

Paleo Solution - 221

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Robb Wolf:

Howdy folks, Robb Wolf here. This is the Paleo Solution podcast and today we have a very special guest, very excited. As all of you know, I am not much of an endurance athlete myself. I have no background in this area and so I figured that we would get one of the possibly most written about best respected people who not only has participated in endurance, in ultra-endurance athletics but has brought this to the masses and this is Joe DeSena, founder of the Spartan race and author of the forthcoming book Spartan Up which is due out I believe Joe May 13th?

Joe DeSena:

May 13th Lucky 13, yeah.

Robb Wolf:

Awesome, very cool, right on. Well how are you doing?

Joe DeSena:

I'm a little tired.

Robb Wolf:

A little tired.

Joe DeSena:

I ran -

Robb Wolf:

Tell folks why you're a little tired.

Joe DeSena:

Yeah. So CAF just became one of our key charities for Spartan race. That's the Challenge Athlete's Foundation. When you go out – we went out to their offices out in California, it just blows you away how they call came about and you know, somebody basically needed a prosthetic, and they raised the money and then they've gone on to do that hundreds and hundreds of times. Anyway, they invited us, us being my son and I, my eight year old to an event in Boston on Friday night and the marathon was Monday yesterday. We went to event and they had a bunch of the victims from last year's Boston marathon that were wearing prosthetics. My son and I got into this whole discussion which lead to a four-mile run him and I nice and really slow Friday night which led to hey I want to do the math.

Robb Wolf:

[Laughs]

Joe DeSena:

[Laughs] On Monday and so we went out and I didn't know if they were going to throw us off the course or what because I had a number that obviously he didn't have a number. Everybody was awesome. We had a

name on a shirt for five and a half hours, people had us elevated off the ground because they just kept screaming go Jack, go Jack, touched him on the head. I think it was just inspirational for the runners for everybody to have this go jack out there. We got to mile 24 where we found my wife, his mom and I didn't know if we can go for a finish line because I would assume they were going to stop us. He wanted to go and then my wife we have other children and she was like why don't you just pack it in here. So ultimately we decided let's pack it in there. It was probably better for Jack because he was feeling it up at mile 24.

What I didn't know is that my wife had parked two and a half miles from that location so we ended up walking. We ended up walking anyway.

[Laughter]

We should have probably just walked to the finish line.

Robb Wolf: So you got in the 26.2 no matter how you slice and dice it.

Joe DeSena: I ended up at about 33 yesterday because I had to walk to the car, load them in, get my bags, carry everything back only to find out I had a meeting at the finish line to then go to the – it was just a very long post marathon hike.

Robb Wolf: Wow.

Joe DeSena: So.

Robb Wolf: I would have been fatigued with the walk to the car. Like that would have probably left me with rhabdo and cramping and stuff so.

Joe DeSena: Well it's funny you said you're a rapid-fire guy, a fast switch guy. My children are all fast switch so I didn't know how it was going to go.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: I think I had to monitor really closely because I just didn't want to have a blowup situation. I don't want to get pulled away by social services.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Joe DeSena: But I kept an eye on him knowing that he's really just like a hundred yard kind of guy. He crushed it.

Robb Wolf: Nice.

Joe DeSena: Because we went nice and easy and every quarter mile, I made him eat something and drink something, poured water on his head like we just monitored the situation well enough that if you go easy, you can get through anything.

Robb Wolf: That's been my experience. You know, I kind of joke about that and usually I use my twitchiness as an excuse to just be lazy and not do stuff like that. But when I've been thrown into situations like that, I just really make sure that I stay under my red line and I can usually motor through without too much problem I'm usually good and sore later because clearly I'm not kind of work hard for that specific stuff but usually able to motor through. So what does your son usually do? Like does he do much running day to day, is he going track at school? Like how did you guys prep for that or you just --

Joe DeSena: So it's funny. So this is a funny story So I grew up in Queens and my mom was very ahead of her time with the vegan diet and health food in Queens in the '70s. You know, it was very Italian neighborhood. If you saw Good Fellas, I grew up right in the middle of that.

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Robb Wolf: Okay.

Joe DeSena: And so for her being into yoga, meditation and like branch sandwiches it was strange for everybody around us. So when my parents got divorced, my dad got us an accountant. My sister and I had a local Chinese restaurant to be able to get away from my mom and eat "regular food.:

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Joe DeSena: So needless to say I became very friendly with the Chinese restaurant owner, obviously a Chinese guy. When we had our first child, the one that ran yesterday, I called him up and I said hey, I need some help. I want to find a mandarin speaking kung fu teacher that doesn't speak English that would consider living in Vermont. He found somebody. So the kids now are almost --they're two and a half years in to doing seven days a week, two hours a day of kung fu.

Robb Wolf: Nice.

