

14. Overcoming Impossible (ft. David Brown, Jerome Avery, & Alana Nichols)

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TOYOTA UNTOLD

As Toyota transforms into a mobility company, our goal is to help create a more inclusive society, particularly when it comes to freedom of movement. Our partnership with the Paralympics is just one more step toward that goal, and we've challenged ourselves as a company to develop equipment for para athletes using our technology and engineering. In this episode, we sit down with three incredible Team Toyota Paralympians: David Brown and Jerome Avery, teammates in U.S. Paralympic Track & Field, and Alana Nichols, a five-time Paralympian and three-time gold medalist who has competed in wheelchair basketball and alpine skiing.

Full transcript below.

<MUSIC>

Alana Nichols: Now, as a surfer, and a skier, and a gold medalist, like that was impossible for me. Laying in a hospital bed, not possible. But, you know, one step at a time and with the right technology in place, I was given the opportunity to reach that impossible goal.

David Brown: Doctor said I wasn't going to walk. Here I am running. You know, I wasn't supposed to be over five-feet tall. Here I am, I'm five foot eight. I mean, starting your impossible, you know what I'm saying, we're living Toyota's mission statement, and we're accomplishing that every day.

INTRO

Kelsey Soule: Welcome back to the Paralympics Podcast, I'm Kelsey.

Tyler Litchenberger: And I'm Tyler.

Kelsey Soule: We are so excited for today's episode.

Tyler Litchenberger: We've been featuring some of our team Toyota athletes over the past couple episodes, and we're one year out from the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. And today, we're talking to our Paralympians.

Kelsey Soule: So, if you guys don't know, the Paralympic Games start about two weeks after the Olympic Games end. And as you know, Toyota is a proud sponsor of the US Olympic and Paralympic teams. But our commitment runs a lot deeper than that. The reason that we're involved is so much more than that.

Tyler Litchenberger: So, a little company background info. We are transforming into a mobility company. And if you want to hear more about that, go back to Season 1 and listen to "Not a Car Company." Our goal is to help create a more inclusive society, particularly when it comes to freedom of movement. Our President, Akio Toyoda, has said that our partnership with Paralympics is just one more step towards that goal. And we've challenged ourselves as a company to develop equipment for para-athletes using our technology and engineering to increase awareness of para-sports through our sponsorships.

Kelsey Soule: And through the sponsorship, we've gotten to know some incredible people that are now Team Toyota Paralympians and Paralympic hopefuls. They're incredible. And we can't wait to see what they get to do in Tokyo. So, first, we talked to David Brown and Jerome Avery. They are teammates in US Paralympics track and field.

Tyler Litchenberger: These guys, I can't even tell you, are the real deal. They were at the Paralympic Games Rio 2016 together. David is visually impaired, having lost his sight when he was 13 years old. And Jerome, Jerome is his guide runner. They run side by side on the track, tethered together by a short cord that they hold on to.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah, I don't — I really don't understand how this is possible, but like their arm action has to be exact. Obviously, they have to move in sync the entire time. Their feet have to hit the ground at the same time. It takes track and field to a completely different level. So, we can't wait for you to hear our conversation with them. Here you go.

<CAR ZOOM>

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BROWN AND JEROME AVERY

Tyler Litchenberger: So, we have David Brown and Jerome Avery with us. And you got — like this is incredible. And I wanted to get you guys in here to talk about this because Paralympians, you guys are in track and field. You run. And you guys run in like lockstep with each other. Like, how did this happen? Like, this is fascinating to me.

David Brown: Well, what happened was-

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: What had happened was-

Tyler Litchenberger: I love it.

Jerome Avery: Definitely, I consider myself a great dancer.

Tyler Litchenberger: Okay.

Kelsey Soule: Oh.

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh.

