nice that I could chat to the Royal Marines, and 36 hours in, I will be saying, "Guys, I'm kinda hallucinating a little bit. I think I keep seeing fish." And they're like, "No, no. There's no fish in the pool." I was like, "All right cool, just checking."

It was so nice that it was so ... they'd been through that, and it was nice to exchange just ideologies. Genuinely, that's why I love what you do on the podcast, because it's just an exchange of ideas and ultimately sometimes that's a lost art form, because I think too many people are so keen to get on their keyboards and go and pull up this study and that study, and it's just like, what about actually just getting in the trenches and exchanging these ideas with people who have been there?

Heather: Right, that's one thing we appreciate about Kris Gethin is that he is willing to experiment on himself.

Nick: And talk you through it, talk you through the whole process.

Heather: And tell you exactly what's going on.

Nick: The whole process. In a very personal way. As an event like this gets closer though, is that delirium, is that something you find yourself being afraid of? Or is it something you start to crave a little bit? What's your relationship with it?

Ross Edgley: That's good question only because ... and I recently spoke about this. I gave a lecture on Tim Noakes' idea on the central governor theory. Just saying that fatigue is an emotionally-driven state that is basically tricking or triggering the body to pull the handbrake on, that physiological handbrake, to say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa" because your body likes homeostasis. It likes this habitual level. It likes to be comfortable. And all of the sudden, if you're saying, "Right, we're gonna go and swim for 48 hours," your body is gonna go, "No, that doesn't seem like a good idea." You have this constant conversation between your mind and your body, and your mind is saying, "Whoa, whoa. You're in danger. You're in danger. Stop." Whereas in reality, the central governor theory is saying you have so much more to give at that point. At the point where you really think you're about to stop, the Navy Seals say, "You're really at 40%."

Heather: I'm so glad you brought that up. I was gonna say that. That's a Navy Seal thing. It's the 40% rule. Right when you feel like you wanna quit, you're only at 40%.

Ross Edgley: Yeah, I have you seen David Goggins? Are you familiar with him? He was on the Joe Rogan podcast.

Heather: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nick: Yes.

Ross Edgley: Yeah, he's exactly the same. He says that. When he talks about his pull-up record, and you see the state of his hands, I think it was the most pull-ups in 24 hours. His hands are so blistered, but you think, that wouldn't have happened. It wasn't just one tear. It would've just

accumulated over hours and hours. You think, what must he have gone through to get to that point?

Ross Edgley: Sorry Nick, looping back around to your actual question, which was "Do you crave it?" I think I crave getting to that point because when you get to that point, you ask yourself, "Are you gonna continue?" And it's the lure of progressive overload. I think a lot of people will talk about when you get to that point to use ... bodybuilding, you're training for muscular hypertrophy and doing a horrible drop-set while you're trying to induce this kind of metabolic stress. Like Dorian Yates, Mike Mentzer-type training. Or German Volume Training. You're on your tenth set, tenth rep, and really you're gonna have a conversation with yourself. "Do you really want this?" And if you finish it, it's brilliant. I think endurance for me is the equivalent to that. I think that bonds all athletes. Sorry, that was a long-winded answer.

Nick: No, no, no, I like it. Only in addition to having that conversation with your hands and your muscles, you're also having it with the fish at the bottom of the swimming pool.

Heather: Exactly. My area of expertise is endurance running and a little bit of CrossFit, and they talk about the same thing. They call it psychological threshold, where you write out ... and I'm sorry, I don't know if I introduced myself. I'm Heather, by the way.

Nick: This is Heather.

Heather: Yes. And the psychological threshold is you sit there and you look at the entire workout, and it's meant to scare you. It's meant to kinda terrify you, and then you just have to push your body through it and push your mind through it anyway. I always said there are two kinds of CrossFitters. There's those who are mentally tough and those who have the physical strength, and the mentally tough ones will beat out the physical ones every single time.

Ross Edgley: Wow. I find that fascinating as well there Heather, just because have you ever seen "Gold Rush," which was a documentary on the British rugby team?

Heather: Yes.

Ross Edgley: Yeah. To your point about it should scare you, they were actually, before an erg test, before they were actually doing a crazy VO2 test, you could actually be sick beforehand because their body almost knew what was coming. There's a brilliant documentary as well on Sir Chris Hoy, who was one of our greatest ever cyclists. You see when he's doing similar interval training. It's really weird and there's this calm in the gym, and he walks in and then you see him. He sets up the bike, and all of the sudden he makes sure it's all set, it's how he wants, and then he goes out and he comes back and he lays down a mattress next to the bike. And you think, "That's a bit odd." And then he disappears and he goes to another cupboard and he brings out a bucket, and he puts the bucket next to the bed. And it's all laid out perfectly. And then he starts his intervals and it's not until afterwards when you see him just fall off in sheer fatigue, and he's convulsing like he's trying to be sick but he's got nothing to give.

That's where you have to put your body. Within the book, we talk about Hans Selye, 1936 Law of Adaptation. And they just found that stress and stimuli is the key to adaptation. It bonds all athletes, whether it's CrossFit and ultra-running, strength training, it doesn't matter. I think that's what so great about what you guys do certainly, and what I try to do with the book. It's just getting people to ask the question, "Are you actually subjecting your body to enough stress and stimuli to adapt?"

Because quite often, people aren't. And they're not, to have this point, prepared to go there to that horrible place where you're gonna cause your body to adapt.

Nick: It's interesting talking about this, too, because the way you describe it, it sounds like something that's very difficult to train for, right? And in this other video, watching how you train, it seems like there's a lot of concurrent training going on and what you're doing right now. You submit yourself to a lot of different muscular training, a lot of different energy system training. And there's really two ways people can prepare for these things. They can specialize or they can do a lot of cross training, a lot of concurrent training. I feel like throughout the book, "The World's Fittest Book," you present a lot of different complete workout plans. They're all pretty specialized, though. I'm wondering how you find that line between concurrent training and specialized training. At this point, especially now that you're doing things for longer periods of times, swimming, 100 days straight coming up, or something like that.

Ross Edgley: Yeah. That's a good question only because, and for those listening, talking about concurrent training, Sir Robert Hickson, 1980s, found that training for strength and stamina was not optimal. The two could not coexist. He said, and I quote, "You dilute the potency of the stimuli." On the cellular level, your body doesn't quite know what to adapt to. If you're gonna try to beat your 5K running time but also trying to put up a one rep max on deadlift, the two aren't gonna be optimal. However, and you're absolutely right, within "The World's Fittest Book," we talk about how looking at stress and stimuli and the potency of that signal you're sending to your body, if you're able to separate your workouts ... so in any given day everybody has 24 hours. And [Yuri] Verkhoshansky, one of the greatest strength and conditioning coaches that's ever lived, talks about this idea of adaptive energy.

So in 24 hours, say I'm handed Nick and Heather, and you come to me and say, "Okay, I'm gonna train for CrossFit and I'm gonna be training for an ultra-run." I know that I've only got a certain amount of adaptive energy if I'm coaching you, and you only have a certain amount in your body. There's no point in me saying, "Nick, for your ultra-run, we're gonna start every morning with some metabolic conditioning in legs and we're gonna see what you've got in the squat rack." That's just completely not conducive to what you're training for. But, by being so, so specific ... sorry to loop back around on concurrent training ... If you were to say, "Right, in the morning, our goal is" ... and I always say in a single tweet, if you can say what you're training for ...