Joe DeSena: Which is really just like a bunch of kicks and discipline and stretching and a little bit of running and jumping. And then throughout Spartan's development and telling everybody about this kung-fu experience I've

come across a lot of the special forces guys and I came across a lot of the MMA guys. Both of them introduced me to because I was not a wrestler myself, to American wrestling and said there's no sport like American wrestling. Special forces went on to explain that that's really who they want to recruit now, it's just a matter of the wrestlers and the MMA guys told me look, Brazilian jujitsu is great, martial arts great, boxing great but if you start at the core as an athlete with the American wrestling background that person is almost unbeatable.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: So needless to say ,there's a farm up the street from us in Vermont where there's a really good wrestler, a young guy 23 years old. So he's now in the house training the kids too. So they do wrestling and kung fu. But it's all very fast burst type stuff like you're used to. So I just didn't know how it was going to but he did it and he got done.

Robb Wolf: Cool, that's awesome. I mean being mentally tough and just generally feeding the kids well and then if they're active then they've got that reserve. So that's phenomenal and you know we talked a fair amount about mixed martial arts and stuff. I used to fight in Thai boxing and I do some old dude Brazilian jujitsu and I had I think two years of great school wrestling like the little Greco and a little bit of freestyle and then the same thing in high school. Even that I mean I was nothing to write home about but even that little experience that I had with that has carried over so well you know, more than 22 years later doing the Brazilian jujitsu and then just also kind of the work ethic that you get out of wrestling. I've noticed that when we've trained MMA athletes that have a wrestling background, my job as a coach is never to push these guys like all the – my main job is making sure that these guys are not blown out on game day. Because they will train themselves down to a fiery burnt out husk by the time that it's actually ready to go. Like them actually showing up you know, kind of super compensate and rested, like they don't even know what to do with themselves or like really I'm going to kind of taper for five days and not kill myself the last couple of days. It's like no man, you really need to take some time off to recover.

It's a hard thing to get through them. Like the work ethic is really phenomenal on these guys which clearly the spec op scene and you know, the --

Joe DeSena: MMA.

Robb Wolf: --and MMA you know, they're just picking that up. Yeah there is nothing else like that.

Joe DeSena: No, I think you're right. I mean they're so used to coming in dehydrated and down on weight. Imagine if like you're doing, imagine if they're a fit when they got there.

Robb Wolf: Right, right and if they actually get to eat consistently and have good sleep and everything else is easy by comparison totally. Totally.

Joe DeSena: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: Well Joe, how did you --you know, you have really incredible background ranging from finance and you know, entrepreneurial endeavors, tell people a little bit about your background and then how it transitioned into your own kind of exploration of endurance athletics and then why you founded first the death race. Death race 2000 was one of my favorite movies ever, the old, old one with David Caradin and all that. So I actually --

Joe DeSena: [Laughs] That's funny. You know, when that popped up on the radar I actually totally loved that because that was one of my all-time favorite movies as a kid. But tell folks about that whole story. It's really amazing. I think it's stuff that people need to hear these days. I think that we don't -- you know, there's lots of stories of success but I think we need more and more of them and also people understanding that the things that you learn in one vertical of life have transferable job skills in other verticals and how you've done that.

Robb Wolf: Yeah

Joe DeSena: And so that's your point like the wrestling I think for my kids and you clearly experienced it that warrior instinct that comes out of wrestling right? I think you transferred the business and I know so many people that are successful people in life now and they were wrestlers.

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So for me I wish I had that background but I grew up in Queens and it was a crazy upbringing literally like that movie Good Fellas. My parents got divorced, my mom moved to Ethica. My dad was doing really well the first 10, 11 years of my life and a super smart guy and got over leveraged in the '80s with real estate like a lot of people and lost everything, which was really the greatest thing to happen to me because it just changed my DNA and my pain thresholds and how much I want to be leveraged. But it also, it got me to work. I went over to my neighbor's house and asked I

could clean his pool to make some money and then not knowing he was the head of one of the organized crime families. So --

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Joe DeSena: He quickly made, got me lots of, made, made other people be my customers. But he got me lots of customers which all happened to be in that same line of work. So over a ten to twelve year period, I was lucky enough to build a pretty sizeable swimming pool and construction business with very little bad debt thanks to him. It became really this my first experience in endurance and I say that because in that business everybody wants their job done now. They got little Johnny's birthday this weekend and the pool has got to be in and filled and cleaned and whatever it is. You know, if you have 750 customers all very demanding like that it doesn't matter what the weather is, you're going to get the job done or you'll never get the job again.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Joe DeSena: And so --

Robb Wolf: Or your knee calves maybe broken, one or the other. Yeah.