Jerome Avery: And it starts with being in sync, you know.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Jerome Avery: [00:03:29] You definitely have to have the rhythm in order to run with the guys such as David Brown, who's extremely fast. I have to mimic the way he runs. I have to run exactly like him. So, as soon as he touches the ground, his inside foot, my inside foot touches the ground. Perfect example. It's like a three-legged race.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Jerome Avery: So, us being in sync is very important. It doesn't have a — we don't waste any time while we're running at all.

David Brown: And one thing, Jerome has been guiding for years. So, he's pretty much the master.

Jerome Avery: Yeah. Well, that's nice.

Tyler Litchenberger: How does a-

Jerome Avery: Yeah, I'm a master.

Tyler Litchenberger: David, I want to start with you. How did you get into this?

David Brown: When I got into Paralympic track actually is 2008. I got selected to be a part of the Paralympic experience in Beijing, China. And I got to — out of like hundreds of applicants — I was one of the 25 that was selected. And I got to go and witness the Paralympic Games live in Beijing, China. So, I got to see guys like Jerome run with his guy that he was running with at the time. And, you know, the fire was lit for me right there. I was like, "Hey, you know I can do that."

David Brown: So, 2010, I would — I had the opportunity to run on a relay alongside Jerome, actually. And that kind of put me on the radar to be invited to a lot of different Paralympic camps and stuff. So, throughout high school, I was running. And 2012, I was selected to come and live and train at the Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, California. And the rest is just history from there.

Tyler Litchenberger: That's awesome.

Kelsey Soule: That's awesome. Have you always been into sports?

David Brown: Yeah. I've come from an athletic family. So, before I went blind, I was playing basketball, and when I started going blind, I just got into sprinting and just continued to play other sports like wrestling, stuff through high school, and stuff like that.

Tyler Litchenberger: And there was never that like, "Well, you know, I'm losing my sight. I shouldn't stop these activities."

David Brown: No.

Tyler Litchenberger: Never? No?

David Brown: Never. It was always something like, "Okay, how can I adapt and get to, you know, do what I want to do and stay active." You know, when I couldn't play anything with the ball anymore because my face became a magnet, it was more so, "How can I stay active and competitive with my friends?" And that was running. You know, sprinting for me. You know, getting into foot races with them because I wasn't able to see where I was going, and I wasn't bumping into anything, but I can beat you in a foot race. So, that was me.

Tyler Litchenberger: How did you two meet?

David Brown: Yeah, 2010, actually was the first time we met, and I've literally just met him on the track. I went to the track. Here I am, little dude, not knowing anything about sprinting or guiding. Really, I didn't know there was a technique to guiding, you know, and even to sprinting. I was just, "Run fast and ah!"

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah, right, yeah.

David Brown: Little kid with the fist balled up, and just going at it, you know.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah, right.

David Brown: Still kind of like that to this day, but-

Jerome Avery: So, Penn Relays was our first event. It was actually a pretty big event for our first event to run. We were paired up, but I was actually training with someone else at the time.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah, Uh-huh.

Jerome Avery: So, it was one of those things that an opportunity had opened up for me to work with David. And we took advantage of that opportunity. But I was still with another guy, and we didn't actually officially get paired up full time until 2014.

David Brown: Yeah, five years ago.

Jerome Avery: So, in between that, he had another guide runner he was working with.

David Brown: Like quite a few guys, actually.

Jerome Avery: Yeah.

David Brown: You know, I was running with them throughout the years, went to London, went to France for our world championships. And then, in 2014, that's when I paired up with Jerome. And, well, that's a different story.

Kelsey Soule: So, I'm so curious about your guys' relationship. So, obviously, you guys have to be in sync with one another physically. But I'm assuming that it's important that, you know, personality-wise, you guys have to understand each other and, you know, you're going to be next to each other for an entire race, and you're relying on each other. So, can you tell us a little bit about what it's like. Like, are you guys — I'm assuming you're best friends.

David Brown: Well, personally, yeah. I mean-

Kelsey Soule: You have to have be friends.

Tyler Litchenberger: I mean, do you like each other?

Jerome Avery: Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead, David. Let me hear you..

David Brown: No pressure.

Kelsey Soule: Like, can you break up with him if you want?