So if somebody stops in the morning and they see that I've got my picnic on the side of the swimming pool and I'm swimming up and down 30K and they stop me and say, "What're you training for, Ross?" I have to be able to say in a sentence to answer them. I can say, "I'm drilling efficient biomechanics through the water, aerobic fitness, and my energy pathways." Done. They'll go, "Oh wow, that was pretty clear and concise." I'm like, yeah. My body knows what it's adapting to. Then, if I've got enough adaptive energy in the afternoon, I'll then be able to possibly strength train. And then if somebody stops me and says, "Ross, I see you're on the Olympic lifting mat there, Ross. What are you doing?" And I'll say, "I am training strength. My body's ability to generate force." Clear and concise. They'll go, "Oh, okay."

So by separating those workouts, you make each workout very clear, again potency of the stimuli, but within that 24-hour period, you're also considering the body in its entirety. Again, going back to adaptive energy. If I didn't have enough adaptive energy, I wouldn't hit the weights in the afternoon because it wouldn't be conducive to my goal in the first place, which is swimming based. Sorry, it was exactly the same with you guys there, that if it was like, "Okay, wait wait, stop. Nick. What are

you doing?" Is that conducive to running an ultra-marathon? No. Then don't do it. Sorry, that was a long-winded answer.

Nick: No, that's great. But you're also expanding your adaptive capacity, which is something you talk about in the book a lot. What am I doing? Aside from all the specific skills you're developing, you're always training your ability to adapt and handle more.

Ross Edgley: That's a great point. And I think that certainly, that's what I love about CrossFit. The emphasis on work capacity. Your body's ability to perform and positively tolerate training of a given intensity and duration. I think what CrossFit has done is taken almost the Soviet principle of general physical preparedness, and just applied it on this kind of mass scale. That's why I love what CrossFit has really done, because even if you don't compete at CrossFit, it will then allow you to have that work capacity to then later specialize. Yeah, I think it's exactly that, and I think the industry was slightly going toward minimalist training. A lot of people are saying ... and you'll know this Nick ... that people are saying, "Oh, I'm gonna train for a fell run, a trail run, but I'm gonna do interval training." It's just, yeah absolutely. Physiologically, you will see improvements in anaerobic and aerobic fitness, but there is no substitute for actually getting out on the mountain and drilling those motor pans. I think yeah, sorry. Slight tangent there.

Nick: It makes sense. One interesting thing about the conversations we've had with Kris Gethin about this was that unlike the way that you described where you're practicing your sport, you're practicing that full body in the morning and then more specifically strength training in the afternoon, he liked to use strength training as a pre-exhaust before his endurance work as a way to kind of get more out of less volume. Before he'd go swimming, he'd do triceps and shoulders. And then he'd do a horrible, horrible leg workout before he went running or cycling. And he felt like that allowed him to kind of hack the amount of volume that most endurance athletes use. I was wondering if you've tried that approach or if you feel like, "I get up, I gotta swim. If I'm gonna do my Olympic lifting, it's hours later."

Ross Edgley: Yeah, that's what's really interesting as well, what Kris does because a lot of these studies out there are done under quite controlled conditions. I think if you manipulate those conditions exactly like Kris is doing ... On a lot of test subjects for instance, to use Kris Gethin as an example, there just wouldn't be many test subjects like him. Where are you gonna find another Kris Gethin? You're not. That's why I love what he did and broadcast to the fitness community. I think Alex Viada is a number one ... What they do is amazing, but they're not anomalies. They're just quite unique test subjects. To come back to your question, I have experimented with that, but my main goal would be because of the distances that I'm swimming, movement efficiency. To do them fatigued and then if I did 30 kilometers fatigued, I would just be drilling worse and worse biomechanics. For me, only because my goal is very slightly different to Kris's, Kris openly was like, "I want to complete an Ironman and hold all this muscle mass." With me, I'm more in the school of thought, "I'll let mother nature take care of my physiology."

Ross Edgley: Last year, swimming 100 kilometers towing 100-pound tree, by the end, I was like, "I don't care how I look, as long as I finish." I suppose I'm slightly different in the conditions that I'm creating.

Nick: Slightly though, but you're still well over 200 pounds and you still are a very muscular individual who is allergic to shirts by all appearances.

Heather: Do you wear a shirt in this book?

Nick: I didn't see any shirts in there. But it makes me wonder though ... Every one of the athletes you interact with in the book, you have Andy Bolton in there, you have Namibian bushmen in there, they all have a different relationship with, or a different portioning of muscle, and you yourself still look a little bit more like a bodybuilder than a swimmer even, even a muscular swimmer. I'm wondering what your relationship with muscle is like and how it's changed over time?

Ross Edgley: Yeah. I think I've never really been asked it like that. But that's a good question only because I was a swimmer. That was my first sport. I was never gonna make sorta Great Britain Olympic standard, because as I was saying up there, I am built like a hobbit. At 5'8", my coach just came over to me and was like, "Ross, unless you grow another foot basically, it's not gonna happen for you." I'm still waiting for my growth spurt. It hasn't happened yet. They said, "Look, why don't you try water polo instead?" I then moved into water polo. I was always quite strong, but at the age of 14, I was playing at senior level. I think it was in the south of France. We were playing in the Europeans, and I just got beaten up by men. They were fully developed, they had beards, and I just didn't stand a chance. My coach was like, "Look, Ross, you need to get stronger to actually hold your own."

That's when I started to strength train. Both structural and functional strength training. Structural being muscular hypertrophy to actually develop more size, but also functional as well, so to actually just get stronger without adding more muscle mass, because it was very important that I didn't add any more muscle mass than actually needed. The only thing that I'm experimenting with now is, I would argue ... and actually, I would love to ask your opinion on this, Nick and Heather, which is at the moment, in weight bearing sports where gravity is impacting, like running. Yes. Absolutely. Your relationship with gravity to your weight is going to be a hindrance if you're heavy. I mean, some of my friends who are fell runners, they bulk up to 65 kilos.

Heather: I'll answer that question. So I was a distance runner in high school, and then I put on about 25 pounds of muscle to compete in bodybuilding. Putting on that much muscle, I'm five foot nine so I've got an inch on you, but I put on 25 pounds of muscle and I couldn't run anymore. Or at least I couldn't run with the same mechanics. So then people asked me, "Why don't you compete anymore?" And I said I don't want to keep the muscle that's gonna prevent me from running, because with, what you're saying, with the gravity-based sports where every pound of muscle is now a pound that you have to carry, it does make a huge difference. I didn't let you finish your question, but I was just gonna jump in and kind of, my personal experience with that. Because 25 pounds on a five foot nine frame for a female is a lot of extra weight to carry.

Nick: Sure, and for somebody who's a fell runner or something like that, it's both a bigger engine but also a trailer behind the truck. Either way, there's a push and pull there for sure.

Heather: Literally. It's all back there. It's heavy to carry.

Ross Edgley: Yeah, because they say that even adding one kg of additional weight, it's time to fatigue lactic threshold, pulmonary ventilation, biomechanics, it all changes just with one kg. That's incredible Heather. Where did you find it limiting you? Was it biomechanics? Were you fatiguing in your legs? Was it lactic threshold? Were you breathing harder? Where did you find it?

