

13. #Goals (ft. Michael Norman and Lakey Peterson)

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We're continuing our series on the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 with two new Team Toyota additions. Sprinter Michael Norman is racing to qualify for the Olympic Games for the first time, while surfer Lakey Peterson hopes to not only compete in the Games, but to be a part of history as surfing makes its Olympic debut.

Full transcript below:

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Michael Norman: I remember exactly when I said, "This is what I want to do." It was watching Usain Bolt run the 100. That's when I was like, "Oh, I really want to do this. Like, this is what I want to do."

Lakey Peterson: And I landed this air, and I won nationals. And I feel like, for me, that was a moment where it was like I started my impossible because I think a lot of people just thought, girls don't do that. It's impossible for them, or it's not normal for them to do that. And I was like, "No, I'm going to go do it. I know I can do it. I can make anything possible."

INTRO

Tyler Litchenberger: Hey, guys, what's up? I'm Tyler.

Kelsey Soule: And I'm Kelsey.

Tyler Litchenberger: And we're back with part two of our sit-downs with team Toyota athletes. Last episode, we talked to swimmer, Simone Manuel, and skateboarder, Jordyn Barratt. And they were representing for all the ladies out there.

Kelsey Soule: That's right. So, today, we've got two more Team Toyota athletes on the show. We wanted to talk to our new team Toyota additions to get to know them ourselves and let you guys get to know them as they prepare for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020.

Tyler Litchenberger: I'm just trying to make it on time to work every day. And these ladies are like killing the game.

Kelsey Soule: And gentlemen.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right. And these two guests are killing it out there in the qualifying rounds. They're starting their impossible. They're making moves. So, first we have Michael Norman hoping to do Tokyo next year to compete in track and field. And if you recognize Alison Powell's voice from Season 1, it's because she filled in for us on some of these interviews.

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INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL NORMAN

Alison Powell: Tell us what events you compete in.

Michael Norman: Currently, I'm competing in the 200 and 400. But maybe later in my career, I'm hoping to move down to the 100. We'll see how that goes.

Kelsey Soule: So, growing up, when did you start running?

Michael Norman: 2009. So, I was in fifth grade. It's kind of like, "Yeah, it is random." My dad just kind of like asked me, "Hey, you want to try out for track?" I was like, "Sure." And then, I remember, I think I ran in some Converse and some regular shorts. I didn't have any running stuff.

Kelsey Soule: No special running shoes.

Michael Norman: Yeah, no. I played basketball before this, before track. So, I had nothing. I just came out there, practiced, met the coach, and stuff like that. I had one little race, and that was like he asked me, like, "You want to do this again?" I was like, "Sure." And kind of just stuck with it ever since my first meet. I think, it's what really, really made me stay.

Alison Powell: And when was it obvious you're fast?

Michael Norman: That's tough. That is tough. I'll say like my first year of track, I was relatively good. My first race ever, I got second place. So, I remember that. And I think that kind of sparked my interest. I really like

competing. I like the atmosphere. It's just a great sport. It's all about me versus them. So, that's what piqued my interest.

Michael Norman: But I think when I really realized like, "Oh, maybe I can go to college for this. Maybe I can be a professional," is probably like the end of my junior year of high school. It was like, "Okay, things are starting to like turn around. Things are getting really good. And I'm progressing in ways that I would have never imagined." And I think that's what really filled my motivation even more to continue working because, believe or not, I had a rough patch in my time of my life where track was just tough. I almost quit.

Michael Norman: So, my first year, that was great year. First, seconds, running fast, beating the majority of the people. But then, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, I'm the small skinny guy. Everybody started lifting weights, going through puberty, getting tall. I'm staying small. I'm just like, "Wow, it kind of sucks." And I mean, I'm running the same times, like, 12.8, 12.8, 12.5, 12.2, 12.2. 56, 57, 58 for the 400. And things just weren't getting — I just wasn't progressing the way I saw my friends progressing. The people who I used to beat started beating me. It just took a lot out of me. And it's just like, "Is this something I'm actually good at? Do I want to do this now?"

