



Episode 20 – Emotion at Work in Competitive Contexts Chatting with Jonathan Drane (@jonolopodis)

Phil: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast where we take a deep dive into the human condition. Today's topic is one that has interested me for a long time and actually gets a lot of coverage in, when I say the press I don't mean the national press, but within HR, learning, training type worlds. Where we're going today gets a lot of press. So looking to successful or elite sports people is a common thing to happen. One thing that I guess I don't necessarily always get to do personally is to hear what individual's stories and experiences are, so I'm really excited to have our guest on today. But before we get them on the air, emotion for me is something that can give us an edge, so it can give us extra energy, it can give us extra determination or focus, but it can also ruin performances and it can undermine choices that people make, and it can be something that's used as a way to explain mistakes. I quite enjoy watching post sporting event interviews where emotion is mentioned because sometimes it's mentioned as a catalyst or an enabler of performance, and sometimes it's mentioned as detrimental or a way that's undermined performance. I'm really interested in both. For something that can have this duplicitous effect how do we make the most of it? So our guest today was a competitor at the highest level. So he's represented Team GB at the Paralympic Games in Rio 2016 finishing fifth in the 81 kilogram weight category in his discipline. He won gold in his first competitive visually impaired championships in the US and won a bronze medal in the 2014 IBSA world championships. Just saying that alone sounds really cool, so I can't quite believe I've got our guest on today. Let's get him on the air. So my guest today is Jonathan or Jono Drane. So hello Jono. Before we came on air Jono said that my podcasts sound really professional...

Jono: A lot more professional than what I've incurred in the last ten minutes.

Phil: That's good then. As long as I've managed to keep that professional persona up while we're recording that's all right. In a bit we'll get on to a bit more about you Jono and what you've done and what you've achieved and that sort of stuff. But before we get into that, as you'll know as a regular listener to my podcast, did you know that everybody, I have a genuine medallist for our country that listens to my podcast just in case you hadn't picked that up already. Anyway what I normally do is I ask our guests an innocuous yet unexpected question, so we'll open with that if that's okay. What's offended you recently?

Jono: That's a good one. It happens all the time I think I don't go five minutes without being offended that's just being so emotionally reactive. What's offended me? That's a difficult one. I wasn't expecting that, I'm finding that really stressful to answer. I think one of the big ones is so recently...oh, Phil, I can't answer this.

Phil: That's all right, don't worry.

Jono: I'll come back to that.

Phil: So has anybody crossed the line with you recently or crossed any boundaries or values of yours?

Jono: I've recently decided to redo one of my GCSE in maths because I wanted to have more GCSEs than I did have exclusions from school, so that's the reason why I've done that. But going back into the maths environment and the classroom environment I realised how much people regress to their childhood state and that really irritates me. A lot of the time the necessity for attention rather than...yeah, it is just the whole thing, I don't want to be there anymore than I have to and when I'm listening to someone spout some rubbish just because they want somebody's attention, rather than me learning that really does my head in and I find it very hard not to say something.

Phil: That's a good one I like that one. Behaviour aside how are you finding reengaging with GCSE maths?

Jono: It's been interesting because I really do...taking a step away from the sport now I really appreciate rational thinking and maths is very much that, it's a step away from a person and into something which is a lot more objective, although it's our understanding of maths. I enjoy that. I think there is a potential for me to get lost in maths.

Phil: Now I want to go and explore that last thing you said about getting lost in maths I wanted to go and explore that, but that's not the reason that we're here on the podcast today so I will...I'll step away from that.

Jono: I suppose you better ask questions about you as well, it's not all about me.

Phil: Yeah, I should do that as well really. I suppose having asked the question I probably should have thought about it some more before I give my answer. I found the stuff that's been happening recently around the Bradley Wiggins TUE exemption and the parliamentary report into it, I found that really interesting, that and some people's...

Jono: I'm curious to ask as in some people, who?

Phil: So there was one journalist in particular who's done a couple of pieces on it in the past and I can't remember his name, I'll have to dig it out and put it in the show notes. But I watched him being interviewed on Channel 4 News and as I say this I'm worried that I might have talked about this experience already, but anyway we'll go with it, but I got really annoyed with the way that he positioned stuff. He was trying to create this overall impression of something but he wasn't actually able to cite any evidence or any specific things to support his case. But he was doing a wonderful job with his language of trying to position something in a particular way. Trying to cast a particular perspective on Team Sky and/or Bradley Wiggins. I've got no affiliation or affinity to either of those entities, whether it to be Bradley Wiggins himself or to Team Sky. But this guy was doing a great job of positioning them in a negative light without having any evidence to support or back it up. That I guess frustrated me and it's the same with the parliamentary report, I'm yet to read it so maybe I should caveat my frustration until I've actually read it. But it seems to be there is a lack of evidence of any wrong doing, it's people perceptions and judgements of whether someone else's actions at a time were appropriate or not. Bearing in mind the history that comes with the sport I'm surprised that such opinion based views are made so categorically if that makes sense, without real in depth

evidence or to suggest one way or another. For me it's like we're not sure, we don't know. We don't know if they did or they didn't, we don't know what was in the package or not but we think they've overstepped the mark. Well that's great that you think it but that doesn't...I don't know, it's not sitting well with me.