Joe DeSena: Or you'll be under the swimming pool and do I did that for ten or twelve years and worked literally like an animal like your grandfather tells you about and knock on wood did really well, paid my way through college and was lucky enough in college to meet... You know, one thing I've always done, I don't know why I've done this and I try to think how am I going to teach my kids this, what I've always taken advice from older people. Because I figure they already made their mistakes and one of the guys I had met in -- at college was very wealthy, a very successful guy and he stayed in touch with me after college while I was running this construction business. He begged me to go to Wall Street and he gave me a stock tip one day and finally convinced me because stock went up and I thought boy that's a lot easier than doing all the physical work I'm doing. I'm going to Wall Street and so sold my business to the only two guys that lasted with me for 10 or 12 years who are both Polish nationals. They were from Poland and literally I went through hundreds and hundreds of employees, most of them lasting a day or two days.

The workload was so enormous no one really could keep up except for these two Polish guys. So I've sold them the business at a sweetheart deal, went to Wall Street and was lucky enough because now I had this entrepreneurial spirit and confidence and quickly figured out how to start

a business on Wall Street. I had another knock on wood, great run from like '98-'99 to 2005, sold it and was it time to settle down. I met my wife or at that time soon to be wife and moved to Vermont to try to just slow down and get myself out of the craziness.

At that time, I had already found adventure racing and endurance events for myself because when I came out of the pooling construction I was in great shape for all the physical work.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Joe DeSena: I got to Wall Street. It's very heavy on food and drinking and it's just a terrible lifestyle and quickly found myself out of shape and just not feeling great especially knowing what feeling great is coming from my mom back –you know, as far back as when I was ten years old. So I wanted to get back into being healthy and found myself stumbling somebody who is running stairs in the stairwell in my building in Manhattan. He was on the cover of Men's Health. He was the epitome of health and he got me into running the stairs. He got me into getting healthy again in introduced some of these adventure races which I had never heard of. Really crazy, long distance stuff, eight, ten, twelve days in the tundra you know, 30 below zero, snow, just crazy stuff.

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I just felt so cool doing it and I was so broken at the same time and just felt alive and every single thing that you thought was a headache in regular life goes away and you're back. I just would do anything for water, food and shelter.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: That's a really cool place to be when you get there. So anyway, during that Wall Street experience, those six –well actually from '95, I was on Wall Street about ten years, six or seven of those years was running my own business but during those ten years doing that, those crazy races, I put my first race in 2001. I put on a race down at the British Virgin Islands as a funny story. It was a five-day race, it was 350 miles and we had 25 of the best teams in the world come down and compete. There were teams of four and it had sailing in it and kayaking, swimming, running, biking, climbing, self-support. It was an insane race. It stormed for the entire – I mean crazy as long as five days.

Well unbeknownst to me, one of our guy that was setting the course with ropes in the crashing waves before the race started cut his leg and got into -

Robb Wolf: Oh god.

Joe DeSena: Yeah and he got into a dingy, a little dingy and the guys that finished setting the rope said hey why don't you go back to the island and we're not going to need you for the rest of the race and sure you know, you're injured, go get sewn up and we'll just catch you when the race is over five days from now.

Well fast forward you know, the race is over after-party, now it's been like six or seven days, no one has seen this guy.

Robb Wolf: Oh, no.

Joe DeSena: I find out about it at the end, at the party and I'm like how could it be that –well we thought he was back in the island, we thought maybe he was just relaxing, we didn't know. We thought we'd run into him tonight at the party. So I had to get the coast guard involved. The coast guard lays out their maps and they looked at Tobago and little Tobago based on where somebody last saw him in the current in the storms. Little Tobago is uninhabited. It's 150 miles away from where we last saw this guy. He drifted there and he lived on this uninhabited island for the five or six days. He ate crabs and drank the water of the bottles of water that had fallen out of race, his backpacks and drifted to the same location.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Joe DeSena: [Laughs] And I didn't know what he was going to do and literally when the coast guard landed in the helicopter where we were, he said hey anybody want to go grab dinner.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Joe DeSena: [Laughs] He was absolutely cool. It was like, it was an awesome story. So you know, between growing up in that crazy place in Queens and being around people that either got killed or went to jail, we're running that construction and swimming pool business which was like having a gun to your head 24/7, never enough hours in a day or Wall Street and the stress of trading or the races I was doing. It started to build some grit in my DNA and there wasn't a day that went by when I didn't think about some of our most gritty people that have ever lived on this earth right and whether American-Indians or the Spartans were just incredible people from that perspective.

So when this idea came about to create a race and the name Spartan was thrown out there it was just it was natural. So I found myself at that point in Vermont trying to relax, not being --

Robb Wolf: Not being very good at it clearly.