Michael Norman: I stuck it out because I had a lot of friends that ran track, and I just like being around my friends. But overall, it was just a tough time for me. And then, just like that freshman year of high school, things just started to click and work again. I just grew a lot, probably like four or five inches. Then, I started lifting weights. So, I started getting little swoll. And then, I was joking. Not really swoll, but I was really skinny in my freshman year. But my times were just dropping dramatically. So, I think that's really motivated me to work even harder and continue what I was doing.

Kelsey Soule: Sometimes, a lot of people get into sports because they're just natural-born athletes, and they're just good at it. But then, when you pair that natural-born athleticism with hard work, training, and committing to it, then that's kind of the perfect storm, right? That's what creates Olympic athletes.

Michael Norman: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: So, do you think that it was just your natural-born athleticism, or was it that you decided, "This is something I want to do. I'm going to be better than these people. I'm doing it."

Michael Norman: I think I had some natural born athleticism growing up. And that's what started me in track. But I remember exactly when I said, "This is what I want to do." I was watching Usain Bolt run the 100 like at Beijing 2008. I just saw him or the side camera panning across the 100 as he runs across. That's when I was like, "Oh, I really want to do this. Like, this is what I want to do."

Kelsey Soule: Goals.

Michael Norman: Yeah, so.

Kelsey Soule: Great. So, what does the next year look like for you? It's an extremely short amount of time for training. So, what does what is the next year entail?

Michael Norman: So, the next year. So, this my rookie year running professionally for track and field. So, this year's world championship year in Doha. So, this year, we're really going to focus on, again, creating those good habits on the track and in life just to carry over to 2020. So, as we prepare for 2020. But this year, I'm really just going for world championship, going to medal. I just run really fast and just really enjoy this lifestyle and graduate.

Kelsey Soule: Obviously, bigger milestone

Michael Norman: Yeah, definitely huge milestone.

Kelsey Soule: What is your typical training schedule like? How much are you training per week?

Michael Norman: I'd say I probably spent about five or six hours a day strictly on track maybe, except for Sunday or Thursday. It just depends. Practice Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and sometimes Saturday. So, training schedule is pretty rigorous, but I love what I do. So, I enjoy every moment of it. Now, some of the stuff becomes tedious, but it's what you need to do to become the greatest person you could be.

Kelsey Soule: Right.

Alison Powell: And after you graduate, is it going to be full time on preparing for the Olympics or do you have to get a job?

Michael Norman: No, I'm just strictly training.

Kelsey Soule: This is your job.

Alison Powell: This is your job.

Michael Norman: Yeah, running track is my job. So, lifting weights, drinking water, stretching. That is all part of the job. So, it's a 24-hour or 24/7 job. I'm prepared for it, and I'm really looking forward to it because school, it's been tough. It's been challenging balancing school and track. So, I think, next year will be just an amazing year because all the time that I spend the classroom, that's just added time I could spend on perfecting my craft.

<CAR ZOOM>

Tyler Litchenberger: Kelsey.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah?

Tyler Litchenberger: Imagine just graduating college and training for the Olympics from 9:00 to 5:00 every day.

Kelsey Soule: I can honestly say when I graduated college, I was not training for much of anything.

Tyler Litchenberger: What were you doing from 9:00 to 5:00?

Kelsey Soule: I worked at a tanning bed.

Tyler Litchenberger: Amazing.

Kelsey Soule: Please don't go to the tanning bed.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yes.

Kelsey Soule: Please.

Tyler Litchenberger: Skin care first, everybody. This is why Team Toyota athletes are so inspiring.

Kelsey Soule: Okay. Seriously, though, I think Michael told us his first car was a Mercedes.

Kelsey Soule: I guess we won't hold that against him.

Tyler Litchenberger: He's driving a sweet Rav4 hybrid now.

Kelsey Soule: That's right. Speaking of our favorite environmentalists, our next athlete is Lakey Peterson, who is going for the gold in surfing, which is brand new to the Olympic Games and Team Toyota. Take a listen.