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah, yeah.

David Brown: [00:07:46] Well, yeah. I mean there is those guide runner and runner relationships where it is just strictly business, you know.

Kelsey Soule: Okay.

David Brown: I've been in the game, actually, for about seven years now. Jerome had been in it quite, you know, longer than me. And he can probably explain that a little bit better. But there is athletes where it's just, "Okay, guide, runner."

Tyler Litchenberger: Go.

Kelsey Soule: Okay.

David Brown: And stuff like that. And it is just strictly, you know, professionalism. But Jerome and I, we're like brothers, honestly.

Jerome Avery: Most definitely.

David Brown: So, you know, we don't have to have a friendship off the track, but we have one just because of

our personalities match and stuff.

Kelsey Soule: Awesome.

David Brown: When I first met this guy, you know, just how funny he was and everything else, and me being, like I said, new and him being a vet, I asked him a lot of questions. I was able to reach out to him, talk to him, and then, of course, laugh with them, joke with him. I'm just like, "Oh, okay, you know, this guy is cool, you know." And then, as far-

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: This could be something.

David Brown: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: Right.

Jerome Avery: Exactly.

David Brown: And, of course, moving to the training center just helped build on that. And then, of course, knowing how passionate this guy is about running and his work ethics, this is like, "Okay, OK, let's go then."

Kelsey Soule: Right, exactly.

David Brown: Yeah, we just matched up, you know.

Jerome Avery: I think my job as a guide runner, I definitely don't take it lightly. I know at this moment in time in my life, I was put here for a purpose, and that's to see for someone else who can't see. And I feel that our relationship and everything that we had accomplished over the years, that's big to me, and it means a lot. And to see the smile on his face when we're on that podium, that's an amazing feeling. I don't know if any, but that feeling right there, knowing that you had a part of somebody else's, you know, working with someone else and just being a part of that, I'd like to say success through selflessness.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah, that's awesome.

Jerome Avery: You know, if he wins, I automatically win.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Jerome Avery: Right.

Jerome Avery: And that's how we always approach everything that we do.

David Brown: And, of course, that is an honor to me too just to know that, hey, this guy, he had Olympic dreams in himself, but he put himself aside to help me get to my dreams. So, to helped him get on the podium as well and get a medal.

Jerome Avery: Yeah, that's a good thing.

Tyler Litchenberger: That's incredible. It's awesome.

David Brown: Yeah, it is an incredible feeling. So, to have, you know, somebody — you know, to have this

guy up there beside me, you know, and then him happy for me, but then me happy for him because it's like, "Hey, we got here together, man."

Jerome Avery: Yeah, exactly.

David Brown: You know, we're both doing exactly what we dreamed of doing, and that's receiving a gold medal.

Jerome Avery: Yes.

Tyler Litchenberger: That's awesome. So, how did Toyota come into your life, and how does Toyota help achieve those dreams?

David Brown: You know, me and Jerome, we are Team Toyota all the way just because one of the sayings is start your impossible. We're accomplishing what people feel is impossible. You know, when people are saying, "Oh, yeah, it's hard to do something with no sight," here I am, I'm breaking 11 seconds in a hundred meters where they feel it was impossible.

Kelsey Soule: Yes, you are.

David Brown: So, it's like, "Hey, you think it was impossible to—" You know, me, personally, pick my life up after a suicidal attempt back when I was 13 and a whole bunch of other things as far as like a doctor said I wasn't going to walk. Here I am running. I wasn't supposed to be over five feet tall. Here I am, I'm five foot eight. I mean, starting your impossible. You know what I'm saying?

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

David Brown: We're living Toyota's mission statement, and we're accomplishing that every day.

Tyler Litchenberger: You're hired.

Kelsey Soule: Exactly. That's like a mic drop. Like I don't have anything else to say.

Tyler Litchenberger: I've got goosebumps. I'm like, "Oh, my goodness." So, what do you guys do when you're not training? Are you still hanging out?

David Brown: Sleep.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yes.

