

Team Narrows Minded

Interviewer: Nikki Henderson

Interviewees: Ghislain Devouton, Fred Pergola, Art Petitpierre

Q I had a great conversation with this first team two days ago. They're a team of three. They live in Seattle and they recently bought a boat that anyone who watched the 2023 race might recognize. It's called Mojo, and it's an F25. So they fixed all the broken bits, made some modifications and they're bringing her back to the race as team narrows minded.

So I guess I should ask, who is the boss?

A I don't think we have defined a boss yet really.

A We have a natural one.

A I think it's safe say [indiscernible] is the boss, yeah.

A We agree on that.

Q Okay. Can you guys tell me, you guys are sailing what was Mojo in this year, in 2023. Is

that right?

A Yeah.

Mojo was sailing with another team which happened to be French too. But it's not because they're French. We bought Mojo. We were looking for an F25C, and they happened to have one. And that was an obvious way to create a connection. But it's essentially a reset for Mojo. New team, new project. Trying to get the boat up to speed and fix what needs to be fixed and so on.

Q Okay. So you guys are Seattle based. Do you remember the first time you heard about R2AK?

A Yeah, go ahead Arthur.

A So I have a friend who attempted it a couple times on a pedal boat, Matt Johnson. Our daughters are really close friends, and he -- I don't remember, probably over a glass of wine or something of that nature we were talking about sailing and those kind of things. And he was

like oh, yeah, there's that race. Oh, sure.

And you've tried it? Oh, yeah, twice. And that's when I started to know a little bit more about it. And then there was two other guys started to talk about it also.

Q Did you think -- what did you think?

A That it looked amazing and that I would most probably never have the opportunity to do it. It felt like just too big for me. Too -- like, I don't know. But nothing that I would one day be doing. Just something that I would be like oh, wow, people doing it. That's amazing. They're brave. I would love to do it, but I would never be brave enough to do it.

Q Do you guys feel the same?

A Yeah. I heard about it for the first time -- three years ago I started reading about it in magazines. And two years ago I tried to set up a team with someone who was like-minded and I had heard of them through the sailing club at

Chilko [phonetic] marina. And we started working on it together and then life happened. You know, had a change of jobs, and it kind of fell through. And I was under the kind of same impression as Arthur. I was like, okay, well, it may just never happen. It was all a pipe dream.

But then we raced J105s on the Puget Sound with Ghislain and Arthur. We were in different boats. And then Ghislain came forward and said I heard you were interested in doing that race. And it felt like the one opportunity that we just couldn't miss. We had no boat at the time. I think things, you know, arrived quite quickly with the Mojo opportunity. But the idea of it was already super exciting, and so the stars were aligning, and I'd say since August, September it's been --

A I remember when you called me -- Ghislain called me during the summer, like,

okay, well, you know I wanted to do it with Fred. Do you want to be the third? And I was like, you know, I have plenty of things to do this year. No, that's not a good idea. And hung up the phone. And then so my wife, what was the question? That was Ghislain.

He wanted me to join them on the Race to Alaska project. I said no. Why? Well, you should do it. That's an opportunity and you won't have that one so many times. And then I took a day to think about it and then called back Ghislain and it was on.

Q Right. It's one of these things that initially seem so ridiculous, insane, scary, all the things you've said. And then you can't get it out of your head, can you?

A It's so true.

A Yeah. And that's sort of the same for me. I mean, I can't really give a date but probably -- I don't think I heard about the first one, but

probably the second race. And then there was there -- the kind of adventure, the Vendee Globe you will never do. And then you think about it, get into more local sailing and more races going on. Start to do races, and then maybe a year and a half ago I was looking a lot at the Gudgeon 32, which is a super fun catamaran. You can look at it. I mean, there are not many out there. I think it's 15. And then I was chatting about that and chatting with some local superstar Ally Hughes [phonetic] that won the first R2AK, thinking about putting together a project. But what kind of boat -- what do you think of the Gudgeon 32? If I were to do it again, I would do it on the F25C again. That's the best boat for it. Okay. Let's look for it. And then oh, yeah, looks awesome. And then started to figure a bit more about the project and what we can do.