Heather: It was literally the mechanics. I started out at 120 pounds, and then I ballooned up to ... I think my heaviest was 160 pounds at my heaviest. That's a 40-pound difference. So, imagine, that's

like trying to run with a 40-pound vest on, which if you put a vest on, it's up on your torso. Which your torso is designed to carry a lot of weight. For me, I gained that weight in my legs more than anything. So now what's supposed to be propelling me is actually heavier. So physically moving those legs every single step was too heavy. I couldn't run with the same mechanics. I had to change my stride, I had to change my cadence, I had to change how my foot hit the ground each time. So now I run differently than I did in high school, but I don't run the way I did when I was competing in bodybuilding if that makes sense. There's three very distinct running styles for all those different weights. I'm right in the middle right now. I'm about 135.

Nick: She's 220 pounds right now. 9% body fat.

Heather: And this brings up another point which we kind of run into being Bodybuilding.com and being very focused on a sport which is aesthetic based. Everyone's trying to get big muscles that look good, and in my experience, and Ross perhaps you can speak to this as well, in my experience, when someone trains for a performance-based goal, "I wanna run a marathon. I wanna lift 200 pounds. I want to-" whatever the performance is, it actually is a ... and this is in my experience, let me know what you think ... It's a better driving force for doing those workouts because it's not based on how you look and feel, it's based on what you can do. If that makes sense. When you're out working with these elite athletes, they are forced to be able to do things. It doesn't really matter what their body looks like. Half the time, their body looks great. But, it's because they have to perform. What are your experiences with that?

Ross Edgley: I completely agree, only because I think aesthetics is so fluid. You could wake up in the morning holding a little bit more water retention. Your sodium, potassium, like there's so many things that could impact how you look on any given day. From the lighting in the mirror if you go into a different mirror. And I think if you are extrinsically motivated like that, you'll be like, "Oh, what's the point. I've been training for two weeks and I look awful." I think by focusing on ... quite often, the bar doesn't lie. So, if you're going and you're trying to put up a bigger squat/bench/deadlift and your goal is also holding more muscle mass, then yeah, inevitably you are going to induce muscular hypertrophy through mechanical tension.

The three ways to build muscle mass: mechanical tension, metabolic stress, muscle damage. And you are going to target one of those if you're just going into the gym and trying to move more weight on the bar. I think you're so right Heather. And this starts to go down the rabbit hole of behavioral science and psychology as well. I think it's only now that we're really looking at ... A friend of mine, John Keely says it brilliantly. He says too often, we're trying to apply a simple mechanical solution to a complex biological reality. What he means by that is we're trying to put this huge body into sets, reps, calories, weight schemes. It's just, it doesn't work like that. You have to understand the athlete, or if you're training yourself, like you said there Heather, your motives.

So, I agree. What do you think Nick, have you found that as well?

Nick: I don't know. I think when it's just a thing about you, if we're talking about muscle here as well is, you've written about how you think that getting back to gravity sports versus swimming, that having a larger, muscle-bound frame actually can provide a distinct advantage. Sort of blurring the lines here, not just talking about hypertrophy for hypertrophy's sake anymore, it seems like you are coming around to the idea for your particular sport, that it provides an advantage in the water.

Ross Edgley: Yeah, and that is another thing, because I ... And it's only just recently really, since

immersing myself in triathlons, Ironman, and open-water swimming, and so many of my training partners are incredible endurance athletes. And what I found is when we all start getting to the 20-kilometer mark during a swim, they are all just struggling. They can't hold efficient biomechanics. A few of them said, "I can't grip the water, my forearm's actually cramping." And we joke and they're saying swimming's a strength-based sport for some of them. And I'm like really? Like it's not that bad. And then it actually gets to the point where they're feeding as well. They're having to feed every ten minutes, even less. Whereas holding more muscle mass, you're inevitably going to hold more muscle glycogen as well.

So almost, and I liken myself to some of my friends. They're incredible swimmers and I say they're like dolphins or sharks. They're rapid. They are quick, but in many ways, I'm just like this tiny whale and although I don't necessarily go as quick, when we start getting to 20 kilometers and they're just flagging and many of them dropping out, I honestly feel like I'm just getting warmed up. And then some of them, and this is sort of going down the rabbit hole of nutritional pathways as well, but a lot of them as well, I think this is purely anecdotal, but looking at bodybuilders, and Heather, maybe you can back me up on this, you can eat. When you probably put on those 40 pounds, did you find that your appetite and your eating patterns just completely changed?

Heather: They did and with bodybuilding, that's what most bodybuilders will complain of, is that it is so hard to feed that muscle every single day. And for me, that's part of it, is I love to eat and even I can't eat enough to keep that kind of muscle on my frame. And it gets in the way of training. And this is why bodybuilders have to be so specific about when they eat, when they train, when they eat again. And so I'm much more of a holistic approach. I want to be able to live a life where I can hop down to the gym and work out, but then kind of eat whenever I want and not have to have things so dialed in.

And so I think, to your point, there is an advantage to having muscle. I notice the advantage to having muscle in pull-ups, which is gravity-based sport, but I didn't have the muscle mass to do pull-ups when I was 120 pounds. But even though I weigh 20 pounds more, so it should be harder for me to do pull-ups, I have the endurance to do pull-ups, because I have the muscle, the strength, and like you said, the glycogen to support that. And same thing with running. Yes, I changed my cadence, but my legs don't get sore or tired the way they used to. It's a different way, but-

Ross Edgley: Yeah, yeah, wow.

Heather: So, things change.

Ross Edgley: I think so. I mean, Nick, and coming from your sport, do you find and I'm always so interested in this, do you find that sometimes the best runners, and I've seen it time and again with people getting it wrong. At Kona, you know there are better athletes, but their nutritional strategies are all wrong. Do you find that sometimes the guy that wins an ultra-race will be the best at eating? Not necessarily the best at running.

Nick: You know, ultra-races, they're a hard one, because I think there are a lot of complete freaks in that particular discipline. And then there are also just people who are willing to get as close as possible to dying.

Ross Edgley: Right, right.

Nick: And that's a skill in itself, like how far are you willing to go. I don't do particularly long races. I like to do somewhere in the 20 to 25 miles and take my time, nice and slow. But I did a race last year where there were a bunch of 100 milers who were finishing at the same time as I did. And I remember looking at them as they were crossing the finish line and I was like, this is amazing. These people, they're 65, 70 years old and they just ran 100-mile race. I'm so proud of them. And then I looked at the results and they're all like 28, 35 years old and they're coming across the finish line. And this one guy was bright, bright yellow and I thought, oh my God, his liver is failing. He was out there for two nights without sleep. And I thought yeah, he clearly has his nutrition dialed in in order to be able to finish. Half the field didn't finish this race. But his primary advantage seemed to be that he was willing to die out there if necessary and I think he won.

So those people are different. I mean, muscle is, I feel like a real advantage in those sorts of events though. Depending on where you put it, because the thing is the most inefficient about runners, and anybody who's ever watched the last five miles of a marathon can attest to this, is their posture is just horrible. They're collapsed forward. And the more muscle you can add in your postural muscles, I feel like the better, right?

Ross Edgley: Yes.

Nick: So it's all about where you put it. In terms of leg training and things like that, it's really hard. I see the same things you see. Where people are just busting these horrible interval workouts thinking it's going to make them faster somehow. Whereas if they just did some strategic strength training in the posture, they would be so much more efficient and that's what you're ultimately talking about is efficiency.