Joe DeSena: Not being very – I last about three days and then we got this thing called Spartan race and I'm back in the fire. I mean I'm not even in the frying pan. I'm in the fire and you know, doing 600 emails a day, doing phone calls. But unlike the last 30 years that I just described, I've never been in an experience, I could never be like a minister or a priest or a rabbi. I just don't have it in me. It's such a good thing. Those people just put themselves at the back of the pack, you know, on the back of the line and they take care of other people. You're my doctor and I wish I could but I'm not. But then you get these emails as a Spartan race owner that people say hey you changed my life. You know, I was going to get divorced or I lost a bunch of weight or I was doing drugs.

You get a little taste of what that must be like.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: You know, every day I want to just – I'm pissed off and I have all these emails and that wasn't the plan here and then you get an email like that. It's like all right you bought me another day. You know, --

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: I mean like you could do a lot of things on this earth and to be lucky enough to make a living doing, you know, helping people is pretty powerful.

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Robb Wolf: And you know, it's interesting I guess I feel a little parallel with that where I used to coach people directly if I had an impact on their lives like I saw day by day. As the things that I've done have been more successful I've gotten more and more removed from actually being around people. You know with books and doing the podcast and different things like that. So there are certain days where I'm kind of like I don't know if I'm doing anything other than spinning my wheels. And then we'll get some sort of a testimonial about you know, somebody's kid had some –you know, autism where their aunt had rheumatoid arthritis and they end up modifying their diet and fixing their sleep and the person is doing a ton better. It's kind of like okay I guess it really does matter. But it's kind of

funny like you can become really insulated from the actual like transformative process to just the whole point of doing that stuff.

It's kind of ironic like if you do something like this and it's actually successful, you may end up being the last person in the world who knows that it's actually doing good work.

Joe DeSena: No. I think about what you just said every day. Yeah I'm – yeah, careful what you wish for right? Because I really wanted to be doing this stuff. I was not planning on sitting at a computer all day every day but that's where we are.

Robb Wolf: or do a podcast with someone like me yeah.

Joe DeSena: Yeah no this is fun. I mean I had heard of you and so I have to say and I hope it's not my ego that's saying it. It is pretty cool to be able to talk to a guy like listen five, six years ago you wouldn't have taken my phone call. So to be able to be connected with someone like you or the guy that actually killed Osama Bin Laden called me two weeks ago, that's Tim Ferris right? Those calls I would never get so -

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: - that's a nice – forget about anything monetarily. Very powerful to be able to talk to cool people.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Joe DeSena: So.

Robb Wolf: So that is super cool. Hey this is kind of an out there question but I have a really good friend Joe Cacuchio. He's a friend of ours in this food business that we have, very, very successful. Played in the NFL, created a food business. Basically he's one of the largest seafood producers on the planet and like he literally started with like a boat.

Joe DeSena: Wow.

Robb Wolf: And then two boats and an old Italian family again and so like really funny stories from that guy. But he said something that has stuck with me so long and the fact that you're just I think two years older than I am, I have a two-year-old daughter and then another one on the way. But Joe said something that was really interesting which was possibly the worst curse a boy can have is to have a wealthy father.

Joe DeSena: Yeah I've heard that and --

Robb Wolf: And what do you think about that? I'm like you know, so clearly you've had a ton of success and like create these potentially big shoes and expectations. I think a little bit about that with my own kids and how to navigate stuff. You know, it's interesting because out in the -- you know, the world at large, it seems like on the one hand we have people who are so crazy like I saw this kind of Facebook picture. There was a sign that was on a Little League fence and it was like these are your kids, the umpires are unpaid, you never played in the major leagues, let's have some fun kind of gig like trying to diffuse people who are totally over the top crazy at pushing their kids.

So on the one hand we have people that are maybe totally outgrown, over the top on pushing their kids then on the other side, you know, there is no -- it seems like a lot of parents are not giving their kids any sense of what you say grit, you know, and these kids can overcome and that they're going to fail multiple, multiple times but really the point is getting back up and continuing and believing that they can do more than what they could do. But how are you kind of managing that amidst like multiple businesses and the notoriety of what it is that you're doing and then trying to raise these kids in a way that they've got some really solid values and they can step outside dad's shadow and be their own entity.

Joe DeSena: All right. There isn't a day or a minute that goes by that I don't think about it and so it is at the forefront of my mind. So when I go back and think -- I think of my story a lot like I'm sure you do what made you the way you are and a giant turning point in my life. I mean it would have been a completely different outcome had my dad not lost everything at a young age because I was cocky and that was definitely a curse to have a successful dad. I got anything I wanted and so as tough as I am on them like they have to watch TV in Mandarin, they do two hours a day of kung fu and wrestling, I make them do their chores rain, shine, hurricane, snow it doesn't matter. It's still a very bubble wrapped life.

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So I think we have to move at some point in the next two or three years to a place that is a little more rugged where they get you know, whether it's some tiny little town in Mexico or some place in China for at least a year so they could experience having nothing. You know, my wife and I will have to be home with them too.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: But I think that's the only way. I mean it was- when I moved to live with my mom, she had nothing and so we no longer had TV. We couldn't pay for each, she couldn't pay the mortgage on the house and just that whole experience was – it was like going to Harvard, it was incredible that experience.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: So.