<CAR ZOOM>

INTERVIEW WITH LAKEY PETERSON

Allison Powell: We're with Lakey Peterson, one of the leading female surfers, and she is a-

Tyler Litchenberger: In the world.

Allison Powell: In the world. She is a hopeful for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, and she is one of our wonderful Team USA Team Toyota members.

Lakey Peterson: Yes, that's me.

Tyler Litchenberger: Is it the first year for surfing to be in the Olympics?

Lakey Peterson: This is, yes. So, Tokyo will be our debut for surfing on the world stage.

Tyler Litchenberger: What kind of waves can you rip in Tokyo?

Allison Powell: This is a good question. Tokyo, to me, I'm from Southern California. I don't know about the waves in Japan.

Allison Powell: How can they be sure the waves will be excellent that day?

Lakey Peterson: That's a great question. And there was a lot of debate before this Olympics. I mean, when surfing got accepted into it, I think there was a lot of back and forth if they wanted to have it in a wave pool because, now, wave pool technologies are so amazing, or in the ocean. And there has been some previous pro events actually in Japan just outside kind of the city. Obviously, not downtown Tokyo. We're not shredding.

Lakey Peterson: But there has been events there, and it can get really fun that time of year. When the Olympics falls is not super-duper ideal, I don't think, for waves. But there are fun waves. I actually just was at a Surfing USA kind of meeting the other week, and they gave us a rundown of like the probability of looking at stats over the last kind of 10 years of what we'll get for the Olympics. And we should get some little waves. So, we'll see. Fingers crossed.

Tyler Litchenberger All right.

Lakey Peterson: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: You started surfing at a very young age because you had a parent who was swimming, yes?

Lakey Peterson: Yes, I did.

Tyler Litchenberger: National champion?

Lakey Peterson: Yeah, world record holder.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yes.

Lakey Peterson: And made the Olympics the year it got boycott actually. It's my mom.

Tyler Litchenberger: And so, how did she take you and be like, "All right, surfing, this is the thing," or was that you as a child, you just kind of ran towards the ocean and that happened?

Lakey Peterson: Yeah, I think maybe a bit of both. I mean, I grew up in Santa Barbara, California. So, I grew up near the water and ocean. And going to the beach is such a normal thing in a place like that. So, I feel like that sort of going to the beach and being in the ocean, kind of being a water baby because my mom got me swimming so young was pretty natural. Yeah, I don't know. It just sort of came really naturally for me, and I loved it.

Allison Powell: Sure.

Tyler Litchenberger: What are judges looking for? Like, how is the sport ranked, pointed?

Allison Powell: Or scored.

Tyler Litchenberger: Scored.

Allison Powell: Scored.

Lakey Peterson: Great question. So, we're pretty much judged on a scale of 0 to 10, 10 being the best, 0.01 being the worst. A lot of it, every day that we surf, every venue we go to, the waves are different, right. So, I think a lot of the criteria is dependent on how that day's looking. If we get a day that's really pumping perfect surf, the expectation of doing big maneuvers and having speed, and power, and flow, it's kind of what they go off of. It's going to be pretty high because we have great waves to perform on; whereas, if we show up, and we have to run, but it's pretty small and tricky, maybe one big maneuver is going to get it a nice big score. And if it is really good, it's probably not going to score a lot. So, they're mostly looking though at, yeah, your speed, your power, and your flow on the wave.

Allison Powell: Do you have a signature maneuver?

Lakey Peterson: I've always tried to be pretty progressive on the female side of things. So, I always have tried to do sort of aerial maneuvers and stuff like that, which for girls is not as common that you see, I guess. So, I might be known for that a little bit, but I don't know.

Tyler Litchenberger: That's so fascinating. And so, being a first Olympic time sport now, how has this been progressing? So, obviously, how long has this been going on to become an Olympic sport?

Lakey Peterson: It's so crazy. I didn't think I would see it in my career time.

Tyler Litchenberger: Really?