Jono: It's a tricky one because I remember watching it on BBC Parliament and most of the evidence...there is a lack of evidence because the paperwork wasn't filled in. And then there was...the way that Team Sky would keep the medicines or the doctor stuff was undocumented a lot of the time and so on. So there's no paper trail to prove either way. But just because there's no evidence doesn't mean they're guilty, it doesn't mean anything like that. A lot of these systems are imperfect and it takes something like this to draw attention to it and then make sure that procedure afterwards is done correctly so that then none of this uncertainty happens.

Phil: For me it's been an interesting thing to watch and for me personally I don't feel like I've read enough of the parliamentary report or enough of the case to be able to speak confidently.

Jono: My experience with the TUE form, I had a TUE form and it's not an easy thing to obtain, you have to go to a lot of physicians and so on like that to support your evidence of why you're taking something. So it's surprising that there is...but I don't know.

Phil: I guess that takes us into your competitive world then, so you mentioned you've stepped away from judo now. How long was Judo part of your life for?

Jono: Well I was doing judo from club level to about 21, that level, o'level-ish stuff. So I'm now 31 so it's been a massive part of my life for what about 18 years maybe, yeah, 18 years.

Phil: Part of the Paralympics side of things is because you're visually impaired, but that hasn't always been part of your life though has it, your sight has deteriorated?

Jono: Yeah, it started to deteriorate around the age of 24. I'm just trying to recall on the facts but it went unnoticed for a while as progressive things do, you don't really wake up one day and suddenly your sight's gone, you don't notice. People making increasing comments about how little I could see, so then I just went and had a routine eye check and that's when things really started getting serious. I remember being told I wasn't allowed to drive home because I didn't meet the eyesight requirements for driving. I did which actually shouldn't...can that be classed as an admission of guilt now or are we past that?

Phil: I don't know what the statutory limitations on that are. We're doing well, we're going to get sued and convicted and we've only been on the air for 12 and a half minutes.

Jono: In that case with that comes all kinds of what ifs, huge what ifs in terms of...I was a plumbing and hearing engineer at the time and driving is a large part of that. So there's a lot of what ifs because all the education side of things that I've done were more or less pointless. As I've explained to you I didn't have the greatest of academic careers or anything like that, so it's not like I could easily jump straight back into university or anything.



Phil: How was that for you then when you found out actually you know what this vocation that I've created and followed I'm not going to be able to do anymore? Bearing in mind what I talk a lot from an emotion point of view how was that?

Jono: Terrible, I wouldn't say that I coped particularly well at all. Yeah, no, it was very challenging. It's emasculating. Because as in terms of me being in a relationship and everything like that, that whole thing of being able to drive and the expectations placed on a man and everything like that, I was like am I going to be able to fulfil that role? But then over time I met a lot of great people and I realised how shit those kind of perspectives on things are and it's not the case at all, someone's value isn't determined by what expectations are set out by, I don't know, just culture.

Phil: By society or expectations. Take me through that journey then from...so 24 you said? Gone in for my routine eye check, told I can't drive home and for legal reasons we will admit that Jono did drive home. So take me through from that point through to you then getting more involved with some of the visually impaired judo?

Jono: Well the initial...I think it was probably about a year and a half...just because you can't drive doesn't mean that you are under the clinical diagnosis of visually impaired or the legal recognition if that makes sense. So there's a vast space between the driving limits and of being clinically diagnosed visually impaired, it was actually about a year and a half before I met the criteria for say classification and judo. That added to the limbo side of things because as bad it was there's the pressures and everything like that because I didn't know what I wanted to do, I had a lifeline in terms of people saw what was a potential in me being a visually impaired athlete but for that year and a half I wasn't of any actual value to them because I didn't meet criteria. It's uncertain as to whether I ever would be if that makes sense.

Phil: As in would my sight be that bad that I would be classified as visually impaired is that what you mean?

Jono: There's so many people in that border line of things because one perspective my quality of life will...so now that I've removed myself from judo I realise what a massive inconvenience it is to have a visual impairment. With the realistics of working and everything like that whereas within the context of judo it was very little of the problem because I had a support of infrastructure around me, which accommodated and stepped in to help me with the bits which I couldn't manage.

Phil: What would that mean in terms of just transport and getting around then?

Jono: That's a huge one but then also it's the emotional regulation side of things. I'm sure you can appreciate facial expressions are a huge part of understanding other people's emotions. One of the interesting things was actually I started to think that I was having hearing problems because an element of listening is actually seeing people's lips move. I can't remember, there's an experiment where they basically take a video clip of a mouth moving to one word but then play an audio clip which is a different word, and there's some form of where the brain can't compute exactly what's going on.

Phil: I think it's called the...

Jono: So that becomes a huge problem. I was increasingly struggling to hear what people say because my reliance on being able to see mouth was a problem. Also with my attention problems it really became important that somebody said Jonathan instead of just starting to talk to me, just because the way that information processing works.

Phil: Do you want to talk about that a bit more, you mentioned about you wanted to achieve more GCSEs than exclusions and you mentioned about you attention challenges there?