Robb Wolf: You know, it's funny. For me I came from a very – when I say poor it's relative like really poverty in the United States is a very relative thing. But for United States it was a very modest upbringing. But to the degree that my parents really had kind of adopted this – this is the way it is, it's never going to be any different and I never really cracked out of that until I was in Long Beach California and I met a Cambodian family that had fled out of Cambodia right near the end of the Canal Rouge. They had to do an escape into Thailand. They were actually pretty wealthy in Cambodia but because like they would go to bed one night and wake up and literally a whole family down the street would be gone.

Joe DeSena: Wow.

Robb Wolf: They were kind of like okay, when is our ticket going to come up and so these people escaped out of Cambodia, were in a refugee camp in Thailand, made their way to the United States within the Cambodian community. It was a very tightknit community and they would give each other loans within the community. These people bought a donut shop and then a cleaner and then a Chinese food place and they were like I have never seen anyone work in my life. Like they had cots in the back of these shops that they owned and you know, the mom or the dad would be on shift, the kids would be studying in between working. All the kids ended up going to school. I think there's like a mechanical engineer, a doctor, their son Sala ended up being just a phenomenal martial artist and so he's a top tier martial arts coach now and everything. But I mean just an enormous amount of success.

When they arrived here they didn't have a pot to piss in, they didn't speak the language but yet within about 8 to 10 years, they owned multiple businesses and were putting all their kids through school.

Joe DeSena: No, I mean that – this book Spartan Up is basically about that. I mean that's the story. Like there was the Russell Crowe in the movie, what is this? Cinderella man?

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

Joe DeSena: And when that interviewer interviews him and says why are you fighting because he's broken down fighters and is busted. He has no business getting in a ring with a heavy weight. He turned and he says I'm fighting for milk right? He's got – how do you compete with that? So they were fighting for milk the people you just described and we're spilling milk.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: Right?

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: That's the difference. And so yeah, careful what you wish for, you know, well the Malcom Gladwell just wrote a book on David and Goliath.

Robb Wolf: David and Goliath.

Joe DeSena: Yeah. He touches on a lot of that.

Robb Wolf: Totally amazing book. It's only been out maybe two months or month and I've read that thing three times. It's phenomenal.

Joe DeSena: Yeah. I think it's the problem with our country and it's not just this country it's any country that's – and a lot of these countries are getting developed quickly. So the problem is I used to call it – I recognized it a very young age right when my dad lost everything. I remember Rocky Balboa, right? He's hungry as can be and he wins that first fight and now he gets all this money and the he gets lazy.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: Many movies portray that and I used to call it Rocky syndrome. It happens to the best of us. So how do you keep that work ethic because if you can work like the people you just described, it makes life so much better and so much more rewarding, but it's hard for people to do. I call it a frame of reference change, if you can change your frame of reference right. So what I like to do is every morning I do 300 burpies and I did them this morning and they suck. They never get better, they're always terrible but in the old days if you and I were living in a cave or like the people you just described in the morning they wake up and they don't even know what is going to happen to them.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: In the morning right? Or you and I wouldn't know if the lion is going to attack us and that's where our fight or flight mechanisms are designed to handle. We don't get that anymore and so in the simple little things in life come at us like the coffee being too cold or kids screaming or the car not, we get upset. We're screaming at the lady at the airport because she's charging us \$10 per bag. None of that should really happen.

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That's only happening because we're --

Robb Wolf:context.

Joe DeSena: Yeah we don't have a frame of reference. But you do 300 burpies in the morning that's like meeting a freaking grizzly every morning.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Joe DeSena: And --

Robb Wolf: Dude, I would move to a different cave, man. Whatever cave you're in means 300 burpies every day, I would find a different cave. I would find a broom closet over that so.

Joe DeSena: They suck.

Robb Wolf: But I get it. It make sense and you know it's I did a reality show for the Discovery Channel, I Cavemen and they stuck us in this horrible environment. You know, two weeks of starvation. I lost like 18 pounds on the deal but it was really, really miserable the whole time and when it was done, I was in a funk for probably a good two months.

Joe DeSena: Really?

Robb Wolf: Because the rest of my life was so dull and boring by comparison.

Joe DeSena: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: That I just couldn't hardly stand it, you know, -

Joe DeSena: Okay.

Robb Wolf: So those really peak experiences which I think a lot of what the things that you've put together really touches on like you have those really peak moments of experience that kind of time index your life. You know you have this mutual suffering with the people around you and then also the kind of internal gut check of am I going to go on or am I going to fold up and quit. It was pretty interesting. Like every moment that the thing was called on, I wanted it to stop and then when it really was done I was like damn that was pretty special you know.