Ross Edgley: Is exactly it, yeah. And just touching upon that as well, what I love about ultras is if we all lined up against Usain Bolt, ten times out of ten, he would beat us on a 100-meter race. There's not really an awful lot that we could do. Genetically, he is just superior. But what is so interesting I found about an ultra is there's so many different variables. And things just right or wrong and like you said, mental fortitude. Like you can't measure it, but ultimately that is going to be one of the determining factors, even though it's completely subjective and can't measure it. And yeah, even postural muscles, exactly what you just said as well. Things like that, ligaments, tendons, biomechanics, to the untrained eye, you like I don't understand why that guy's won. But to the trained eye, you can go yeah, because his movement efficiency was incredible.

And I'm going off again on a little bit of tangent, but I'm so excited right now. I think we're on the cusp of a two-hour marathon. And I can't wait to see it done, because I want to look back and see why is it that we couldn't do that for so long. Roger Bannister, first guy to run the four-minute mile, they said at the time, leading physicians said a human cannot run under a four-minute mile, his lungs will explode. And Roger Bannister was actually a medical student himself at the time and just said, "Well, no, I disagree," laced up his trainers, and the rest is history. But once he broke the four-minute mile, there was some crazy fact that over the next three months-

Heather: Something like ...

Ross Edgley: Yeah, loads of people just went under that. What was previously seen was impossible. Once somebody did it, it was just kind of like the floodgates opened. Central governor theory. So all of a sudden, athletes were like, "Oh, it is possible." So all of a sudden, they lifted that physiological handbrake and that's what I find so interesting in every single sport. Even strength

training as well, anyone who's lifted will know as soon as you un-rack the bar and you're squatting, if you tell yourself you've not got it, that's very powerful. Neurologically, something's going on and your body's just going, "Wow, no, this isn't going to happen."

Nick: Sure.

Ross Edgley: Same with bench. Same with a deadlift. If you just lift it and you think that's cemented to the floor, then it's not going to come off the floor. And so yeah, I find it amazing and I think we're scratching surface on that kind of mind/body connection.

Nick: Now to bring it back to swimming for a second though, one disadvantage that I've been told about muscle in the water. A lot of the great swimmers have a slightly higher level of body fat because otherwise they find that they just sink like a stone. That was the first thing Kris Gethin told us after his first swim. He said, "Oh my God, I didn't anticipate that at all. I went out there and I had to work harder, because otherwise I was going to sink to the bottom of the damn pool." Do you find that you can actually float fairly effectively? Or do you sink to the bottom? Or is that one reason why you like to attach yourself to logs because it gives you a little buoyancy?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, no, so right now I am eating quite a lot. I do want a little bit of body fat. Sort of buoyant body fat would be a good thing. Because I do. So I had a body scan before I embarked on my 100-kilometer swim. And they just sat me down and said, "Ross, you have no physical attributes to be a swimmer."

Basically, you have poor muscle mass, less body fat, and then even get this. They said you have a big head. And I was like, well, no, I know I have a big head. And they were like a dense skull. So you are just torpedoing down to the ocean bed.

Nick: To the floor.

Ross Edgley: Exactly. But they said, and I'm sitting there with my head in my hands going well, this is awful news. And they said, we have some good news, Ross, though. There is a saving grace. And I was like, "Fantastic, please tell me." And they said, you have nice, shapely, womanly hips. And so apparently I hold a lot of my fat around my legs and my bum.

Heather: They did not tell you that, did they?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, genuinely. Yeah, I will send you the link. I think it's still on YouTube on the Red Bull documentary. But yeah, he says, "You have nice womanly hips."

Nick: Was the word shapely in there? I like that. That's a good word.

Heather: Yeah, the shapely was the best part of that word, yeah.

Ross Edgley: I think it might have been.

Nick: And I highly recommend the Red Bull video series "Strongman Swimming" that they did with you.

Heather: Yes.

Nick: It's fantastic. And especially if you look in the book, nothing could be further from working with Bushmen or Andy Bolton, the first man to deadlift 1,000 pounds than swimming, pulling a log. And so I'm wondering how you arrived, some people may know you for the Tree-athlon, where you did a triathlon with a tree, carrying it. But how did you arrive at swimming as the arena where you thought like okay, this is really where I want to push to limits, in particular.

Ross Edgley: Yeah, so it's quite a long story. I'm going to try and keep it as short as possible. I suppose it all started with the World's Strongest Marathon, as the media called it, where I ran a marathon pulling a 1.4 ton car around Silverstone Race Circuit to raise money for the Teenage Cancer Trust. So we did it. It took ages. It took me 19 hours and I finally did it. After that, everyone was like, "Oh, Ross is really good at doing long, long distances with heavy things."

Ross Edgley: Right, okay, it's a weird skillset, but I'll take it. And then Nevis, which is a Caribbean island, very, very small, has ambitions to become the world's first carbon neutral island. So they said, look we have an annual triathlon. Why don't you come out here and pull something or carry something heavy to raise awareness and money for a lot of our eco-friendly projects? Somebody said a tree. I said a *Tree-athlon* and so then I talked myself into doing a Tree-athlon.

Nick: So, it's all just a pun, the whole thing came out of a pun then, basically.

Ross Edgley: Yeah, yeah.

Nick: Okay, we can relate to that. That's -

Heather: Now you're speaking our language unfortunately. We find ourselves to be very punny.

Ross Edgley: Good, I'm in good company. So yeah, it was after that. It was during the Tree-athlon and I, at the start line, was speaking to my friends and my girlfriend, she was like don't do anything stupid. I was like I won't. And she was like, I know what you're like, you're going to race. I was like, I promise I won't. And I stood at the back to allow everybody, because there were some genuine racers there, some real athletes. And I didn't want to get in their way with my tree. So I hung back. But then, I'm not going to lie, as soon as the gun went, I was like, oh, this is on. So I went sprinting with my tree into the water and I actually came out the water in a decent position and overtook many people in the water with the tree. And afterwards, Keri-anne Payne, a friend of mine who's the Double World Champion at 10K, she said, you're weirdly quick with a tree.

Ross Edgley: No, I know, right? And she's like look, why don't we just see how far you can do it? So then, to sum up, I said great and I wanted to swim the English Channel pulling a tree. I rung up the English Channel and I always say I wish I'd recorded this conversation. It was the Port Authority. And I said, hello, it's Ross here. I want to swim across the English Channel. And they said that's fine, we'll send you the paperwork. I said, fantastic. Just one small point, I want to do it towing a tree. And they said, well, you're not allowed. And I said, why not? And they said because you're not a registered vessel.

Ross Edgley: To which I replied, I said, well, how do I become a registered vessel then? And then, they hung up the phone on me. So-

Nick: You need more muscle mass. You need to be a little bit heavier in order to be a registered

vessel.

Ross Edgley: Right. So that was when the Caribbean Tourism Board and St. Lucia heard about this and they said, look, we've got two islands. Why don't you come and swim between these? So that was the weird way that that all came about. So yeah.

Nick: Okay.

Heather: So you still haven't got to swim the Channel with the tree? That hasn't happened yet?

Nick: Nope.

Heather: Okay.

Nick: But in the book, one great line that you have about the Tree-athlon is that riding a bike while pulling it was like the greatest ab workout ever invented, you said right? Which made sense to me. That's like a loaded carry. But how was swimming different in what the log actually imposes on you physically?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, purely I think like swimmers and sailors and anybody in the water, they spend thousands, millions of pounds, certainly the sailors on their boats, to reduce drag. They want to travel through the water as efficiently as possible. And I'm doing the exact opposite. So I'm saying I'm going to tie a massive piece of wood to my trunks. So it was purely in terms of resistance, time to fatigue, lactic threshold. So that burning sensation in my shoulders, my shoulders would blow up so much quicker and easier. And feeding, as well feeding strategies. So that's purely all it was really, just like adding resistance in the form of a giant lump of wood, basically.