Jono: That is the old thing of attention deficit hyper disorder, whether you believe in it or you don't believe in it, I imagine is the difference my mum liking you and probably wanting to punch you in the face. But as in terms of a lot of people are sceptical of whether it is or not but I'm on medication now and part of that is a stimulant and I can't tell you...when my academic experience was basically up until the age of 15 I was undiagnosed and I was predicted all F's in terms of my GCSEs. Within the space of a year going onto medication and people being aware of my problems I managed to get seven C's and three D's which probably to a lot of your listeners isn't a huge deal. But for me whereas I was just holding on to being able to do my GCSEs because of exclusions and so, I actually then got 100% attendance within my final year and so on. But you shouldn't take my own subjective experience as fact. I can't imagine not being on medication so I hope that some people understand how much I value the ability to have some control over what I attend to.

Phil: Would you mind if we stick with the ADHD for a minute, would that be okay?

Jono: Yeah.

Phil: There was one question about ADHD because the way that you've just articulated is that, or the what I heard should I say, is that actually what I didn't have was control over my attention. Whereas a lot of people can say right I'm going to focus on this right now or I'm going to concentrate on that or I'm going to listen to what somebody says.

Jono: Let's take that segment of what you have just said, you've engaged the working memory. So you've gone I'm going to take this, I'm going to take this and I'm going to point it in this direction. Whereas for me that central executive role was so underdeveloped that I just basically intuitively did anything which come into my mind. I didn't have the ability to contrast, compare and do things like that and work out what was right or what was wrong, I just did whatever felt in that given second.

Phil: If that was to walk out of the classroom or to say what you were thinking or whatever that would just happen?

Jono: Imagine children, adolescents or anything like that, so if we talk about a teenage boy, all teenage boys are impulsive as it is, so I know that people are going to say that. But I generally felt overwhelming remorse every time I did something bad but I didn't have the ability to...1) my self



awareness, I'm using this word now but that's something I've only discovered in the last five years. At the time I just did whatever.

Phil: How did that then effect you emotionally?

Jono: Emotionally it's very difficult because the sense of awareness isn't there. You know like problem solving you have to be aware of something in order to go through the understanding and the influence process. But I wasn't aware, emotion was something which was me rather than what happened to me and so on.

Phil: So was it just unregulated in that way, whatever you felt just came out without any filter or anything else applied to it?

Jono: Massively, yeah.

Phil: How was that for relationships, I don't mean like sexual or romantic, interacting with other people?

Jono: I was reading something about autism and autism there's a huge spectrum and one of the issues that they struggle with is sometimes a lot of relationships are built on shared attention. So my ability to find common ground with you is that we have some similar grounds in terms of shared attention. We both attend to a certain topic and we then enjoy exchanging in our own perspectives on that sort of thing. But if we were to go back to my unregulated self I had no ability to pay attention to one thing for any particular length of time. So when it came to sharing experiences and everything like that I had nothing to bring to the table, I just had an ability to cause controversy or entertain people by my inability to cope with simple things.

Phil: So how did that translate into the ring then? I'm asking this from pre visual impairment to post, so asking from both perspectives, but

Jono: It's just recently changed but it's now five minutes and if there isn't a deciding score then it goes into something which is golden score and that's unlimited time until the next person makes a score.

Phil: When you first started how long were the fights then, was it less or more? I guess where I'm going is from a certain point of view if you struggle to hold your attention in one place and then whatever you're thinking or feeling just comes out, I'm intrigued as to how that would translate into the ring for say a five minute or a six minute or however long it was?

Jono: Well because that element of things pleasantly were easy, I don't know why but I was drawn to attend to something. So explicitly I was able to focus on judo but implicitly I'm then also being able to learn social rules and everything like that, the things which were going on in the background. So then I'm interacting with people more and whilst I'm focusing on something constructively then I'm reinforcing constructive behaviour.



Phil: Did you find the ADHD, did it effect you when you were fighting or not, were you able to...was that a context where you were able to actually ...

Jono: One of the things that we talk about and I think you almost wanted to touch on it earlier is in terms of being lost...when I referred to being lost in maths, almost a state of flow. One of the requirements for a flow state is that loss of that central executive role, that whole thinking and everything like that. Things just make sense, it's that serendipitous...the self being dissolved, anyway, because I didn't have that then intuitive nature was my primary default, I could always be intuitive. So with judo because it requires such instinctive roles it was a lot more easier to do that. I was a lot more suited if that makes sense. But in terms of strategy and tactics I was rubbish.

Phil: It was much more you would just go with how it felt in the fight rather than right I am going to deliberately spend the first minute and a half doing evasion and drawing them in and then I'm going on the counter and just be however I felt?

Jono: I did not appreciate that until the last 18 months of my career, yeah, massively, that whole strategy, tactics, analytical approach, whereas before it was just throw or be thrown.

Phil: I'm going to jump forward in time again now then, so your vision deteriorated to the point where you could then get the classification to be visually impaired. But you were already on a watch list for want of a better phrase then were you then for Team GB, had you already had that tap on the shoulder to say if you get that classification...?

Jono: I think the erroneous assumption was that if you were a good judo player that would transfer across to being a good visual impaired judo player which I from experience don't think is necessarily the case. I see the two sports as very different both physiological and mental wise. One of the problems I had was when I tore my ACL, which means more or less that I was out for about 12 months with rehabilitation and everything like that. One of the situations coming from that is problem solving, so instead of me sitting around and going I can't do this, it was about what can I do? One of the things we identified was that the fact that within a VI judo fight I have to start gripped up. With sighted judo there's a lot of the grip stuff and so on. I am automatically using my muscles for five minutes rather than a non visual impaired things where we'll probably engage for about 30 per cent of the fight. VI judo you're engaged 100% of the fight. So contextual wise the physiology in my body is totally different to what I would have experienced as a sighted player. So then suddenly when it comes down to thinking critically in the moment it's a totally different context.