Jerome Avery: Sleep is very important.

David Brown: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yes, I'm a fan of sleep.

Jerome Avery: We're just hanging out.

David Brown: Yeah. Honestly, when we're off the track, we try to stay away from each other.

Jerome Avery: We have a partnership.

Tyler Litchenberger: But you're friends.

Jerome Avery: We're working together every day. It's like being around your brother all day every day.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah, of course.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Jerome Avery: So, we need a break from each other. And it works out perfect.

David Brown: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: What is your training like? What is the next year look like for you? So, how many days a week? Like how does this work?

David Brown: Well, we train six days a week, twice a day.

David Brown: So, that's one reason why we tired of each other too.

Tyler Litchenberger: And that's why you're so sleepy too.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

David Brown: Yeah, exactly.

Kelsey Soule: Wow.

David Brown: I mean, so, of course, leading up into Tokyo, it's — we got a saying, "What got you there will keep you there."

Jerome Avery: Exactly.

David Brown: You know, we're just going to continue to grind it out. And, of course, we know that we have a great team, my Team Toyota behind and his Team USA. And we're just going to continue to do what we do, and let's push towards gold.

Kelsey Soule: Awesome.

Tyler Litchenberger: It seems — I mean, so Toyota has made a big push and getting Paralympic time on NBC and making sure that you guys are seen.

David Brown: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Are you seeing more recognition because of the time on TV and things like that?

David Brown: Yeah. Honestly, since 2016, when the Paralympics was broadcasted, since then, me personally, I don't know about Jerome, but I have been receiving more recognition. Like that day that I got back in the airport, there was somebody that came up to me, and was walking alongside me talking, and he was like, "Hey, how are you doing?" I'm like, "I'm doing good, sir." And he was like, "How was your flight?" I'm like, "I'm

doing — you know, it was good. You know, a little tired and always great to be back.” He’s like, “Yeah. So, you’re coming from Rio?” I’m like, “Yes, sir.” You know, he’s like, “Are you Mr. Brown?” And I’m like — and I turned to him like, “Yeah, I am.” He’s like, “Sir, I saw you on TV,” and this guy completely freaked out, you know. And, of course-

Tyler Litchenberger: That’s awesome.

Jerome Avery: Yeah.

David Brown: Like one thing with me, though too, is I’m real big on talking to high schools, and elementary schools. and stuff like that. I’ve had a lot of students come up to me, and they’re like, “I saw you on TV, I saw your races, I’ve seen you all over social media,” and stuff like that, and you know. So, you know, a lot of recognition like that has been coming out of being on television. And it’s been a blessing. You know, just really humbling. I mean, Jerome?

Jerome Avery: I’ve seen a lot of changes. Especially 2016, like he said at our nationals, Toyota was actually there, and they were looking over at us a little bit, which was a good thing. And Tatyana McFadden, I don’t know if you’re familiar with that name, she’s one of the biggest athletes we have for Paralympics. So, to see her represent and going to the Games, it definitely... it was good to be a part of that.

Kelsey Soule: Okay. So, if you could say one thing to the listeners to hold them over until they see you on TV in 2020, what’s the hype? What’s the tag line? What are we looking for from you guys?

David Brown: One thing I would say is it’s never too late to start your impossible. With Jerome and I coming up a year from now-

Jerome Avery: That’s what I’m telling.

David Brown: Yeah.

Jerome Avery: But it isn’t.

David Brown: It is not. Be prepared to see the impossible.

Kelsey Soule: I love it.

<CAR ZOOM>

NARRATION

Tyler Litchenberger: O-M-G Kelsey, I still get goosebumps thinking about that day, we got to talk to them.

Kelsey Soule: I know. They’re definitely — I feel like they’re two of the coolest people I’ve ever met. And I just can’t wait to watch them on my TV. I am team David and Jerome all the way.

Tyler Litchenberger: 100%. So, our next guest is equally as amazing. She’s like Wonder Woman. She’s a five-time Paralympian and six-time medalist.