Nick: Okay.

Heather: So you had something to pull against? And that can be a certain kind of challenge.

Ross Edgley: Well-

Heather: I mean because kind of going back to what you were talking about, looking at the bottom of the pool, and it's very, very boring. And if all you're focusing on is just trying to be as efficient as possible, and that can get very, very dull for the mind, but then all of a sudden, if now you have an added element of you have to pull this tree, then-

Nick: And an irregular tree.

Heather: And kind of to a lot of what you talk about with overloading, you're kind of overloading your mental system at that point, because you have a new challenge on top of that and in many ways, that can be a refreshing thing for the brain to have and for your body to have. It's like "Oh, okay, well now I have this different challenge that can distract me from the real challenge, which is just swimming." Am I making any sense?

Ross Edgley: You know what, Heather? You're the first person to say that, but you're absolutely right. So when I was swimming and we were training for it, if a wave kind of caught the tree, it would almost act like a bungee cord. So I would get a real sharp pull on my trunks and then I know at that

point that I have 100 pounds of wood coming at my feet like a torpedo. And so it was keeping me preoccupied, because I would be okay, best case scenario right now is it disappears past my shoulder. Worst case scenario is it goes into my shins or, and it did on a few occasions, hit my feet and basically just took the toenail clean off. And so yeah, it was kind of knowing. Like a tug of war just across the Caribbean Sea with a tree. So it was weirdly, I don't want to say it kept me company, because that's sounds odd. But there was this element of like, "Oh, at least I'm not alone doing this."

Nick: No, I know. That was a question that I had as well, is how intimate do you get with your log?

Nick: I mean it's an odd question, perhaps, but do you find that you spend time with it, name it, talk to it, anything like that?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, when we were in St. Lucia, when we finished there, it almost became a celebrity out there. And certainly the same in Nevis. And even now, people out in Nevis, they'll take pictures with the tree, because it's at one of the beaches down there. And there's a hotel on the beach. So people will turn up and say is this where the Tree-athlon was? And I sometimes just get tagged in in a picture. So, the tree's out there. He seems to be doing well. He's retired and just seems to get like yeah, everyone just there on the beach taking pictures.

Heather: He's just riding your coattails now.

Ross Edgley: Exactly.

Nick: Riding your trunks. Did you have a lot of planning going into that? Was there a lineup of logs or did you just walk out there and pick one?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, now this is important. And I became an expert in trees inadvertently throughout the year. But certain trees are a lot more absorbent, so there was that element. So, if you were 10K out and that tree had all of a sudden absorbed all the water, it was basically going down with you attached to it. And in other trees as well, just really not very efficient through the water. So yeah, but I think it came down, you'd have to pick a tree and need it to just feel right. You'd go okay, we've got a connection. And we just set sail, yeah.

Nick: Now to take this to another level, you were telling me in an email the other day about your next challenge. You're taking Strongman Swimming to yet another distance extreme, right? This is a little closer to home for you though. You're not having to go out in the Caribbean for this one. So what's your next challenge?

Ross Edgley: It is, yes. When does this air, by the way? I'm wondering when people will hear about this. I don't know whether I'll be doing it at the time or still setting sail?

Nick: Probably in the next couple of weeks actually, so-

Ross Edgley: I'll probably be on my merry way by then.

Nick: Okay, yeah, well, let's say next Monday, we're going to put this thing out next Monday.

Ross Edgley: Okay, okay. I might see be here then. But you're right. This is again how it came about. So, I did the 48-hour swim with Royal Marines. I just wanted to see how far I could swim in 48

hours. After that, I was with the Royal Marines and I was in the Officer's Mess, which is this kind of grand room where they all sit down and discuss matters. And I came in. I had trench foot because I'd been in the water so long. And one of the officers over there—amazing mustache and he's just like this old English Royal Marine—and he just says, what are you doing? And I said, I've just finished a 48-hour swim, just wanted to see how far I could swim. And he goes, why are doing that? I said I want to train for the world's longest current neutral swim. And he just said, that's sounds a bit crap. And I was like, what do you mean? And he goes, it just sounds a bit long-winded, I just doesn't sound very good. And I said, well, what do you propose I do then? And he sat there and he considered his options, drunk his tea, and he turned to me and he said, do you know what you need to do? I said, go on. And he says you just need to man up and swim around Great Britain, that's what you need to do.

Ross Edgley: So, I was like, fine, all right.

Nick: Well, fine then. I'll do it.

Ross Edgley: So, I was like, all right, fine. And we sort of floated the idea with a few people. The sailing community has been amazing and yeah, the support was incredible. And I think they were like, yeah, we want to see that done as well. So in a few weeks or depending on when you're listening to this, I will probably be attempting to become the first person to swim all the way around Great Britain, is the plan.

Heather: What distance is that? How far is that?

Ross Edgley: Well, it completely depends on the route and-

Nick: The currents and, right.

Ross Edgley: Yeah, a lot of it. So it could be as little as 3,000 kilometers. It could be as much as 5,000 to 6,000 kilometers. So either way, it's going to be a long time. But it works out roughly, this is kind of best case scenario and in theory, it works out 50 kilometers a day for 100 days never touching shore.

Nick: Never touching shore, okay. So the trench foot will be a possibility during that as well, I imagine?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, 100%. If I don't get trench foot, I'll consider this a success.

Heather: We're going to have to have you back on to see how this all went.

Ross Edgley: Yeah. I think what's great about this is, for everything that we talk about, there's quite often a blueprint so you can throw around ideas, speak to people who have done it before. Or even merge ideas if you're sort of bodybuilding like Kris Gethin but want to go into Ironman, you can just merge the two worlds. Whereas with this, I've been speaking to everyone from sailors, swimmers, and everyone's just like I just don't know what will happen. Like the human body not meant to be in the water for 100 days swimming 50K a day. So salt mouth where your tongue basically and throat swells up from exposure to the salt water. From abrasions and chafing from the wetsuit as well. Even hypothermia. So even if I set off at June, the English summer doesn't tend to last that long. So I need to get around to Scotland where the Highlands in pretty good time, at least by August or

September. Otherwise, you're looking at temperatures. Well, I was in Glasgow two months ago and I was swimming in a canal there and it was two degrees.

Nick: Hmm.

Ross Edgley: Yeah.

Heather: Yeah.

Ross Edgley: So I don't want to be doing that basically.

Heather: No, no.

Nick: No, no. When you were swimming in the Caribbean, you had to be pulled out of the water ultimately there, not to ruin the video for everybody. I was wondering what, what that experience, what you learned from that that you think that you can apply here for swimming an even greater distance and greater amount of time?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, I think going back to what you said, Nick, about sometimes an athlete's sort of superpower is just their ability to really take it, like you said, when they're prepared to die. I'm not saying I'm prepared to die, that's not what I'm saying at all. But all I'm saying is certainly when I got on the boat, having swum 100 kilometers and like you said, not to spoil it for anyone who hasn't seen it, but it was a 40-kilometer swim from Martinique to St. Lucia. And I swum twice over 100 kilometers and still didn't touch the beach because the currents were so bad. So although I overswum, I still didn't make it.