Phil: What would that mean, would you need more strength or more endurance?

Juno: Physiology wise what we used to do was...we drawn on your running experience that lactic acid build up. What we wanted to do was try and synthetically create that exposure to that state, that high intensity of the arms and everything else. So we started using occlusion training. So we would wrap...it sounds almost like S&M but we'd wrap straps around our arms to restrict blood flow and so that our body couldn't get rid of the lactic acid build up as quickly. So then we would do our circuit training with that. So we would get this massive increase pooling of blood in our arms and



because our arms is the way of the main physical demand within visually impaired judo. But then all during that I'm having to think well what's my process but it's so hard to do that when you're thinking oh my god my arms are going to fall off. So, yeah, it's creating this stretch as opposed to the overstretch, that optimisation so that in training it would be so hard that when I went to tournament it wouldn't be as hard if that makes sense.

Phil: I guess that link between the physiology feeling like your arms are going to fall off, how does that affect you cognitively then, from a self taught point of view or from...?

Jono: Well in between the trips to the bin where I vomited...but that was so good. So then we started to introduce visualisation techniques. I'm not completely absent of sight and I need to stress that there's a lot of difference between visual impairment and no perception at all. I would stand in front of a TV and watch particular fights where there were similarities between them and the people who I would likely fight at the Paralympics. I would be having to mentally rehearse what my process would be under this physiological response to the exercises and everything like that. One of the other things was to encourage transfer, was that I would hold a judo suit and just practice what my gripping strategy would be and so on like that. It was good fun. It was tough. You're always going to get arguments of whether the scientific benefits or anything like are there but as in terms of a placebo, the fact that I was doing something and it was judo related, and the fact that I couldn't because I was injured do actual judo, it allowed me to feel positive about how things were moving and how I was developing.

Phil: I can imagine and sometimes I have my armchair psychologist moment, so if I do one of my armchair psychologist moments, having had your...having lost some of your sight also then...and then found something that you enjoy, but then having to lose that again for a year, I can imagine emotionally that would have been quite tough to get your head around?

Jono: I'm quite open about talking about mental health and I think it's a lot more common. One of the things and I go off on a tangent but it's not the fact that that...I really appreciate what you do in terms of the emotion side of things. I sit there and sometimes I think that how complex emotions are and how difficult it is to articulate them. But then I'm thinking it's not an absence in the language available it's an absence in the opportunity to develop your use of emotion/language and so on and to make sense of what's happening to you. As much of a shit situation the injury was, my goodness I was able to make grounds up in areas that I would never have addressed. To my gain I still stand...even though on paper most of my achievements came before the injury I was a better player after the injury by far, unrecognisable. But again the awkward thing which happened was I tore my ACL 18 months before the games and then two months before the games I tore the other ACL. But I didn't have long enough time to have the rehab or the surgery so I had to fight with a torn ACL. So you're talking about the fact that I tore my ACL, 18 months out, that was a huge emotional thing, I had a bit of a breakdown. And then two months out again I went and did it again. That was so, so challenging not to make yourself feel like a victim.

Phil: Can I explore that?

Jono: Yeah.

Phil: How was that then? So two months out from Rio, you've just done the same injury that knocked you out 18 months ago, that you've taken a year to recover from. Finally back in the ring, finally getting back fighting and getting fit again. Getting ready for arguably the biggest competition of your life and then you tear the other one.

Jono: Well it's so interesting the mindsets were different from the two. So the first one which was, the 18 months, I remember having a discussion with my friend and the sole philosophy was that we would hit...because I'll be back six months before the games and basically that's already eating into a large amount of the preparation. So it would have been hitting the ground running. So whatever happened, as soon as I get the go ahead that I can compete and train again I would already be running. Whereas when it was two months before the game it was just this uncertainty it became even more uncertain. It was so hard and essentially it just came...an amazing comment made by someone recently and they were talking about a ski jump, I think it was from a TV series. He was saying this is all I wanted and this was...the realistic expectation of me medalling went out the window, but it was a case of just giving luck the best chance and so continuing all the good work. But he described it as a bad day was going to be one where I worried about the outcome, a good day would have been where I thought about the process, but the perfect day would have been where I thought about nothing at all. Referring back to the flow state it was just whatever...it's that acceptance of the uncontrollable and just going oh I'm just going to go for it. I just want to have one day where that internal critic of how things don't necessarily go how I want them to or anything like that just disappeared. Well I didn't worry about what people thought I was just like this is my day. In a sense I achieved everything I wanted to achieve that day even though superficially a medal was my goal and my expectation.

Phil: I guess you didn't reach that moment of acceptance where you were like you know what as long as I come out of it where I'm not going to think about the process and I'm not going to think about other things, I'm just going to go and enjoy it ...

Jono: There's so many bad connotations with it, it's like that whole attitude of it's not the winning that matters it's the taking part that counts. Of course you want to win and like everything about me but that never disappeared. Of course I would have broken my body again just to have won that medal. But it's finding value in a shit situation isn't it? There's so much heartache.

Phil: How did you find that value then, what was the self talk, how did you get yourself to that point...?