Joe DeSena: No. No, It was just like the adventure races I get it. Because I used that, every time I was in the middle of it like when you were in the cave, I was thinking I can't even believe I signed up for this.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: This is freaking terrible. Then every time it was over I'm looking for the next one. It's –you know, yeah, I get it completely.

Robb Wolf: So we had a girl on here Laura Zera. She was on the Naked and Afraid Show. She's a really gorgeous girl, phenomenal primitive skills, expert, a really, really interesting background and I asked here this question which was how do you cope with that mental suffering. Like with these shows you could always say okay I'm going to quit and you know, with most of these races you have an opportunity to quit. You know, the people who don't I'm always intrigued by what kind of the internal dialogue is that they have, like how do you tackle that? What's the internal dialogue you have with that.

Joe DeSena: I think everybody, everybody has got those little crickets or however to describe them, the little thing that pop in their head and say hey. They come up by the way, those crickets come up with really good, logical reasons why you should quit and throw out the white flag. It's hard. It's hard to convince yourself otherwise. I found recently before I answer the question directly, I found recently that with the children it's much harder because when the crickets used the kids as the logical reason to get off the bike at like two hours in when you plan a four-hour ride, you can't win that argument. You're supposed to be with your kids. And then you go home and you end up sitting on a computer and you're like all right the crickets tricked me.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: It was just to get me home.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

Joe DeSena: So but for me I think in the early days it was about proving something to myself and then somebody really, really smart I've become friends with who was actually the early creator of video on the internet said, gave me this idea. I don't know if you've ever heard of future memory.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Joe DeSena: Have you heard that term before?

Robb Wolf: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Joe DeSena: Yeah. So I never heard it before and so I think the first few times that I pushed through and I was able to crush the crickets, it created obviously a release of chemicals in my brain at the finish line like you had when you were done with your Discover Channel show. And then when you go to attempt the next thing, your brain will actually release some of those chemicals in advance of the finish. So you can remember what the future is going to feel like and push yourself through because listen I've had some events that I didn't finish and it never goes away. That terrible feeling is just awful. So I think it comes with some experience.

Now if you ask me the question regarding the people that never get through that first one I just.. that's probably has something to do with living a very cuddled life right. So like your friend in the food business described if the child has had everything and never had to fail, well it becomes hard for them to push through some of these things we're talking about I think.

[0:35:11]

Robb Wolf: Because they never had that future memory, they never have that one imprint at success that they overcame something huge and then did something subsequent to that.

Joe DeSena: That's right.

Robb Wolf: Yeah. It's interesting you know, for me when I'm in stuff like that, when I've talked to different people like folks who are in the special operations community, there's different coping strategies and mine interestingly is that I give myself tons. Like I'm constantly saying oh I'm going to quit but I'll say I'm not going to quit until noon. I can hang through this until noon but at noon I'll wrap it up. Then noon comes around and I'm like ah that wasn't so bad. I'll quit at 4 o'clock and then four o'clock goes around. So

I'm actually – the way that I've coped with that stuff, I haven't heard a lot of people talk about that. Like usually they're just like I'm not going to quit, somebody would have to shoot me and that's all there is to it. Whereas for me if the time indexing is too long like this is something that made it hard for me to get done with school doing my undergrad, four years just seemed like an eternity. So it finally took me a little while where if somebody was like you know what – you know, I mean this seems like it should just be completely obvious stuff but the person was like just tackle it a quarter at a time.

At the end of each quarter if you don't want to keep going, then quit but just finish that one quarter that you're in. I'm like okay, that seems kind of reasonable. And then I started adopting that with different you know, whether it was writing my book or this discovery channel gig and that's actually been really, really successful for me. Like do you have internal dialogue like that or you're just basically like --

Joe DeSena: I don't --

Robb Wolf: -- they're going to carry my dead body out of here before I quit.

Joe DeSena: No. It's funny because you know, we've put on one of our races, we put on a separate entity called the Death Race. We're pushing and challenging people to the limit in what you're currently describing and so not only have I been a participant but I'm also the guy actually providing the torture and watching people break and looking for correlations. So I think that people that are --you know, you'll have to carry my dead body out of here, they tend to quit.

Robb Wolf: Hmm.

Joe DeSena: Believe it or not. More often than not. I use exactly what you say during it. Hey you know what I just go to make it to that telephone pole. I don't say to myself I'm going to quit at the telephone pole but I'm able to take bit sized pieces and digest those one at a time and again but it comes from that experience of the finish lines comes with or without you ,I've learned. I remember I was probably three big races in and it occurred to me if I quit and go to a hotel room and we have to wait for the race to end before we can get out of here anyway which is going to be four days ,from now, time is going to pass. So that time can pass while I'm watching TV in a hotel room which should feel really good or the time could pass along here and just get it done.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: So once I realized that, like you can't stop time. Like it's just going to keep moving with or without you and then you're sitting there in a hotel right and the race is over and you're shit, well that wasn't... Sorry, I cursed.