Lakey Peterson: Yeah. I did not think. And when I was really young and little, I always dreamt of going to the Olympics and something. That was my thing because my mom didn't get to go but made the team. And I was always like, "I'm going to go. It'll be so cool." Once it was sort of starting to be like, "Oh, whoa, we might actually get Tokyo," there was starting to be rumors, and I was like, "Wow." Now, everyone's saying it will, but I didn't want to get my hopes up. So, it's just amazing that we've come so far with the sport.

Lakey Peterson: And I think surfing has this reputation of sort of really relaxed beach bum people, which in a way is true. We're pretty soulful and love the ocean. But it's also — I'm really excited for it to be in the Olympics and be taken seriously as a sport because everyone on the world tour that I compete against is taken so seriously. Everyone's got to train. Everyone's got a nutritionist. Everyone's got a physical therapist. It's amazing.

Lakey Peterson: So, I think the world is going to really enjoy watching it in Tokyo. And I know the performances will be incredible. And just as an athlete, it's so fun to be a part of things like this, like Team Toyota, and seeing all these other athletes come together. And it's pretty darn inspiring. So, thankful for Toyota and this opportunity to be here with them and just sort of experience all of it. It's really cool.

Allison Powell: And you're very involved in organizations that work on keeping the oceans clean. Tell us what it means to you. It's very interesting that surfing is now an Olympic sport, right at a point where, there's a lot of attention on oceans, particularly the plastic in oceans and a lot of the environmentalism around oceans. And tell us about some of your involvement in that.

Lakey Peterson: I mean, for me, obviously, I'm in the ocean every single day. And I've been in all the oceans around the world. I kind of experience everywhere. And so, I think it's just a natural thing for me to really have a heart for our oceans and just our world. It affects what I do. I mean, I've been sick so many times from surfing when the water's dirty or whatever in all different areas of the world. It's a global issue. It's not one person's escape from it or one country's escape from it.

Lakey Peterson: So, yeah, I just think that together, we can all — it sort of sounds really cheesy, but I think, collectively, together, we can all really make a difference. And if I can, in any way, be a voice or an advocate for people to just be more aware of their plastics use, or pollution use, and little tips and tricks, it all really does compound and add up to help clean up our oceans. And it's something that we need to start doing before it's not reversible.

Tyler Litchenberger: Has there been anything, like your training, you're in the ocean, and like a fish flies out, and like hits you?

Lakey Peterson: I've had fish hit me, yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah?

Lakey Peterson: That's happened. There are always like those needle fish. You know those needle fish that jump? Have you seen those things?

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, I see. Yeah, yeah.

Lakey Peterson: I'm always so scared those are going to hit me. Yeah, it's going to puncture me.

Tyler Litchenberger: Because the ocean's so big, and there's so many things in it that aren't humans.

Lakey Peterson: They aren't humans.

Tyler Litchenberger: There's so many life opportunities for something to happen-

Lakey Peterson: Talking about a really big wave.

Tyler Litchenberger: ... that could go really funny or really bad.

Lakey Peterson: I mean, I think, yeah, it's part of just being sort of in an action sport and being in a sport that you're in an environment that's uncontrollable, which is, sort of, I think the fun and the challenge of it a lot. It's always changing, the ocean. And you can never — it will humble you like that. Like you're never — the moment you think, "Oh, I'm getting pretty good with big waves," or whatever, it will humble you.

Lakey Peterson: And I think the challenge of that is really, really cool. You can never fully master what it's going to do or what the wave is going to do. I think that's a continual challenge for surfers. And I think the greats really have such a great read on on how to just work with the ocean, and figure it out, and be adaptable.

Lakey Peterson: And in terms of the fish and all the creatures in the ocean, I don't know. I love it. It's it's so refreshing to go out in the ocean and whatever, see a dolphin, or have a fish jump, or I don't know, if there's a shark, then just get out of the water.

Allison Powell: So, who's our prime competition.

Lakey Peterson: For me?

Allison Powell: Like what other countries?