Jono: So prior to the games and during the games I didn't have the time. And bearing in mind I suffered with mental health issues prior to that. I always thought it was really confident of them to put me on the 13th floor in the village, I thought there's some confidence there. But it came along after and it was Jo Frazier, I read a statement about Jo Frazier. So Jo Frazier in his own right was Olympic gold medallist in boxing, undisputed heavy weight champion of the world for three years but most people if they know Jo Frazier they know him from Mohammed Ali. And the fight if anyone really has paid any attention, the greatest fight of all time was the Thriller in Manila where Jo Frazier and Mohammed Ali, I think Mohammed Ali won on technical knockout in the 15th round.



Mohammed Ali everyone knows about but Jo Frazier said Ali always used to comment on how I would be nothing without him but who would Mohammed Ali have been if it wasn't for me? For me that's such a powerful thing in terms of being a working part in a bigger picture than just Jonathan Drane, it's human progress. So Frazier and Ali together demonstrated how far the limitations of the human body could take a punch. And it's the same thing, I'm so proud of that part of the measurement of the people who are on the podium that day, I was part of that measurement, of their success. The fact that I turned up required them to have to step up.

I think about loads of things that that applies to and there's such an undervalued perspective on the value of trying. If we go back to the Thomas Edison analogy we always commonly associate Thomas Edison with excellence or the necessity of failure as in terms of he was...it was suggested that 9,000 failed experiments before he invented the light bulb. So hypothetically what if those 9,000 experiments don't always come from the one person? What if they're distributed across a load of people, they're all doing their 9,000, not all of them can invent the light bulb. But each one of them through going through these experimentations, of addressing uncertainty they learn, they adapt and they implement it. It's the same thing with sport, by my failures people learn. So hopefully you've passed the baton onto the next generation. I could tell you a million different ways of how to fail.

Phil: I like that.

Jono: Well I hope there's some sense in what I've said.

Phil: Yeah, absolutely there is. Can I get really specific again and this time I want to get really specific about when you were in the ring, and it might be interesting to think about this, did your strategies change pre visual impairment to after? I guess pre sight deterioration to after. How is emotion viewed? In your experience how was emotion viewed in judo?

Jono: Oh, it's the limitation. I think that's poor understanding of what emotion is though. I think you touched on it earlier, it's like this relationship with the flow, arousal is very much a part of emotion isn't it. So one way of accessing that is by understanding emotion. With arousal in terms of sporting performance although I know that there's better models and everything. Is it the inverted U hypothesis, which there's an optimum peak performance occurs for...it varies from individual to individual especially within context. But it's finding your peak performance and correlating that with levels of arousal. So emotion, it's like when I listen to music if I feel something that's because I'm emotionally reacting to it. It seems to be such an untapped resource because of particularly within the male framework, it's not okay for me to talk about emotions, unless it's anger. It's just not okay and hopefully that's changing. I think that's a huge limiting factor in terms of human potential is that we avoid this talk and we replace any emotion from a male point of view with anger. But I just think it's such an untapped element of things.

Phil: If you had advice for a fighter, you might coach I don't know, but let's say you were coaching, how would you advise them to...?

Jono: So one of the things from a coaching point of view now is it's the person centred approach. Because remember just because I did things a certain way it doesn't mean it's the right way. As in



terms of giving people...I just facilitate their own growth and understanding so by essentially prompting certain questions and stuff like that, I hope to maybe guide them in the direction. But essentially it comes down to them, I really don't have a right to contaminate their learning if that makes sense. So that person's approach it's their own journey, if they want to learn it this way whether they want to understand why they respond this way. But what right do I have to suggest that anything is right or wrong. Apart from as long as it operates within the rules.

Phil: So I guess then anybody that you're coaching could either be one...they could either take a very, where I'm going to take all my emotions into the ring, if that's what they want to do and then you'll support them with that. Or I'm going to work really hard to leave my emotions at the edge of the mat and not take them on with me and you'll just work whichever way you'd prefer to?

Jono: Yeah, it's hard to articulate because it is just a natural progress whether they want to go that way. I'm not saying either way is right although it's the journey and they have ownership over that, I don't have any right to tell them otherwise. I see my role in anything even as a prospective father is that I provide a source of information but it doesn't give me the right to tell you what information you should listen to. I feel like I'm overstretching to have something constructive to say about this.

Phil: No, that's all right. Did you use emotion when you were competing...?

Jono: I don't like to comment in terms of anything 18 months prior to the games because I don't think I was particularly well and a lot of that was with how I dealt with emotions. But up until this point now it's still a progressive journey I still respond very...before...like anything it's already happened before I can spot it. But my appreciation of how well it can be used is just with anything like from your realm with things about information gathering, but that's essentially what we're all doing. I did come across a great example of the use of strategic use of emotional intelligence with Bjorn Borg. I read this and I thought this was a fantastic example although there's an interesting twist to it. So Bjorn Borg I think it was the Madison Square Masters, £400,000 prize money and he was playing John McEnroe. John McEnroe everyone who knows him he favours the fast game, so he wants the quicker turnaround between serves because that's the style of player he is. So what Borg did was he decided to slow down the game. So he even, I think got a few time infringement penalties as well and in that he threw McEnroe off his game hugely and Borg won. But in the sporting context Borg he's the older version of Roger Federer, the ice man, he showed no emotion. But then in personal life I think bankruptcy, divorce and everything like that. So it's just interesting to see how people operate in emotional intelligence. In one domain it doesn't necessarily transfer over to another.