And I mean, I had no partner, nobody. I

had not really talked with anyone, but I'm notorious for taking on some stupid project and just go for it. And I mean, do it seriously, but just be a little bit brave enough to take on this kind of project. Okay, well, we can figure a boat. I know a few people, so that's -- I know exactly what happened with Fred. I mean, we were friends on Facebook and knowing each other from sailing and so on. And he put a comment on last year R2AK saying that sounds super fun. And I just replied, let's do it. And we started a conversation from there. And a few months later, I mean, we are in. We have a boat, so that's a good starting point.

Q So I think almost all of you have said both the word "brave" and the word "stupid". Which is it more, brave to do it or stupid?

A I think you need to be, I mean, brave or courageous enough to take that on because there are a lot of components to R2AK. I mean, the

boat is one thing. Being okay sailors is another one. And you have external factors, rocks, logs and, I mean, current and wind and all those landscapes that are a little bit hard to navigate. So yeah, it's complex. I don't think you should be stupid. I mean, the idea may be when it comes up might be oh, that's stupid, I won't do it. But you can't be stupid trying to do it. Otherwise I think you have much more experience than we do obviously on that topic, but you can't -- I mean attempt to do R2AK and being stupid about it. I don't think that would be reasonable.

Q Yeah. I guess I'm interesting to see what you guys think but I want to dig into it. Do we think it's stupid to do R2AK, or do we feel that everyone else thinks it's stupid and we think it's a great idea?

A I think it's probably more about that. Because it's that idea of okay, you're going to be the

three of you on a boat for a week and a half or two weeks in the cold, not sleeping, eating shitty food and what's the point? Why are you doing that? You could be at home. You could be I don't know, flying to Hawaii, going to warm water. Why instead are you choosing to self inflict such a thing? Like, that's the stupid part of it. And then it becomes a project and it becomes something in which, well, it has to be carefully thought out. It has to be carefully prepared. And that part is not stupid at all. But just putting yourself in a situation where you know you will suffer. You know you will be exhausted. And that's what probably from an external standpoint is somewhere in between being brave and being stupid. Because we don't have to do it. We choose to do it.

A I have a different -- I have a different perspective on this. I think the brave factor,

yeah, it's an exciting. It's tiring. You know, it's exhausting. You're a little scared of bears maybe and strong currents. The stupid part which I've heard and I've thought about as well is, you don't have an engine. Not even a sealed engine. So when you have to get out of currents that might be, you know, 10 plus knots, you don't really have a safety net. And actually a month and a half ago, the engine wasn't working. We had to row back to the marina, and we did that for about half an hour. Already we could see yeah, it's going to be a little bit of an effort. Especially when you have the wind on the nose. So yeah, that maybe is I want to say almost the scary part, which immediately hits you the moment you need to get away from shore or move away from a danger. But it's part of the excitement. It's part of the unknown factor which makes it attractive.

Q So on the subject of big currents then, you're

called team Narrows Minded. What's the idea there?

A I think this is the spirit of I mean having a fun name. But we don't want something too cheesy or I don't know, too ridiculous. So I mean, we jot down a couple ideas. We had actually a good name before this one. I was trying to remember it and I can't.

A I must have a note somewhere.

A But anyway, at one point we were like oh, how about narrows minded. And everyone was like oh, yeah, this is the one, and so that will be it. And I think it reflects some respect to the race and create a tie with the race course. But at the time it was kind of a trick word and so yeah, we thought it was fun.

Q And it's kind of ironic too, because you're anything but narrow minded if you're doing something as outrageous as this?

A You're on the boat with French people, Nikki,

right now. Do you think the French are
[indiscernible] because I think there's an
element of that as well in the name. And in the
logo, there's a little French guy, proud and
kind of chest forward. So maybe there's a bit
of a stereotype around the French people as well
in that name.

Q So is being French part of your identity, I see?

Will there be baguettes on board?

A We'll bake every day. That's part of the trip.

A Arthur is a fantastic baker.

A The plan is to only drink red wine during the
race, is it?

Q Yes, of course. And large amounts of butter,
no? So a friend of mine likes to say that
people who do R2AK are either running away from
something or running towards something. And we
like to think that the best of us are running
towards something with this race. And I'd be
interested, you know, what are you guys running

towards? What are you seeking with this race?