Lakey Peterson: Okay. Australia's obviously very, very strong and very, very good. Brazil on the women's side, but really on the men's side. I mean, our world champion right now on the men's side is Brazilian. And they just got a ton of them that are so, so talented. And also, particularly really good in small waves, which is probably what we'll have in Tokyo, kind of not too much like pretty — not a lot of power in the waves in that, and they, for some reason, seem to be able to generate so much speed and are just really good in those sorts of conditions. So, the Brazilians are really good. There's a couple great surfers from Europe. We actually have an event in France, in Portugal every year.

Allison Powell: There's that big waves in Portugal.

Lakey Peterson: Yeah. Yeah.

Allison Powell: There's really big waves.

Lakey Peterson: And I was in Portugal, yeah, for the Big Wave World Tour. And so, yeah, you get some great people from over in Europe. And then, yeah, but America is going to take the cake. Don't worry.

Allison Powell: So, is it to your benefit to catch more waves or wait till it's a good wave that you know you can really shine on?

Lakey Peterson: That is super dependent on conditions, but you want to be selective with the wave you go on because we have a thing called priority. So, if there's myself and one other girl in the heat, say, I catch the first wave when the heat starts, then the girl that's out here and who didn't catch a wave, she then has priority over me to go on whatever wave she wants, even if she's not in the best position. So, you don't want to just take a wave and give up your priority.

Lakey Peterson: If you have priority, you want to select something that's going to give you opportunity because you, also, are a little bit against the clock, right? I mean, it takes time to paddle back out and get back out there. So, you only have 30 minutes. So, you want to kind of be tactical. But you also don't want to just sit and be too selective. like, "Well, I didn't make anything happen." So, it's a bit of a game.

Tyler Litchenberger: When do trials start? Do you have to qualify as a new event? And then, running off to the Olympics, what does that timeframe look for like for you? How soon are you going to get to Tokyo should you qualify?

Lakey Peterson: Yeah. So, the way our qualification is going to work is we have a world tour, right, which for the women's top 17 in the world. For the men, it's top 34 in the world. And so, within this tour, we have 10 events. In each event, you get points. It's the same amount of points for the all 10 throughout the year. So, at the end of year, you get like a world ranking.

Lakey Peterson: And so, what they're going to do for the US, and Australia, Brazil, they'll take the top two from both the men's and the women's at the end of the year, and that's who's going to make the team. So, they'll take the top two women ranked. And then, that will be who qualifies for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. So, from there, we'll see what happens. It is my first time doing this, qualifying for the Olympics, but-

Tyler Litchenberger: But it's also everyone else's first time doing this.

Lakey Peterson: Exactly, exactly. So, I would imagine, actually, once the Olympics comes around, I think we'll probably get there pretty early in Tokyo and get settled in. And yeah, it will be really fun.

Tyler Litchenberger: Do you know when — we're talking to Simone earlier, and she was saying, she's like, "We don't get to go to the opening ceremonies because like literally swimming starts right after." Do you know generally when surfing is going to be?

Lakey Peterson: So, they're actually going to give the whole two weeks that the Olympics runs a waiting period for us, so that we can choose to run in the best conditions possible. So, you don't run into that rut of like, "Oh, shoot. We're scheduled to run on the 15th, and it looks really good on the 18th and flat on the 15th." So, it's really great that the IOC is giving us that opportunity to have some leeway from those two weeks to choose the best conditions. So, I don't know when we'll be surfing yet. But, hopefully, it's later. I want to go to the opening ceremonies if I make it. That would be so cool, yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: What was your first car and what do you drive now?

Lakey Peterson: I drive, right now, a TRD off-road 4Runner, which I dig.

Tyler Litchenberger: What color is it?

Lakey Peterson: It's white. My first car was like a Mini Cooper way back-

Tyler Litchenberger: No, that's fine, yeah.

Lakey Peterson: ... which was not incredible.

Tyler Litchenberger: We know there are other brands out there.