Phil: I guess that's one of the things I'm interested in, in that world of sport in terms of whether you're encouraged to feel and express those emotions or whether the encouragement is to control them and minimise them. But then if I put you in a different context does it work differently. When you were competing would you work with your emotions in a different way when you were actually fighting for a place...?

Jono: Well mainly because day wise I lost fights when I got emotional. I lost so many. One of my last sighted events was the British Nationals in Sheffield, that must have been 2013. So what was one of

my last sighted events and basically all I'd ever wanted in my career was to have a national medal at sighted. So I qualified out of the pool tournament, I went into the final pool. By qualifying and going into the final pool I was guaranteed a bronze medal. So then the rest of my fights were basically whether that medal would be bronze, silver or gold. When in the first fight of that thing it had been a long day, the eyesight deterioration was happening, I was struggling to see with the light and everything, and the boy started kicking off during my...by kicking off he was arguing, he was talking and that's generally frowned upon. I accidentally caught him in the face and to this day I still can't out rule the fact that I didn't punch him. So his nose...I don't think I did, it was just because of the way the fight was going. I went to throw my grip on I got the depth perception wrong, I hit him in the face. But then after that because of the nature there was blood and everything like that, then my arousal went through the roof and I began to focus on the fact that if the fight had to stop more than three times he'd lose the fight and I'd win the fight. So ethically wise I don't think I responded, so he was taped up and I might have focused a bit on removing that tape. I got disqualified and I lost my bronze medal even though the only way I could have lost that medal was by being disqualified from the whole tournament and that happened because I let my emotions get the better of me.

Phil: Oh wow, that wasn't where I thought it was going to go.

Jono: I couldn't contain that feeling. One of my coaches Howard Oates who I've worked closely with for years, he knows that my level of arousal happens instantaneous it's not something which just progressively comes on, I can go from zero to ten within the split of a second. He knows the key part of me going into tournament is to be joking and laughing because otherwise I'll spike too quickly and too early. So part of his role was trying to regulate and dampen down my responses to things.

It's not as bad as the loss at the Paralympics, that one hurt. But it's an element of regret, there's an element of growth there as well in terms of my understanding of myself and how I responded. It's one of many times I've cocked up.

That one hurt a lot because previously ...the Korean who I lost to in the semi final again I couldn't really throw because of my knee, but going into the bronze fight my strategy was to get the guy penalised out of the fight. Because I'd fought him two years prior and he'd been disqualified because he kept breaking off the grip. If anyone wants to watch me lose and have my heart broken they can watch it on YouTube. So in judo you need four penalties, if they get four penalties they're disqualified. Prior to the last grip exchange [inaudible 00:49:14] was on three penalties and it just broken off again, which should be a penalty but instead of giving us both a penalty...I was on one penalty he was on three penalties, he should have been disqualified, we should have both been given a penalty. I was only on one so I'd have been on two so I'd have been fine, he would have been on four. But instead because they didn't want the fight to end that way they didn't give him the penalty they just gave me the penalty. But I can't argue too much because after that he then got hold of me and then threw me. I remember that though, that was one of the hardest things was the adrenalin of being returned to the centre and thinking he's done, he's done, there's no way they can't give him the penalty. And then they've given me the penalty and not given him the penalty and I'm like what? Again I went into the next fight and the next grip, we call it a Jimmy Mattis Start and he threw me. I don't think it was because I was distracted but that was very hard to not...as soon as he let go my arousal level went up because he's done for, he's done for.

Phil: So when you say it hurt what bit or what bits about it hurt?

Jono: Most of us are sold this whole narrative of how we expect to be the star of our own film. When anything adverse or anything like that we're conditioned to expect, it's going to happen to anyone, I'm due some luck. Then it was this realisation that oh and it's over and you're just like four years, oh. Again it just takes some time to process and essentially what it comes down to is was it worth it and I'm like with every single ounce of my body I can honestly say yeah. Not necessarily because a fifth place, no, it's because of the people I met, the level of understanding I gained from how I operate and I just think it's just so nice to have a purpose. So, yeah, to wake up every morning to think how can I get better? And there's this analogy about the rowers, I can't remember what the Olympics was leading up to but basically a year out from the Olympics they decided that every single thing what happened the question would be will it make the boat go faster? I just thought having that element of refinement and analysing, yeah, it's one of the pleasures of life.

Phil: Have you replaced what you did have then with something now? Do you have that purpose and that focus in a different way now you're not competing?

Jono: One of the things which is why I was so attached to judo is because it was what I believed the only thing I could ever pay attention to. With all those elements where my knee fell to bits, I'm so scared of losing the one thing which makes me human or makes me who I am because I could pay attention to it. I've realised I could pay attention to so many things. I started to have this control over things. One of my interests now is chess, I flipping love chess. It doesn't mean I'm any good at it but most people who enjoy whiskey couldn't tell you how to make it. The chess element is everything I never had, you go back to the central executive, that rational thinking. But don't think for a second that they're not devoid of emotions. The last two years there's a guy called Garry Kasparov and he won the world championship 13 times, he's synonymous along with Fischer and Spassky, these two were massive chess players. But he seems to have the perfect balance of emotions, he uses emotions so intelligently to enhance his thinking and that's not something we commonly associate with chess. We think I like these otamatones they're purely rational thinking. But, no, he used that. Another thing which I enjoyed about him was that he used to go to the gym because the length of chess...this is what I talk about, how do I make the boat go faster? He made sure that he was physically fit as well as mentally fit because he knew that chess matches go on for days like tournaments go on for days and so on. Constantly refining the way that he could better think. It took an IBM Deep Blue to beat him, the computer.