A Steppingstone to the clipper race is what I have in mind. Three years ago, four years ago I worded the brochure at home. I was living in Europe back then in Luxembourg, which is landlocked, right. And the brochure arrives at our doorstep and my wife picks it up. She looks at me and is like, what are you planning? And maybe that was a little too long of a trip at the time and we had young kids. So yeah, R2AK is a kind of first step towards a longer adventure. It's a super exciting adventure. It's something we can't miss. I don't know if I'm going to be in Seattle forever and it's right on our doorstep and it's so beautiful. So yeah, I'd say a step towards that.

Q That's a great idea and a terrible one. What about you both?

A For sure I'm not I mean running away from anything. I'm more looking forward and

discovering more. I'm definitely at a point where I want more sailing in my life. A little bit more -- I'm not sure I want more adventure, but I want -- yeah, I want to discover more. And I mean, looking at I mean what people do and different races or just sailing adventure, I mean, this is one of them. This is close to us. It's achievable. And yeah, it's probably a starting point for other things.

A Yeah, I don't think I'm going away from anything either. Like, life is good for me. I have a nice family, a lovely wife. So not running away from anything. I love my job. But like that's such an opportunity to have fun, to see new places, to be on -- and just being on the ocean with enough time to enjoy it. There's a part where it's like when we do race around Seattle, that's for a day, that's for some races. That's for okay, a weekend. And that's too short. Like, it's hard to really get the opportunity to

spend more time enjoying it. And that one is one of them. I don't think that for me it's a step toward something else or not something that I have planned yet. But it's just a good way to enjoy sailing with friends. And the race is just a good opportunity to do that.

Q Yeah. It's like you're sinking deeper into something?

A Exactly.

Q So you guys are friends now presumably. It sort of sounded a bit like you all found each other on Facebook, like who is crazy enough to do this. How is the team character going along? You know, if people are following, what should they expect from you three?

A So yeah, Arthur and I knew each other quite well sailing on the same G105 and Fred was on another boat, so let's say a dock friend. And actually I think we found ourselves being a well balanced team. We supplement each other pretty nicely

quite honestly. So Arthur is our mechanical engineering, he going to figure out -- no pressure. He going to figure out the pedal drive and everything. Fred is really focused on numbers and electronics and organization, which is fantastic. I hate electronics. And I love doing carbon work and any DIY on a boat, all the systems on a boat is what I like doing. So we all have our own things to focus on, and I mean, we discuss to agree on what we want to do. And that works pretty well so far.

And sailing wise, I mean, seems to work pretty well too. I mean I think we can trade positions on the boat no problem. We can trust each other to be safe and drive the boat carefully. But get the best out of it.

Q So after all the rowing that you had to do that half hour, that's why you're putting a pedal drive on?

A Yeah. It's super light. This boat is extremely

light, but it's not made for rowing. I mean, if you're on the forward position on the amah kind of bent forward and trying to row, you're not going to be able to do that for a very long time. And the pedal drive, I don't know, I've seen such exciting designs now from Arthur and Ghislain. I want to see it in the flesh. And by the way, I have to justify going back to the gym three times a week. I've told my wife, that's why I'm doing it is to be able to pedal all the way up to Alaska. We don't know what the weather will be like.

Q So we'll be looking out for quads of steel then?

A Absolutely.

Q So you've got an ingenuitive design for the boat or is that secret at the moment?

A There are several options still on the table.

I've been saying that it will use our legs as probably like almost 99 percent sure. Because legs are so much stronger than arms. Now --

Q And you'll be drinking the red wine with your arms.

A That's the thing. But we definitely plan that whenever we see there's going to be that place where we can put our glass.

Q Of course made of carbon fiber?

A Sure.

A Already made the toilet out of carbon fiber, or the toilet seat.

Q You decided to go with a toilet seat.
Controversial choice.

A Well, okay. So the design is very R2AK-ish.
Like a solid Home Depot bucket with a nice carbon fiber seat on top. That's what it's going to look like.

Q Oh, luxury.

A Luxury and light weight.

Q So have you guys sailed? Have you got much practice planned?