Kelsey Soule: Honestly, I don’t know if there’s anything that she can’t do.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah, we interviewed Alana Nichols, and while she’s not competing for 2020, she’s

working on developing adaptive surfing for future competitions.

Kelsey Soule: I'm constantly amazed at what these people do in their quote un-quote free time.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Kelsey Soule: So, during this interview, Alison was pinch hitting, but just listening to it got me super excited. Check it out.

<CAR ZOOM>

INTERVIEW WITH ALANA NICHOLS

Tyler Litchenberger: Alana Nichols, you are here. You are like team Toyota legend, I feel like.

Alana Nichols: Thank you.

Tyler Litchenberger: And you also — two sports. You have wheelchair basketball and Alpine skiing as a Paralympian.

Alana Nichols: That's right.

Tyler Litchenberger: Like that's crazy.

Alana Nichols: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: That's exciting.

Alana Nichols: Yeah. I mean, I like to brag that I kind of started the two-sport trend because I went wheelchair basketball, and then alpine skiing, and then suddenly, like, Lolo Jones is on board, and Lauren Williams, and all these athletes are really kind of like exploring because the fact is we're always training anyways, so why not be competing in another sport like while you're training and cross train?

Alana Nichols: And so, fortunately, my two sports worked out really well. So I was, you know, really fit as a wheelchair basketball athlete. I also have the adrenaline type ability to want to go fast. And so, I transitioned to alpine skiing really well, being already physically ready to do that. And so, I knocked out five games like within a span of 12 years. So, it was like back to back. And it was just such a blast. I've had so much fun.

Tyler Litchenberger: That's incredible. And the skiing, it came naturally because you started as a snowboarder, right?

Alana Nichols: Well, so I grew up as an athlete. I started when I was five. I started with tee-ball. I played volleyball and basketball throughout junior high and high school. I put a lot of my eggs in the fast pitch softball basket, was hoping to go to college on a softball scholarship when I was first introduced to snowboarding. So, I got started a little later in life in junior high, like at 14. And I suddenly realized, "Oh, there's this whole other aspect of my athletic ability that I wasn't aware of." Like, I like to go fast. I like pushing the limit. I like seeing where that edge is.

Alana Nichols: And so, snowboarding really offered me this feeling of like creativity that I didn't get from traditional sports or linear sports. And so, getting to be able to express myself in that way was really exciting. Although I was really very focused on going down that softball road.

Alana Nichols: My senior year in high school, I was 17 at the time, I ended up trying my first backflip on a snowboard. It didn't go well, if you will. I over-rotated the backflip. I ended up landing on a rock that was underneath the snow. So, it was kind of a combination of a perfect storm. And that's what left me paralyzed from the waist down.

Alana Nichols: So, athlete all my life, suddenly my whole world gets flipped upside down. And I have to kind of like reinvent myself. And at the time, this is in 2000, there weren't companies like Toyota that were celebrating people like Paralympians, and people with different abilities, and their ability to be mobile. So, really, it took me two years to realize, "Oh, there's other people with disabilities. They're playing sports. They're being athletic." And once I did realize that and I started playing basketball, that's when I got my life back. That's when I finally came into my own skin again, but it took two years.

Alana Nichols: So, thankfully, in this day and age, there are people, God forbid, that get paralyzed now that do see other Paralympians on TV. Thanks to Toyota and companies that believe in mobility. And so, after my injury, getting back into sports really got me back into life. And, I just had to figure out how to adapt. And I got into a basketball chair and, suddenly, I felt more athletic. I go to Beijing for basketball. And then, again, turn around, and I figure, "If I can do this, like, why can't I go to the Paralympics for alpine skiing?" And in such a Cinderella story way, I ended up making that dream not only come true by going to the Games, but then becoming the most medaling athlete at the 2010 Games.

Alana Nichols: And it's unbelievable to me just to be able to say that, but you could imagine after becoming paralyzed, thinking my athletic career was over, next thing you know, I'm on a podium getting a gold medal. I'm like, "How is this my life?"