And when they pulled me out, I was seeing stars, completely depleted of muscle glycogen. I was eating so much, but my body just wasn't basically absorbing. It wasn't assimilating all the food that I was eating. And I'm not going to say it was nice to take it to that point, because even when I was on the boat, the doctor was sort of shining a light in my eye and I just couldn't really see it. And I was at that point just like okay, this is what it feels like to really take it a bit too far. And I'm not saying it's nice, but I know I can push it that far, but let's not take it that far because I've got a 100 days of this. So it's nice to know where that point is and my job for 100 days will be to play with that, sort of getting as close to it as I can without overdoing it. And I think that's-

Heather: That sounds like more of a challenge than the swimming part.

Ross Edgley: Yeah, do you know what, Heather? You're right. I think the whole thing about this is really it's like the body is inevitably going to break down. You make peace with that fact. That over 100 days, I'm going come back looking like someone from Castaway. And once you've made peace with that fact, it's just about nursing the body and just trying to get it all the way around the coast of Great Britain. That's my job really. It's not necessarily the swimming. A successful swim will be a byproduct of efficient feeding strategies, prehab, rehab, sleeping correctly, taking care of any wounds, abrasions, chafing, salt mouth. The swim will be a byproduct of doing all of that right basically. So the swimming's not even the hard part in a weird way.

Heather: It's only this stuff ...

Nick: Have you had to just dramatically change your training in order to build up to this? I mean,

compared to the training that you did for swimming to St. Lucia? How different was the volume? Or is it different?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, I think the reason I've probably spoke so much and we spoke so much about the mental aspect is because yeah, looking at strength and conditioning, you're going to set principles, specific adaptations to imposed demands. If you want to get good at running, go and run. If you want to get good at biking, go and bike. There is no substitute to actually just doing the mileage. But there does become a point where you know how to run, you know how to swim, you know how to cycle. And that's not going to be the determining factor.

It's really going to be about if you want it enough and that's why we spoke, I think so much about the mental aspect. Because that's really what this will come down to. So, for instance, the tide changes every six hours. So in theory and weather dependent, I will have two, six-hour periods to swim every single day. Now that doesn't matter if it's 2:00 in the morning, 7:00 in the morning, or if it's beautiful at 1:00 in the afternoon and the sun's shining. If you don't get in and swim for those six hours, that is a period lost. You know and in six hours with the tide with you as well, you can be clocking you know 30 to 50 to 60 kilometers, if you're prepared to swim during those six hours.

So that's why I talk about, in terms of training, I mean because even looking at ... And what I've talked about there is almost biphasic sleep as well, so you know sleeping twice in a day. So shorter periods. And that you can't really train for and it's not even like I could start training now for those 50 kilometers a day because going into it there would be no concept of tapering and periodization. So a lot of this is, and I forget the name of the author now, but he said, when of my favorite quotes is, "Jump and build your wings on the way down." And I think with this, that's certainly the case, that it's just, it's just to get ... Or I'd like to use a sporting example. The Tour de France. They will use the early stages of the Tour de France to actually condition their bodies for the latter stages. And I think this is probably, hopefully, fingers crossed, touch wood, gonna be the same, in theory.

Nick: Now speaking of touching wood, just to be clear, are you pulling a log around Great Britain or is this just you this time?

Ross Edgley: No. We're leaving the tree for this one.

Heather: He gets to go on the next trip.

Nick: Okay, because I had this ... because I know that you've talked to the BBC about this as well, and I just had this image of David Attenborough narrating you snuggling with the log in the middle of the ocean in the middle of the night. I thought what a fantastic vision it is.

Ross Edgley: No, no, yeah. No tree for this one. So like I said I think -

Nick: Dammit.

Ross Edgley: It was, oh no. It felt right to leave him in the Caribbean and you know do this one solo, I think.

Nick: I guess it's just a good thing that I wasn't that drunken Marine in the room at that point where I'm like "You, what you gotta do."

Heather: You would've had him carry around something bigger than ... Oh my goodness.

Nick: Okay, so while you're gone, your book "The World's Fittest Book" is actually going to come out in the United States, as well. So we should talk about that a little bit in case you aren't in any shape to talk to us for awhile after the swim.

Heather: Yeah, so I want to talk to you after you finish this trip and see how you're doing but-

Nick: So I've read the entire thing, I really appreciate you sending me an advanced copy. And it's totally fascinating because you talk about it throughout it like it's a project that you were chipping away at for 10 years, like it was a 10-year journey that you actually had in mind kind of from the start. It feels a little bit like "Born to Run" and books like that where it's like, "All right I'm going to try to touch as many things as possible, learn as much as possible." So tell me what vision you had for this thing at the start versus at the end. Because it's really hard to ... It's hard to imagine you 10 years ago saying, "You know where this is gonna end? It's gonna end with me pulling a log through the water."

Ross Edgley: Yeah. Yeah, I mean it almost happened by accident. So I mean I should probably start by saying you know "The World's Fittest Book," the title, was really a testament to the people who helped create it. So you know, Andy Bolton, Dorian Yates, Linford Christie, you know all of these guys, it was really a testament to them rather than sort of saying, "I'm the world's fittest writer." It wasn't that. And it was really exactly that, that I never intended, it was really my training journal and my travel journal. But when I was fortunate enough to train with you know Andy Bolton, so for those who don't know, you know seven-time world powerlifting champion, first guy to deadlift 1,000 pounds, I was deadlifting with him up in Leeds and I noticed before every lift, he'd perform these kind of knee bends before he'd lift the bar. And I was, "Andy, what you doing there?" We got talking and he started to talk about how he was applying Verkhoshansky's principle of the depth jump.

So, for those who don't know, Verkhoshansky, Soviet Union strength and conditioning coach, found that if you are performing your box jumps, he found that by dropping off a platform, landing, storing that kinetic energy so there's an eccentric contraction in the legs, you then store that elastic energy and there is a higher, more powerful concentric contraction in the legs. Basically by jumping off the box, landing, and then jumping you can jump higher.

So, I was like okay. So I turned to Andy, I was like, "So is that what you're doing there? You're loading up, you know the legs, eccentric contractions or stretching or bending your knees, whatever you want to call it and then deadlifting? You're performing a more powerful concentric contraction. So the bar basically lifts off the ground and you become the first man to deadlift 1,000 pounds." And he was like, "Well, yeah, not has verbose and in depth as that, but yeah." So I was like, "Well, hang on. That's amazing. You're the, at the time, you are the strongest human to ever live, but you've done it using speed principles." And he was like, "Yeah, I never thought about it like that."

Then I was at Brunel University, and again I was fortunate enough to train with Linford Christie, who I think still to this day is the oldest 100-meter Olympic champion. And when we're in the gym, void of the track, he was repping 160 kilos on the bench press. For like five reps, perfect technique. And I was like, "Well, hang on. You are one of the fastest humans to ever live. But you are repping 160 that a powerlifter would be jealous of. So what are you doing now? Are you a strength athlete or are you a speed athlete?"

And then this evolved even more when I started to then live with you know fell runners up in the north of England. And I started to look at their descents. And I was like, "Hang on, running is just a body weight exercise. You're putting three times your own body weight through each foot, probably even more on a really steep descent. So your control of your body weight, proprioception, kinesthetic awareness, ligament tendon strength is unbelievable. So, hang on, are you now a strength athlete or are you an endurance athlete?"