Phil: Where I'm going with this is there's this narrative that business can learn from sport. So what have you learned from sport that you've now brought outside, not necessarily into business but what did you learn from your experiences with competing, and with competing at the highest level and how have you translated that over into your life?

Jono: One of the important things to appreciate is that we often think context as a fixed state but context is fluid, it's always changing. So the person who I thought I was...say I went and did something and I failed or I succeeded, that doesn't define me because the context is me myself I'm changing so is the context. But it's also the way that I approach the term failure, I don't think failure

is the correct term to use, I like the concept of hit and misses. So when you refer to it as a miss I think you remove a lot of that anxiety of what I might be a failure or anything like that, but by miss you think well what can I improve? So one of the things was what was good? What could have been better? And how can I make that better? So every time it's like you're reinventing, not completely, it's about the tweaks. You shouldn't suddenly flip it in the other direction and change everything, it's about just slowly the one per cent day to day just moving. What is it, 365 days of the year, even if was 1% every week that's 52% increase. So it's about that refinement and how you look at things. But also it's about understanding people and how they respond to things, but in order to do that you have to understand yourself first and take in the human element of things. Yeah, I think it's like that and it's about finding...you read a lot of research and I think...this is quite a strong statement but I do think that science to a degree has castrated intuition. I know that there's a bad side of intuition as in terms of racial bias and so on like that, I condemn that completely. But science shouldn't lead...from a coaching element it shouldn't lead it should guide, it should be a guide, it should be stood behind. You shouldn't overstretch from the bounds of what science can prove. That's the way I think things should go, it's about finding that golden mean, that balance.

Phil: Because it's quite a challenge whether it be social science of psychological science. If I think about those two realms that we're looking at, often those experiments are done in very specific settings or looking at very specific perimeters or looking at a particular thing, which often sits part of a wider system. I absolutely position myself as an evidence based practitioner but that said I can't say that...this is where I'm agreeing with you in that I can't say just because I am an evidence based practitioner, that I then use the same solutions or approaches everywhere I go because that's just not the case. There needs to be a mix of the two, it's not always about just what the researcher, what the science can tell us because every context...like you said context changes, context is shifting all of the time. Because thing A worked in context 1, doesn't mean that thing A will work in context 2 or 3.

Jono: Yeah, the working parts changed, as soon as somebody comes in, so when I draw back to the Bjorn Borg element he would have changed the strategy according...say McEnroe, if Federer stood in front of him he would have had a totally different approach to the game. It's the continuous adaptability but whilst I'm stood here and I'm trying to define myself as a person as being successful or non successful I'm also not adapting. It's interesting with you because I understand with emotions and intelligence there's a lot of psychometrics available but again because...so I'm always an advocate of someone like yourself because even though you are human and whatever you do is subject and fallible but you're a lot more adaptive in your approach then psychometric test or question areas. Obviously that's my opinion but I'm sometimes sceptical of how the language can really...how useful or accurate it can be.

Phil: I had a really interesting discussion with somebody at an event last week when they were espousing the reliability of a particular psychometric and I was like I just don't buy it. What do you mean you just don't buy it? I just don't buy it.

Jono: It's amazing one aspect is that if people do buy it they're going to employ more people who have the desirable characteristics and in doing so then they increase the number of people who



were in those positions of which they're trying to prove. Again it reinforces it in the wrong way in terms of the evidence.

Phil: Yeah, and becomes a real challenge because what I said to him was whether I like it or not if I am filling in a psychometric questionnaire, especially if it's a personality questionnaire for a job I am going to want to put myself across in the best possible light. And the response is, yeah, but what I can then do is I can look at those items where you paused for longer, which items did you answer really quickly, which items did you pause for longer? I was okay so what are you kind of implying then? Well if you're having to think really hard about some items more than others then that might suggest that you're answering that in a way that isn't quite authentic and I was like okay. But couldn't there be lots of other reasons why I take longer answering particular items, I don't understand your question, I'm not sure which of those options to choose from. Is it rarely or is it often? I'm not sure actually.

Jono: One of the other interesting things is like the same thing with performance or the IQ test, just because I perform a certain way at one given point doesn't mean that that's the complete assessment of my ability. Mood can directly affect perception, my perception of myself might be altered and something like that. So when you talk about the ability to be adaptive, yeah, it's just interesting there's so many flaws in that fixed definition of things or the framework or measurement instrument used. Sometimes it risks an oversimplification.

Phil: So I'm going to start to bring it together then. What have been the biggest learnings for you, for your time competing? What have been the main...what are the biggest learnings for you from your time in competition?

Jono: I think it's the importance of trying. I do think trying says a lot. It's referring back to the whole thing of taking...recognising yourself as a working part to something much bigger than yourself. Your contribution and whatever, when you try you push. It's that saying that somebody wants a null hypothesis because in some way it provides a significant relationship between two things. That's what everyone wants because then obviously they gain an element of notoriety, but then also improving that something doesn't work is just as important because you provide another one of those 9,000 ways how to not do something. It guides future understanding but again with our understanding of what is it to have a useful life or to contribute to something, it's that social recognition.