Robb Wolf: No, actually we curse like sailors on this thing, that's fine.

Joe DeSena: I'm cool.

Robb Wolf: I'm a little surprised we haven't been there yet, no.

Joe DeSena: Yeah like I could have did that. That wasn't so bad. Once you realize that like almost anything is possible. I mean look at Shackleton

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: I mean look what he had – I mean anything is possible. It's just look those guys, I don't know if you follow that expedition that tried to recreate what Shackleton did with \$9M I don't know what the amount of money was of equipment where they had like a piece of wood and a cloth.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: Right? They tried, they tried to redo that expedition not when they left for it to go get help and they had to get rescued.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: With all those fancy equipment. But I argue the reason that happened is because they could get rescued

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: Shackleton would have loved to get on the radio and say hey you know what, we're out of here. This is – but he couldn't there was no option. When I was first learning how to run long distance, I'd make my wife drop me 40 mile from the house.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Joe DeSena: No money, nothing. Got to get home.

Robb Wolf: Burn the boats basically.

Joe DeSena: Yeah. Yeah.

Robb Wolf: No, I mean it totally makes sense like when you have a safety hatch. That's part of, you know, writing a book like actually having a deadline and part of your contract is that if you don't meet this deadline you're going to get sued and not only will you not make money, whatever money you have is probably going to be gone. And then all of a sudden you don't do emails, you don't fart around on social media. You have a fulltime job getting that thing that you contracted to get done before the hatchet falls on you. So no, it's really powerful stuff.

[0:40:09]

Joe DeSena: Yeah. Well think about it, almost every college kid will tell you right when doe the report or any project that's due get done? It gets done right at the deadline.

Robb Wolf: What do they call that Parkinson's law or something? Like any project will expand to the duration that you give it and so if it's two days to make a decision it will take two days. If it's two years, it will take two years. So yeah.

Joe DeSena: And that's interesting because in business what I do is I like to put false deadlines in place.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

Joe DeSena: And it works. There's another thing. I don't know if you have law for this, but if I have to do my 300 burpies, if I tell myself we're doing a thousand today, 300 becomes easy.

Robb Wolf: Easy, right.

Joe DeSena: And when we get to 300 I say I'm done at 300. That's really all I intended to do anyway.

Robb Wolf: Right. An easy day right, right.

Joe DeSena: Right an easy day so.

Robb Wolf: That's awesome stuff.

Joe DeSena: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: Joe, what else the you have cooking here? So you did some work with the folks who were impacted by the Boston Marathon bombing like what

other things do you have that's kind of dovetailing into this? You know, it's interesting, things like crossfit, things like the Spartan race, they have both an online presence but then clearly these in-person you know, experiences it starts creating these really interesting, very vibrant social networks. Like what are you doing that's kind of spring boarding off of that stuff?

Joe DeSena: I mean the biggest thing for me is interviews with people like you. I've never done any of this stuff before and we got approached it had to be a year and a half ago and somebody came up said you want to do a book. I said well I have a book in my head I've been working on for like 30 years but I don't know if I want to do a book.

Robb Wolf: Clearly no deadline on that one. So.

Joe DeSena: No deadline on that one. I just didn't want to die first. And he explained that actually everybody wants – is willing to talk, more easily willing to talk to you and you could interviews and things. I thought oh that's interesting. It's been true and the amazing thing for me I'm sure it's different for you is the book business doesn't see like a very good business. Like it's not going to really make that much money unless you self-publish I guess. You don't have to sell that many books like I think they sell more bulldozers than they do books, right?

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: But yet everybody wants to talk – is more willing to talk about a book.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: So just doing all these fun podcasts and interviews is big, which then leads to more charity discussions so that's really you know, where CAF came from and we're working with another charity called support the troops and what these guys do is they've been doing it 30 or 40 years where they package up like cigars and chia seeds and whatever they can get Whole Foods or anybody that donate, Girl Scout cookies. And they package them up and they ship them over to guys and girls that are on the front line and that need stuff. They'll even put toys in the box. So I went down to the factory where they wrap everything up and ship them out. I say why do you put toys and they say well you know, if you're in Iraq or Afghanistan or anywhere and if those, if our military can give toys to the kids, the kids will look out for them and say hey, don't go around that corner there.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: So that was really interesting. So anyway we're helping these guys which is exciting because you know, I feel like kind of wimp that I wasn't in the military. It's something that bothers me and so I've gotten massive military envy and I love being around all these guys and girls that are high ranking and you know, just makes you feel cool to be connected with them.

Robb Wolf: Right. Right.