Tyler Litchenberger: I have goosebumps. Like, that's so awesome.

Alana Nichols: Thank you. Yeah, it's been such a wild ride.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Allison Powell: Can you talk about how becoming a Paralympian has kind of informed the rest of your world?

Alana Nichols: Yeah. Well, I don't know what would have happened, right? So, I was headed to college on a softball scholarship. I was hoping for the best. I had a dream of playing at the Olympic level. I don't know if that would have happened. I certainly know that I wouldn't be a three-time gold medalist and the first female American to win gold in the Summer and Winter Games.

Alana Nichols: So, in a lot of ways, becoming a Paralympian created these opportunities that I wouldn't have had had I been an able-bodied athlete. So, you kind of look at it in a different way. You give it a little twist, and you're like, "Wow, that might have been the best thing that's ever happened to me." Like becoming paralyzed was the best thing that ever happened to me. And I know that's probably hard for some people to hear, but it's honestly been such – I don't know – an intriguing way to live. I've had to be creative in what I've done to adapt to my world.

Alana Nichols: And it's really an honor to be an inspiration to people. And I used to really hate that word. I'm

like, “Don’t use the ‘I’ word at me, okay?” But I’ve really embraced this idea that some people just need a little bit of perspective. And regardless of what’s going on in their life and their struggles, and everybody has them, and I don’t want people to compare their stuff with mine. Everybody’s monster under the bed is only as big as you let it be.

Alana Nichols: And so, I’ve been able to kind of create a different type of life that I think is really kind of intriguing and inspiring for people. And, again, like it’s only when I come across obstacles that my life is actually disabled, right. So, I come across a set of stairs, and I’m suddenly different and disabled, and I can’t go up them. But if the world was universally designed, I would just look a little different. We all have different bodies.

Alana Nichols: And that’s what I really love about Toyota’s mobility program is like, let’s figure out these obstacles. Like, I love that. And I think that having a bionic body, if one day I get to walk around in a robot, I’m happy to do that and be like a superhero. That’d be great. I don’t know.

Tyler Litchenberger: Well, even without that, I feel like you’re a superhero already.

Alana Nichols: Oh, thanks.

Tyler Litchenberger: Like that’s crazy.

Alana Nichols: We’re working really diligently to develop adaptive surfing. So, as you know, able-bodied surfing is in the 2020 Games and will be debuted in Tokyo, which is so exciting. And adaptive surfing is not far behind. So, we are working really closely with the International Surf Association and USA Surfing. And we’re getting this huge group of adaptive athletes from all over the world into one competition. And we’re developing a classification system. And we’re kind of well on our way.

Tyler Litchenberger: Great.

Alana Nichols: So, it’s really exciting. And I love the sport of surfing. It’s amazing, so.

Tyler Litchenberger: You get niche. It’s a little niche.

Alana Nichols: It’s a little niche. But yes, in the Paralympic world as well, we have to have classification systems, which are basically here’s categories of disabilities. So, not everybody — like a single-legged amputee wouldn’t compete against somebody with paralysis. So, it’s essentially leveling the playing field for categories of disabilities. And then, from there, you then start checking all the IOC boxes. So, then it’s like, “Here’s what needs to happen on your way to becoming a sport.”

Alana Nichols: I’m not headed to Tokyo for any Paralympic sport. I do love broadcasting. Would love to be able to contribute in some way to the surfing scene there. But working diligently on adaptive surfing.

Tyler Litchenberger: This seems like a bigger calling, at least. Like you’ve competed. And, now, you’re like for the future generations of people who want to compete in surfing, you’re setting the stage for that.

Alana Nichols: Yeah. That’s kind of the idea is to give back, and paving the way, and creating opportunities because there’s so many adaptive athletes, I mean, from all over the world, from Chile and Argentina that literally sell their belongings to come to La Jolla, California to compete in the International Surf Association World Adaptive Surf Champs, you know.

Tyler Litchenberger: Wow!