Lakey Peterson: Yeah, which was not compatible to surfing. And then, from there, I went straight to a Tacoma. And I love the Tacoma. And then, now, I got the 4Runner, and I'm really pumped on it.

Tyler Litchenberger: That's awesome.

Allison Powell: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Start your impossible —

Tyler Litchenberger: That's our tagline, catchphrase. But it's more than that to us at Toyota. And we often ask employees to kind of tell us stories, and not just stories, but live it too. Do you have a story or a moment of how you started your impossible?

Lakey Peterson: Great question. I think, for me, what comes to mind right away is when I was 14 years old, I was competing. I didn't start competing until I was 12. So, a bit later. And so when I was 14, I made this event

called the Nationals. And it's just you got to be like pretty highly ranked in the junior. It's for 18 and under. So, I was really young. I was 14. Made the Nationals for this 18-and-under division, which, at that time, is like a pretty big deal.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Lakey Peterson: Nationals is all the best kids from around the nation. And I made the finals in it. I was sort of not on the scene yet at all. I was kind of still starting surfing. I guess, a bit of a dark horse, if you would say. And it was at a time where I was like, "Gosh, no one believes me. I think no one even knows who I am." All of a sudden, I even was like, "Whoa, I made the final in this national event." And I went out, and I was like, "I'm going to just try and do in air," which has never been done. At the time, it had never been done in a junior event before ever on the women's side.

Lakey Peterson: And so, I went out, and I landed this air, and I won nationals. And I feel like, for me, that was a moment where it was like I started my impossible because I think a lot of people just thought, "Girls don't do that. It's impossible for them, or it's not normal for them to do that." And I was like, "No, I'm going to go do it. I know I can do it." Yeah, I think that was a turning point for me where I started my impossible. It was like, "No, I can make anything possible."

Tyler Litchenberger: That's awesome. That's so cool.

Lakey Peterson: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Are you practicing some of these things that haven't been done on the women's side, like, maybe to use in the Olympics? Obviously, you want to get better at them, but-

Lakey Peterson: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Lakey Peterson: I mean, totally. I think that's the next step for women's surfing is getting girls to be more comfortable with doing airs, and being more progressive, and kind of going outside those boundaries that people think they shouldn't go out of. So, yeah, that's definitely something that I practice and is on my mind 100%.

Tyler Litchenberger: I'm so excited. I'm so excited to watch surfing for the first time in the Olympics.

Lakey Peterson: Oh, good.

Tyler Litchenberger: But then, also, to see these progressive maneuvers being done.

Lakey Peterson: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: All right, everybody, take care of the ocean, please.

Lakey Peterson: Yes, please.

Tyler Litchenberger: We want to fish to hit Lakey and not plastic, please.

Lakey Peterson: Exactly.

Tyler Litchenberger: All right. Thank you so much for joining us on Toyota Untold.

Lakey Peterson: Thank you, guys.

Tyler Litchenberger: This is awesome.

Lakey Peterson: Awesome, thanks.

<MUSIC BEGINS>

OUTRO

Kelsey Soule: I think Lakey is probably one of the cooler people I've met. First of all, I can't surf. I can't.

Tyler Litchenberger: What?

Kelsey Soule: I can't do, actually, any of these things that the athletes can do. So, I'm so glad.

Tyler Litchenberger: I mean, you could run like Michael.

Kelsey Soule: I mean, yeah, but it's slow. So, I'm so glad you guys got to talk to her.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah. She's doing amazing things. She's surfing. She's protecting the ocean. We will be rooting for her. and Michael this year, for sure. I can't wait.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah. And that goes for the entire Team Toyota also. So, thanks for joining us on our second episode. This was Kelsey.

Tyler Litchenberger: And Tyler.

Kelsey Soule: You can find our guests on Instagram, @michaelnorman22 and @lakeypeterson. Our show is produced by Sharon Hong and Alison Powell. Music by Wes Meixner. Edited and mastered by Crate Media. Find us on Twitter, @Toyota and @Lexus, and on Instagram @ToyotaUSA and @LexusUSA. That's the end of our show. See you in two weeks.