A I mean, we have done -- so when did we get the

boat? Beginning of October. We've done a fair amount of day sailing in fair weather to start with. And quite a few joyrides. And then last weekend actually we had some solid weather. I mean definitely 20 plus with good -- I mean it was a good test for us, understanding the boat, understanding the limit of the boat, understanding our limits. We will probably take the boat out of the water for a little bit just to reinforce it where we want to reinforce it and do a little bit of paint job and so on. But then we definitely want to spend the last two or three months before the race to train a little bit harder, train in race conditions. So we kind of draw a course that basically does the whole Puget Sound that will include an overnighter at least. Probably narrow passages in the Orcas or between Whidbey Island and the continent. So yeah, we want to do more serious R2AK-like type of such.

Q Right. Because the boat is -- especially the lighter weight trimarans and catamarans this year just got absolutely pummeled in that shorter chop, so sounds like that's a good plan.

A Yeah.

A We heard about it.

Q Are you nervous about anything for the race?

A Logs. Absolutely. At night. Which is exactly last year to the team who previously owned Mojo. They hit a couple of logs at night and they had to call it a day. It would be great if we can avoid that.

A Yeah. Logs is one. I mean chop as you mentioned, the hammers chop for hours. And I think on a traditional monohull, J105 boat you can go against the sea for a while. It's not comfortable. It's hard on everything but you can keep going. On a boat like those light weight trimaran, I mean after a while it can impact the boat pretty badly. Things move and I

mean, bolts and basically strips and carbon can tear off. I mean bad things can happen. So we have to figure out where -- I mean where we have to put the brakes and where we will have to stop and kind of take that into consideration.

Q So if you're in the middle of the night and you're all kind of feeling nervous about a log and you're in chop and you're going up wind, what is going to keep you motivated?

A Red wine.

Q Avoiding the hangover by continuously drinking.

A That's an excellent question. I don't know.

Just -- I mean the feel or need to finish the race. I mean, that in the end we want to get to Ketchikan.

A We're all fathers, right, so we all have kids, so I think we all have the same kind of mental safety limit which is I'm not going to put my life in danger, the life of the crew in danger because I really want to get there. But we also

have that racing spirit. And Ghislain has been pretty humble so far. He's done a lot of upgrades to the boat and he can work strap like no one else and he's actually done some pretty cool upgrades. So if there are things that can be fixed during the race, I mean, I trust Ghislain and Arthur to be able to do that.

Q And what about the crew, yourselves, do you reckon you'll get along through thick and thin, through the tough times?

A You can't really have a crew of less than three people on this boat so we're going to have to make it work.

A The biggest problem is probably the length of our bed bunk because I'm the small guy. Ghislain is in the middle. Fred is the really tall one. So the question we have to solve is can we find the right length for the whole team to be able to sleep.

Q At the same time Arthur?

A No, no, no. The goal really to have two people sailing, one sleeping and taking turns.

Q So either way, you're winning, really, aren't you, if you're the short one?

A Oh, I'm the short one so wherever I do travel, I'm the most comfortable one. Be it on a plane, on a boat, there's always enough room for me.

Q All these small details you don't think about when you sign up to R2AK.

A Yeah.

Q All right guys, well, thank you for this. Is there anything else you would like to say to anyone who might be following, who might be following you and what they should watch for?

A Come to Port Townsend for the start or to Victoria. It's going to be fun.

A Yeah. If you want to bring a trailer, we'll be fine with that.

A Another thing is we're looking for sponsors because you know, as you know it's a ton of

gear, ton of safety gear, and R2AK is pretty unique opportunity to kind of showcase your brand, if you like the idea of the mission, if you like the idea of the adventure. So we're looking for sponsors right now, and we'd love for some people to join us on the adventure.

Q So anyone who is interested in a really tall person, a middle height person and quite a small person who wave French flags, drink French wine and sail a really fast boat, give us a ring?

A That could be a lot of people.

A And if you don't have money, just send wine.
That will do it.

A That works too.

Q Well, thanks very much, guys. We'll keep an eye on you. Sounds like you're going to be a fast team. So we'll have to keep a special eye on you.

A Thank you, Nikki. It's been a pleasure.