Alana Nichols: Like it's their one thing. And I would love for them to be able to compete at a Paralympic level one day, if that's what they want.

Allison Powell: And the development of mobility tools, you've probably seen quite a bit of change in your time. Can you tell us a little bit about how the actual products have changed and what you see kind of the potential?

Alana Nichols: Well, it's kind of funny to say this, but if there was ever a good time to be disabled, it's now.

Tyler Litchenberger: All right. Okay, yeah.

Alana Nichols: It's like, okay, so something tragic happens, and we're all very fragile humans. You lose a leg, you lose an arm, you lose your vision, or you become paralyzed, and you're in a chair, you have options. And so, I'm in a wheelchair that's 22 pounds. And if you asked me how much my wheelchair weighed 60 years ago, it'd be upwards of like 65 pounds.

Tyler Litchenberger: Wow!

Alana Nichols: And so being able to push a titanium carbon fiber wheelchair around, and something that's small enough to fit just about anywhere is really — I mean, it's really great. And so, say, you're an amputee, there's these new Bluetooth-enabled knees that you can actually connect to your phone that have like, "You're going uphill, okay, let me just get on my phone and tell my leg how to walk uphill," those kind of things.

Alana Nichols: Toyota's mobility for all program is creating a lot of really fun Toyota products as well. It's like this amazing technology that creates mobility for people and independence. And I think that's just really cool.

Tyler Litchenberger: "Start Your Impossible", I'm sure when people hear that tagline from us, they just think, "That's your tagline for Olympics? Okay, fine." But how do you see people living and breathing "Start your Impossible" like from a Team Toyota perspective?

Alana Nichols: Yeah. Well, from a Team Toyota perspective specifically, we are compiled of both Olympic and Paralympic athletes. When you start a four-year cycle of going to the Olympics, it's essentially impossible. You're looking at that mountain like four years. How am I going to do this?

Allison Powell: Yeah, that's a long time, true.

Alana Nichols: You start your impossible, and it's about breaking down the large goal into manageable smaller goals. And so, Olympic and Paralympic, I mean, that's very applicable. And it starts every day at 6:00 a.m. when you wake up, and you go to the gym, and you build.

Alana Nichols: For the Paralympians, specifically, I mean, every Paralympian has probably had an impossible moment where, like myself, I was lying in a hospital bed. And I was 17 and it was time for me to start my impossible. And that, again, is just about getting one — I mean, it's an inch, a step, or a mile at a time. It's like just get into your wheelchair, and then push forward. And whatever that looks like. So, every Paralympian's got this really rich story of how they started their impossible. And, now, as a surfer, and a skier, and a gold medalist, like that was impossible for me.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Alana Nichols: Laying in a hospital bed, not possible. But, one step at a time and with the right technology in place, I was given the opportunity to reach that impossible goal.

<MUSIC BEGINS>

OUTRO

Kelsey Soule: Tyler, that was an amazing conversation.

Tyler Litchenberger: I know, right. Thank you.

Kelsey Soule: You get no credit for that. I was impressed by Alana.

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, right. Okay.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: So, all of our Team Toyota athletes were incredible to talk to. And we're excited to see what they do this year. And we hope to see them at the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. And we'll be checking in on their progress later this season. So, look forward to that.

Kelsey Soule: And once again, thanks for joining us on Toyota Untold. You can watch the progress of our Team Toyota athletes on social media. David is on Twitter, @drb1019. Jerome tweets @Mr_Jerome_Avery and he's on the 'gram, @_jeromeavery_. Alana Nichols is also on Instagram, @alanathejane.

Tyler Litchenberger: And you can follow all of our Team Toyota athletes, @teamtoyota on Twitter and Instagram.

Kelsey Soule: The show is produced by Sharon Hong and Allison Powell. Music by Wes Meixner. Edited and mixed by Crate Media. We're back in two weeks with an episode on Overlanding.

Tyler Litchenberger: Overlanding.

Kelsey Soule: So, don't forget to subscribe. See you later.