Joe DeSena: So that's a big one going on and then this other thing, I'd love to get involved in, we're doing this called the 431 project. The idea there was back in 431 BC you know, we came up with the four elements right, earth, and I always screw this up, air, water, fire. Today's four elements for the next generation or even us right is cell phone, coffee, couch.

Robb Wolf: Right. [Laughs]

Joe DeSena: [Laughs] Computer. And they're saying that the next generation and I'm sure you've researched this more than me, could live five years less than us because of that change in lifestyle.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Joe DeSena: So I said what if we create this awesome event in Vermont? We have a farm out in Vermont that's like Davos meets Ted Talks meets Spartan race farm to table dinner. We bring like a couple hundred people and the only requirement is they have to have fire in their belly. They actually get stuff done in life. It could be anything, it could be an astronaut, it could be an artist, it could be a nutritionist. So we're going to try to bring everybody together. I think it's September 21 up in Vermont and do this cool weekend.

[0:45:26]

The goal is going to be to start to create media around trying to get to these 16 to 21 year olds that are going to be the next parents, next set of parents to give them a leg up like I had because of my mom. Like that introduced the healthy way of life. I didn't have that. My mom had – I'd still be eating that Chinese food with the guy.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

Joe DeSena: Seriously no I wouldn't have known.

Robb Wolf: Right

Joe DeSena: And so if we can get to the 16 to 21 year olds and just give them a taste whether it's with video or something that man you could feel so much better, do so much better whatever. Like people forget the brain lives inside of the body. If the body is unhealthy, the brain is going to be unhealthy. So anyway that's a cool project we're working on. I love to have you involved in that if you had any interest.

Robb Wolf: I would love that and you know we're good friends with Joel Selleton of the Polyphase Farms and he's --

Joe DeSena: Would love him there.

Robb Wolf: He's not far from that. So --

Joe DeSena: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: --let's put something together with that. So Joe what else did we miss? I feel like we covered it at least a little spackling of your background and what you've been up to and what you're doing next. What else do you want to wrap up with?

Joe DeSena: Well just we want everybody to come out and do the Spartan race and if anybody, if anyone of your listeners or whatever is nervous, they don't have to be nervous. We've got 74 year olds, four year olds, you name it. They all get it done. If anybody is hurting for money and wants the book or wants to come out and do a race they could shoot me an email Joe@Spartan.com and I'll come up, I always do. It's not for us. It's less about the money and more about just getting people out there and living life.

Robb Wolf: Awesome.

Joe DeSena: That's the message.

Robb Wolf: Right on Joe. Well it's been great talking to you. We will have links to the forthcoming book Spartan Up which is available currently on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, all those sorts of things. Are you going to do a book tour? Like do you know if you're going to be in specific cities supporting the book?

Joe DeSena: I think right around the launch we're doing something really cool in New York City at a crossfit gym on Madison Avenue.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

Joe DeSena: Which everybody is welcome to. But I don't know exactly when it is so. -

Robb Wolf: When you get details we'll get it out to people, we'll push it out via the social media that we have. We'll make sure folks know about it.

Joe DeSena: Appreciate that.

Robb Wolf: Awesome Joe. Well it's been --

Joe DeSena: Thanks for having me.

Robb Wolf: Oh man, it was great connecting with you, super excited to talk to you and excited to meet you in person. I doubt I will be able to make the September gig. Our second kid is arriving late July, early August and I have a feeling that my wife is going to trim my travel wings. When we had the first kid I had stuff scheduled a month after Zoe arrived and that was not a popular. My wife is Italian so.

Joe DeSena: She's not letting you go anywhere.

Robb Wolf: Yeah. This time I'm going to give it a good four to five months before I get back out on the road so yeah.

Joe DeSena: Congratulations on the baby.

Robb Wolf: Thank you and I'm very, very excited.

Joe DeSena: Kung fu.

Robb Wolf: You know, Zoe actually goes to Jujitsu and watches – my jujitsu coach is actually a woman. She got second place at the Pan-Ams and the 130-pound black belt division and so if Zoe watches her grapple with these other guys. Zoe is only two years old but she's just fascinated by this stuff. The other day, you know, she had stuffed animals and all this and she'll get in and do site control and take them out and do an arm bar on these animals just from watching. You know, the cool thing with kids, they just, they don't really require any instruction. You just make it fun and make it kind of play based and they're all over it so. Yeah. She's getting her ground combatted figured out already so that's pretty exciting.

Joe DeSena: There won't be a teddy bear or a doll in your house that can mouth off.

Robb Wolf: With a good elbow, yeah, yeah. You know, those are going to be broken, yeah, yeah.

Joe DeSena: Well thanks Robb.

Robb Wolf: Great having you on Joe.

Joe DeSena: Bye.

Robb Wolf: Will talk to you soon.

Joe DeSena: You got it. Bye-bye.

Robb Wolf: Okay. Take care.

[0:49:32] End of Audio