So, I kind of sat there and was like the lines are becoming completely blurred. And so the book really started as my journey to just say how could you build the perfect human? Like this kind of idea of human optimization. I was like imagine taking the principles of the fell runners of England, combining that with the strength athletes like Andy Bolton, the speed athletes like Linford Christie. And I just started writing. And after 10 years, putting all of these teachings into one book, I was like, "Oh wow, that kind of is a user's guide for your body." If you were take any athlete and build them from the ground up, that is how I would do it.

Nick: Right, yeah.

Heather: That's one of your taglines, is your... "Here's your user guide, your body's first complete user guide." I like that.

Nick: And that's one thing that's really interesting about the book is you know, you have these great anecdotes, these great stories with all these different people. But then there are also a number of programs in there, you know the sort of like the ultimate "do this first before you do anything" sports-specific one, which I thought was a really fascinating program.

But I was wondering what you hope somebody gets out of those, right, because you've done both very specific training and styles of training where you're doing a lot of different things at the same time. How do you ... What do you hope somebody gets from those programs in particular?

Ross Edgley: Yeah, I, from the book, I felt that, and it's been so nice here in England seeing the reaction. Mel Siff, so who wrote "Supertraining" with Verkoshansky, he talked about how the fitness industry's slightly becoming like a fast-food fitness industry. So we're being sort of fed these quick fixes or magic diet pills. And he was like in reality we need to just empower people. Quite often it's not the answer people want to hear because they want to believe in quick fixes and magic diet plans, but they just don't exist. And that's one thing with the book. I say look, so much of what is in here, we've known for thousands of years. I'm just the one trying to put it into a cohesive conceptual framework.

Michel Foucault, French theologian, says, "You know, I'm no guru. My job is to make windows where there were once walls." And so what I wanted people to get from this is for them to be empowered themselves to be their own personal trainer, their own nutritionist. Ralph Waldo Emerson, as well, he had such an impact on this. One of my favorite quotes of his is, "If you teach a man principles, he can create his own methods."

And I think so often in the fitness industry, we're taught methods. So, I want to increase muscle mass and people will say, "Oh, you want five by five, you want German Volume Training." You know all of those are valid, but they're methods. Whereas if you actually teach principles of muscular hypertrophy, mechanical tension, metabolic stress, muscle damage, you can start to create your own method. You can create your own programs.

And a lot of people have even said, "You know, I'm not an elite athlete, I'm not looking to swim 100 kilometers with a tree attached to my trunks." I'm like, "No, no, no, you don't have to." If anything, I think the book is just as valuable for a mom or dad who's just got a family, because their time is so precious and in the gym they need to be so specific. Again, going back to Robert Hickson, on a cellular level they need to be so specific about what adaptation they want. Or if something goes wrong, that week if they've got to take the kids to school and all of a sudden or they didn't sleep that night and all of a sudden because of lack of sleep, you know ghrelin and leptin, the hormones in the stomach, they're completely out of whack and they find that they're reaching for the ice cream and the cookie jar and they don't quite understand why. Well no, because of "The World's Fittest Book" you're empowered to understand principles so you understand why you're inevitably reaching for the ice cream, the chocolate bars. And so you're empowered, is essentially it, yeah.

Nick: Okay. Now one thing that I found was really interesting about the training programs in the book is that they're all variations of upper/lower splits or a push/pull lower body splits. Even the general physical preparedness (GPP) program. And I was wondering what that arrangement of training versus full body training for athletes, what you feel like what advantage that offers to people and to you to teach these methods.

Ross Edgley: Yeah. I found just for the sake of simplicity and we explain all of the principles and then we say but this is how I would put it into a workout. So that biomechanical split set seemed like the most obvious way to really describe it. However, with things like ... Also, as well because again going back to adaptive energy, looking at just three days per week of strength training, if you are a runner, if you are a swimmer, a cyclist, it then would allow you to really spend the majority of your time, the majority of your adaptive energy and the majority of the volume of your training on the sport that you specifically want to do. And I think that's why we went for those types of programs. And I say we because Andy Bolton was a huge help on the strength aspect. He trains a lot of strength athletes, but also as well people coming to him saying, "I want to be stronger but this is actually my sport. I'm a football player, I'm a rugby player."

So, you have to really consider that sometimes strength training, like a lot of the workouts in the book, can be brilliant on their own if that's the only workout you want to do. You just want a strength workout. But if it's supplementary to your other goals, your other sport, it can also be used like that, as well.

Heather: I was gonna say, when Nick first handed me this book I thought it was very bold of you to put "The World's Fittest Book" on the cover and then after reading it I get where you're coming from with that so. But I do think a very apt subtitle would be "The World's Best Adventure Book" because you travel all over the world. You meet all these amazing people and you get to really kind of take their knowledge and distill it down into this, I mean it's not a short book, but you know you really get to the point on everything. And then-

Nick: I read it in a day. I'll put that out there.

Ross Edgley: Wow, Nick.

Heather: Show off. He's just showing off. But then the other thing I really appreciate is you take all these sayings and these adages and these quotes that we've heard before and then applying them to fitness in this way. Because really that's something that's universal for people and anybody can

relate to wanting to feel better, feel stronger, you know, run faster and so you know just taking just that Emerson quote and actually applying it to how you treat your body is such a powerful message and-

Nick: The book actually starts talking about Ralph Waldo Emerson, it doesn't start with Siff and Verkhoshansky and Selye, it starts with Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Heather: I expected to open it up and see a bunch of, you know, weights and dumbbells and I open it up and we're talking about great writers. And I'm like, "Wait a second, what?"

Nick: Well, yeah, that's a good point. What do you feel like reading philosophy really, where does that resonate with fitness for you? Obviously the two are part of the same conversation.

Ross Edgley: Yeah. Firstly, that's so, you really have read, that's so sweet of you guys, thank you. I get a bit, not like choked up, but I think because it was 10 years of writing, so when I actually put it out there I'm still nervous and obviously having listened to you guys on the podcast I was so nervous sending you a copy.

Nick: We're not going to have you on if we don't read it.

Heather: Are we that scary?

Ross Edgley: But no, that is really sweet. Yeah, I think I almost call it fitness philosophy because I think you know we have to really just question everything. And it's almost like this physiological intuition that you should just constantly ask questions, not just about the book, not just about studies, but your own body as well, your own knowledge. The whole book evolved from the quote that I quite often say that you know, "There are many ways to get fitter, stronger, leaner, don't discriminate against any or favor one. As soon as you do, you close your mind and limit your potential." And I think that almost goes back to Bruce Lee in that Bruce Lee at the time sat there and was like, "Well, hang on, what is the best martial arts? Like what is the best sort of human combat sport?" Because boxing only uses your hands and then you got jiu jitsu where it's wrestling, you got greco wrestling, you got kickboxing, and that was where he started to experiment with Jeet Kune Do which really is MMA today. Like he was absolute pioneer of that movement and seeing how MMA has evolved has been incredible.

And I think, and again sorry I'm going off on a tangent, but Nassim Taleb, one of my favorite authors, nothing to do with fitness as well, he's an economist, but he said, I love his quote which is you know, "As humans facing limited knowledge, always resort to prescribed ideas and narratives." And what I mean by that or what I took from that to mean to fitness is with limited knowledge, these prescribed ideas and narratives is we can look at people and go, "Well he's a big guy, he's a bodybuilder. Oh, look at that girl or that guy, he's quite skinny he must be a runner." But really like we're all human and the body is so much more powerful than that. And what I almost wanted to do with the book is just to get like everybody speaking like Bruce Lee I think wanted to do with martial arts, I wanted to do with fitness.