Phil: Anything else?

Jono: Yeah, I suppose how irritating people are, just how gross men can be hygienically and so on, a particular shout out to my friend Christopher Skellie. He'll know exactly the multiple ways that he can trigger my gag reflex.

Phil: Yeah, we definitely won't go there. Any professionalism that I have left would be completely lost if we went there. I've been capturing the notes on the different things you've talked about, so the inverted U curve and that sort of stuff. But is there any particular books or videos or anything



that you would particularly recommend for people based on your experiences of things that you've either read or watched that have been really helpful, useful or beneficial for you?

Jono: Yeah, I'm always going to promote Kasparov's books Deep Thinking because I think that's a really interesting look at how technology is also, without sourcing a lot of the brain's functions to technology now, but one of the one things that remains is that our emotions, that's one thing that computers struggle with to not understand and so on like that, irrational behaviour. So that's a really interesting and insight from somebody who's very clued up. I think he's a consultant for DeepMind at Google. What was the other one? One of the great films I watched recently was Alpha Go as well, that's available on Netflix but as a film or documentary film but that's understanding again, watching this Korean master at the game of Go. But again just appreciating watching a guy...watching the impact of emotions on one person. Because he's essentially playing a computer and the computer's don't feel tired, they don't feel emotions. So they're relentless in their approach to problem solving whereas the contrast to the, I can't think of his name which is doing him an injustice to this bloke, this master at the game Go, he is subjective to emotion. But there's a lifting point, I won't spoil it but there's a lifting point in that. But other books.

Phil: Anything else, any other recommendations?

Jono: There was one called Mind Gym which was how I started my journey. Mind Gym is a great book for understanding how...obviously I've done a lot of physical gym work but how that can extend to the mind. It's within a sport context but I think it's very much transferable to many domains. In terms of tactics and strategy there's a book called The Book of Five Rings which was written centuries ago by I think Japanese swordsmen. But he talks about things and again that's transferable. And then the final one maybe...so when we've talked briefly, we haven't talked much on it but Flow for people who want to understand flow to books. The Rise of the Superhuman by Stephen Cottle and this is...I know that you like Nancy Klein?

Phil: Yeah.

Jono: Well she talks about creating an environment of clean...is it clean language or optimising...so she talks about, yeah, constructing...

Phil: The thinking environment, yeah.

Jono: Well Stephen Cottle talks about creating flow environment, that optimisation of the human performance and again I think that's been directed towards business elements of things. But then also if you want to get a good grasp of kind of what a flow is but with a cringey narration it's the Zen of Archery. For anyone who likes mindfulness or anything like that, this is essentially applying the mindfulness...well mindfulness I think is a little bit different from Zen I can't remember, because it's more external whereas mindfulness is internal is it?

Phil: Yeah.

Jono: If you talk to anyone it goes back to what I was saying about the perfect day where I don't think at all, it's like that moment where you can't distinguish the boundaries, it sounds really cringey, the bow, the target, the thing and it just happens. And you don't know how it's happened it's just happened.

Phil: Thank you, I'll add all of those to the show notes. All right then, Jono, one of the things that I'm conscious of...you mentioned a couple of times about mental health and you mentioned that first period where you did your ACL and it was a really tough one. But I'm conscious I didn't really pick up on it or mention it.

Jono: Go for it, if you want to spend some time quickly talking about that or in more depth.

Phil: I've done a few different podcasts about a couple of different mental health aspects, I've done one on burnout, I've done one on imposter syndrome. So what was the experience for you then, what was it around?

Jono: I don't want to lower the tone, it was basically suicide.

Phil: Okay, so depression, suicidal thoughts and that sort of stuff?

Jono: Yeah, and I was admitted into hospital. I talk about it like this. I remember my admittance into hospital, it sounds quite dark humour, anything which can be manipulated into a noose you get taken away from you. I always think of my 18 months as no shoe laces to no medal.

Phil: Wow, yeah, that's an interesting way of framing it and looking at it. What I'm thinking I might do is rather than open that up now I'm going to...we'll have a conversation off air about whether...if we want to go and talk about that how that would be rather than open it now if that's all right?

Jono: Of course, yeah, it's not a problem.

Phil: In that case then, Jono, is there anything else that you're thinking, feeling, want to say?

Jono: No, apart from an overwhelming sense of love towards you, no.

Phil: Oh, thank you very much, it's mutual and reciprocal I can assure you.

Jono: I really hope there is something of use in there.

Phil: There was lots of really, really useful stuff in there all the way through from talking like you've just mentioned about flow to how you approach the coaching work that you do at the moment through to the experiences and the self talk that you gave yourself at different points. And even for me the bit when we were talking about the ADHD and how that affects you, that I found really useful and interesting as well. If people wanted to pick up and chat with you where would it be best for them to find you, on Twitter?



Jono: Yeah, I think it would be Twitter.

Phil: And what's your Twitter handle?:

Jono: It's @jonolopodis and that name came about because I was wondering what my name would be if I was born in Greece.

Phil: So you came up with Jonolopodis?

Jono: Yeah.

Phil: I'll put a link to your Twitter in the show notes as well just in case people struggle with spelling Jonolopodis.

Jono: I do.

Phil: I just want to say a huge thank you really, Jono, thank you very much for giving your time. It's been great to have you on the podcast so thank you very much.

Jono: Thank you.