

## Interview with Team Spirit of Nevetz

Interviewer: Jesse Wiegel, Race Boss

Interviewee: Ohad Shafir

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**A** I tell you, Jesse, me dealing with the R2AK is like living in a parallel universe, which is I think not a bad idea sometimes. And also about four days ago, I wrote my first Facebook post in my life. And the post was about the R2AK, and I was thinking of people, you know, who think that I shouldn't do it. I shouldn't do a post in times like this. But many people were very, very enthusiastic and happy about it. You know, just to bring something else so far away and so distant from our said reality these days.

**Q** Certainly.

**A** So for me, circles around me, it's a very good opportunity.

**Q** So I think it was maybe six months ago you first reached out to us?

**A** One year ago.

**Q** Was it a year? Wow, time flies?

**A** A year ago, yeah, yeah, December '22.

**Q** Yeah. You sent us links to You Tube videos. Basically as I recall, you were saying here I am. This is reality guy. I know how to sail around the Mediterranean pretty damn well. I'd like to come out to where the water is really cold. Currents do things that they never do where I live, and try this out. So how the hell did you hear about this? And what makes you want to do it?

**A** From the beginning, you know, I fell in love with the R2AK from 2015, from the first year. How -- I don't remember how I got to know it, but from the beginning it was -- I wrote in my post, my first post and told people -- tried to tell people why -- why I liked it so much. I said it was a combination of anarchistic, crazy and very professional organization, race, very special people. So I fell in love from the beginning. Why? One of the places that you wrote -- there was a definition of the Americas cup for dirt bags. I follow racing, sailing races around the world. And some of them are very impressive. But you need a lot of money and you know, a lot of sponsors. And here is an opportunity for something else. An epic race, but with smiling atmosphere.

**Q** You spent a heck of a lot of years as I believe the director of an organization called Nevetz Saleem [phonetic]?

**A** Yeah.

**Q** Did that experience, is that dovetailing into your race to Alaska attempt?

**A** For sure. You know, for sure. This is the place that I -- I'm a clinical psychologist in profession. And for the last 20 years, I directed Nevetz Saleem [phonetic]. It's a place, a treatment center which consists of post psychiatric boarding school and special education school for kids from 12 to 18. Around 80 kids, brilliant kids, that suffered all

sort of crises, mental crises especially. Most of them came after being hospitalized. And around 120 staff members. One of the most special places for me in the world, kids that I love very much, very special treatment and educational programs. And this is -- and I decided two and a half years ago that I'm going to -- when I'm 60, I will finish directing the place. I will stay a little bit afterwards. And for the last two and a half years, I worked with the people that will come after me. And getting ready for the race to Alaska is a kind of treatment for me, psychological treatment for me to get in terms with my place -- the job that I did for the last 20 years.

**Q** I think people have said that anyone who wants to race to Alaska likely needs some psychiatry?

**A** I'm free on the docks. I'll be free on the docks.

**Q** As the race boss, you know, I also -- I do some psychiatry, talking people into and out of doing stupid things. So do the youth that you work with, are they aware that you're about to do this thing?

**A** The staff are aware, but the youth, it will be I think I will talk to them about two or three months. I don't want -- there's a special -- it's in June. And every -- every year on June 30, we say good bye to the kids that leave us. And usually it's a very, very emotional day. And I will be hopefully in Alaska. So I will have to talk to the kids that finish, that graduate, and to their parents and tell them to explain why I'm not there. But I think that as I know them, they will follow and be part of it for sure.

**Q** So just turning to -- turning to your vessel choice, that was -- that's the most striking thing maybe that we've learned about you. You're using what's called an X cat, and could you describe in simple terms what an X cat is?

**A** It's the boat that -- I was looking for a boat that I could do adventures in. And -- but will be simple and safe and I found this Austrian guy and I asked him many strange questions. But the boat is part -- the biggest problem that I expect is to be wet. But apart from that, it's a very safe boat. It's plastic. It's made of plastic. It's unsinkable. It's got a very good rowing system that I didn't have to improvise. It was built in. And she's a very good sailing boat. She's light but she doesn't capsize. And I do -- I sail her -- I sail and row her about three times a week in all kinds of weather. And we can sail in Israel also in the winter, it's no problem. I feel very safe. I feel very secure about it. But I know that the main problem will be it's a very wet boat.

**Q** Very wet and very cold. Have you ever been in water as cold as we have here?

**A** I've been in water but not with this boat. Yeah, I've sailed in Scandinavia, but the outside weather in Israel in the winter will be I think like the rainy days in the summer in Alaska. The water, I don't plan to be inside the water. And as -- as far as I know, my boat, and I sail in rough seas also. Never did I come close. And I capsized with a lot of dinghies. No boat capsizing [indiscernible] this boat, they made something very good. It's a very special boat.

**Q** I don't think anyone really plans to be in the water?

**A** No.

**Q** But we definitely make it happen. How long is the X cat?

**A** 5 metres. 16 and a half feet.

**Q** Thank you for giving it in feet because most of us are Americans and we have no idea about the metric system. How are you planning to load that sucker up with all your gear? It's not much space?

**A** That's no problem. It can carry up to I think in pounds, about 250 kilos. More than 500 pounds. That's no problem. And it has a special net in the front and this boat I can sleep on. I can put a tent on it. No problem with dry bags and things like this. No problem.

**Q** All right. Sounds like you're pretty set. So there's got to be something that is scaring you about race to Alaska. Why would you do it if it didn't scare you?

**A** For sure. First of all, I lived in the sea all my life. And I will be 60 this year, and from -- from very early, I'm in the sea. And I'm always scared and respect -- I always respect and scared from the sea, okay. The sea is -- is something that I never lost my respect. And every time that I thought I was secure, it showed me otherwise. So -- so it's part of me being in this environment. I think that I know everything to see and to read about Seymour Narrows and places and Cape Caution. And because these are things that I -- these are situations I never dealt with. And I think I understand the meaning of tides and currents and slack tide and et cetera.

But for sure I know that everything that I plan, the sea will throw at me everything I didn't plan. So okay. This is also part of it.

**Q** Good. I'm excited to see it. It's always really fun to watch all of you wild people do this thing from at least the comfort of whatever boat I happen to be in that usually has an engine. So you know of course, you know, first place, \$10,000, second place steak knives. I'm going to go out on a limb here and say it's going to be pretty hard for you to even reach for the steak knives. There are of course the 20 and under award that you could gun for. But beyond that possibility, what is -- what is success in race to Alaska for you?

**A** First of all, talking to you now is a success, okay. I was really not sure that I would be accepted. The people around me were sure, but I wasn't. And to be -- to be able to fly out of Israel and to, in these times, I hope, I pray that the situation will be -- will be better so I will -- so I can leave with a full heart. But if I will be on the dock in Port Townsend, it's the second success for me. And to -- to arrive to Victoria and to -- on time will be the third success. And from now on, and from this point on, I intend and I do my best to be in Ketchikan. But the whole thing for success to me and [indiscernible] this will also be something that I hope I will do with honor.

**Q** I'm really looking forward to meeting you in person here in Port Townsend. And yeah, good luck on all your preparations.

**A** I really -- thank you, Jesse. And I want to say, as I grow, as my experience is growing, my experience with people and interactions, there's a thing called energy. Energy of people, energy of a thing. And the energy of the R2AK, there's something very, very special about it. And I'm happy to be part of it. Really, I'm -- makes me happy. And I feel privileged.

Transcribed by Kelsey Fletcher