I would love it if you know ultra-runners are no longer scared to go and you know chat to the powerlifters and hang out in the squat rack. And equally you know powerlifters and bodybuilders won't be scared to go and run an ultra-marathon or not necessarily an ultra-marathon, even just a 5 or a 10k, in fear that their muscles'll waste away. It sounds quite, I don't know what the right word is

here, but like this utopia I want to live in. That is just where like you know all, everybody, because we're all just trying to optimize the body that we've been given. And it will be amazing if we all start thinking rather than and I think you know not to go down this rabbit hole, I think at the moment sometimes it's like "Oh, the bodybuilders don't speak to the powerlifters who don't speak to the CrossFitters who don't speak to the swimmers who don't speak to..." And it's like you know we're all one, you know?

Nick: Well, that makes perfect sense. And I think the Internet has allowed all these people who feel limited by those groups when you're in the gym and you think, "Oh, god, I can't talk to that person." Those people are out there finding one another and oddly, I've been reading a lot of ... Do you know who Percy Cerutti is? He was an Australian running coach in the mid-20th century. He was huge on strength training. This is back in the 40s, 50s, 60s, right? And there've been people throughout history who really just they looked at and said, "This makes no sense to think one way or the other. There's so many benefits to be had from all styles of training."

Ross Edgley: Yeah. I'm a massive fan to talk about running, Emil Zatopek, arguably the greatest endurance runner ever. And you know some of his training, like his a hundred 400-meter sprints. Just obscene. I mean he pioneered interval training but you're absolutely right, Nick. Every now and then I love that you get an athlete or a coach or somebody who just thinks completely differently and just says like, "Do you know what? I'm gonna rip up the rule book on overtraining." And that's exactly what Emil Zatopek did and look what he achieved. And I think one of the best things will be, or the biggest compliment I get when people have read the book, is people say, "Oh, it's inspired my own journey. I'm now thinking differently about my training." And I think if I was to get a message in a few months or a few years to say, "Oh, I read your book, it inspired me to do something different and you know I've just set a world record," or even just a personal achievement, I'll be like, "Do you know what? It was worth writing."

Nick: Sure. Last night I'll add that it inspired me to get out "Self-Reliance" by Ralph Waldo Emerson, which is something I re-read every couple of years and it had been a little while. I just absolutely love that and you had me getting it out and reading it on the bed stand last night.

Ross Edgley: Oh, wow.

Nick: But I was wondering also, as you prepare for something that's such a mental and emotional challenge like what you're about to start, do you find yourself reading more fitness and more sailing or do you find yourself reading more philosophy to prepare yourself?

Ross Edgley: Good question. A bit of both, but at the moment, a lot of philosophy. So I honestly I have I think about 50 books that I've just ordered that I'm taking on the boat with me. I would say 80, 90% of them are philosophy. Only reason being I think it gets to the point where my split times and swimming and my nutritional strategy is just all down to a point. Like I've got ... Not to say I've got it figured out, because a lot could go wrong, but I'm not gonna get any better as a swimmer and I'm sort of sitting here thinking, "What would make the biggest impact, or what's gonna be the biggest contributor of success?" Is it trying to shave one second off my 100-meter split? Or would it be trying to unearth some sort of philosophy that I can tap into at any given moment when I'm swimming around the Highlands in pitch black and seven foot waves are just hitting me in the face. What could I draw upon? Yeah, so it's ... Like I said, I'd love to ... And I have no idea what's gonna happen, I'd love to catch up with you guys afterwards and say, "Oh, I had this epiphany when I was swimming across the Irish Sea." I don't know if that will be the case, I certainly hope it is.

Heather: Definitely take a notebook and jot down some notes ...

Nick: So, you're going to be listening to audiobooks, though? That's interesting. So you'll have your earphones out there and you'll be listening to Ralph Waldo Emerson and hopefully some Nietzsche in there, as well?

Ross Edgley: Oh yeah, so no, so yeah with open water swimming you're not allowed, this sounds so weird, you're not allowed headphones because it's considered ... So it's all being done with the right rules and restrictions. So I'm not allowed ... So it will literally be reading as much as I can during my down time and then when you've got that sort of sensory deprivation you can't hear anything or swimming at night you can't see anything. It will just be going over everything that I've just read. So there'll be this real element of sort of like reading half a book and then thinking, "Right now, I'm gonna be swimming for 30 hours," so I can actually mull over I've just read.

Nick: So, you're getting a waterproof copy of Ralph Waldo Emerson to read in the Irish Sea then? I'm still ... I don't quite understand.

Heather: No, he gets to just be alone with his thoughts.

Ross Edgley: On the boat. Did it cut out?

Nick: We're here.

Heather: We're here.

Ross Edgley: Oh, you're back, yeah. So I've got my own cabin on the boat and then it would just be down time, so like I said, that biphasic sleep. Six hours, six hours in the water, six hours in the boat, six hours on.

Nick: Okay, okay. Now it's making a little bit more sense. Can you get us a copy of your reading list? I would be totally fascinated to see what was on your shelf on the boat.

Ross Edgley: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I'll send you pictures because the cabin looks amazing. So like I said, it's a tiny little cabin and I've just kind of decided to forego space and comfort for books. I'll send you a picture as well.

Nick: That's be wonderful. Well best of luck with that. I'm hoping that there will be a full video series documenting this one, as well.

Heather: Yes. At least take a notebook and jot down your thoughts because I'm curious to see what six hours of swimming with your own thoughts will do.

Ross Edgley: I will. And yeah on this one, there are weekly video diaries on the Red Bull YouTube channel. I think the nice thing about this would be events in the past, we've shot them and then it's been live a few months after. And then also my own social media. So with this it's gonna be very much in real time. So you'll be able to see my body breaking down over the 100 days real time. So yeah.

Nick: Okay, let's make this easy to find. You're on [Instagram](#) in particular, it seems like, and [Red Bull's YouTube channel](#). What day is this all going to start?

Ross Edgley: It's looking, weather-dependent, on June 1st.

Nick: So, very soon!

Ross Edgley: Very soon, yeah.

Nick: Wow, well thank you so much for making some time to talk with us beforehand on such a short deadline. I really appreciate that.

Heather: Yes, thank you.

Ross Edgley: Not at all. This has been a lot of fun. It will be good to tune in afterwards. I would just love to actually get your opinion on maybe of the few of things that I've discovered or, like I said I'm hoping for a sea-based epiphany of some sort. It will be good to check in afterwards.

Nick Collias: Yeah, I hope you find something out there, some clarity. Plus "The World's Fittest Book" will be out in a month or so in the United States and is out in the U.K. now and doing very well. So, Ross Edgley, thank you so much for coming and talking with us.

Heather Eastman: Yes, thank you.

Ross Edgley: Thank you so much, guys. Thank you.



PODCAST EPISODE 41: KRIS GETHIN - MAN OF ULTRA

Our favorite bodybuilder-turned-triathlete stops by to discuss his latest challenge and triumph, a 50-kilometer high-desert ultramarathon in the middle of winter. The man who has famously "never missed a meal in 19 years" also talks about his recent experiment with intermittent fasting, and his next adventure: an unsupported ultra-triathlon in Yellowstone National Park!