

Ep.49-Gabriela Gallegos

Kelly: Welcome to the Triathlete Hour. This week we're talking to Gabriela Gallegos, who serves on the USA Triathlon board and on the World Triathlon board, Gabriela talks to us about what that even means, what they're working on, and how she started a triathlon series in her hometown of El Paso, Texas.

Now Gabriela and I talked two weeks ago—back when Texas was in the middle of a massive storm, and before the most recent USA Triathlon vote on the updated bylaws. So I didn't ask her about those at the time, but I do want to note now: I went back to Gabriela last week after there was some confusion in the triathlon community to talk about the bylaws and ask her for some clarification. Here's what she told me...

If you're a USA team member, you're being asked to vote right now on the updated bylaws. It's a fairly straightforward vote aimed at bringing the organization in line with the most recent federal laws. You can see all the proposed changes on the USAT website and we'll include the links in our show notes for you to look at in detail.

Now, one of the things that has caused people a lot of concern was some language about USAT members being required to comply with safe sport rules, USAT's general counsel clarified for me that 1. this is not new, and 2. it doesn't mean that every USAT member has to take the safe sport training, nor does it ban consensual relationships between adults.

Now go check out all the documents, we'll include a link, and make sure you vote by the end of the month if you're a USAT member. And we promise the conversation with Gabriela is much more interesting than being about bylaws.

And first we chat with Laura Siddall again for "Sid Talks" in advance of Challenge Miami this weekend. Get all the details on how to watch after this break.

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All right. We're back with Sid for Sid Talks. Sid, last week we talked about Ironman New Zealand, and then I had to go and redo the intro and say, "Sorry guys, Ironman New Zealand got canceled!"

Laura Siddall: But, yeah. So it's been postponed, it's been postponed now to the 27th of March, but for a few days it was a bit, yeah, it was finally exciting that there was going to be a race and like Ironman New Zealand was pretty much the--well, I was in Boulder last year and did some of the commentary on it. And it was that last race before that we saw before everything closed down.

And New Zealand have had a pretty...unrestricted year. They had an initial lock down which was pretty harsh, but since then, it's been life as normal for New Zealanders, but they just can't get in and out of the country. And it all looks good. There was a bit of a wobble going into Challenge Wanaka, but that was okay. And then it was Ironman New Zealand... seven days out. They had another community outbreak, I think in Auckland, which meant that they shut the city of Auckland

down for seven days, which means meant they would review it on the day after Ironman New Zealand would have been raced.

And the rest of the country was put on restrictions, which basically meant, as far as I can work out, that you can't have gatherings of more than a hundred people. So that's why it they couldn't put on the race. I think they've done an amazing job to turn it around so quickly and have it on the 27th of March.

I know they were...I was talking to some friends and they were still going to do a virtual, or they were still going to do an Ironman distance on the same weekend. And I was like hey, you might just want to hold off on that. Because if they then announce that the race is actually two weeks later, we don't want to have a full distance in your legs, however you're doing it, to start with.

Kelly: Usually when they have to reschedule something three weeks later, move it, they have to worry about travel, like people traveling from far away, but it's not a problem.

Laura Siddall: That's it. That's the, one of the bonuses being in New Zealand that the travel and the number of people going are all new Zealanders.

So yes, there are travel that they've had to arrange and accommodation, but seeing some of the forums and I'm in some of the groups for the people training for New Zealand. I think the locals have been ... They do have a great relationship with the local community. And it sounds like the locals have been amazing at helping people out with accommodation and getting everything rearranged.

Kelly: It's not funny, but it's funny, when we say an outbreak in Auckland, five people got sick, basically.

Laura Siddall: It's something like that. Yeah. I heard to be, I probably get misquoted, I didn't fully check out, but I heard a guy tested positive and then went to the gym. [*So they shut down the city.*] But yeah, when we talk about outbreaks in New Zealand, the same happened for Wanaka. Okay, we're talking like half a dozen cases if that and they shut things down, and look, I get it because they're an island and they've managed it really well from what we've can see so far. And obviously if it did spread, we've seen the rate of how it spreads through some other countries. So that could be devastating for New Zealand. But also at some point they're going to have this, it's not...Anyway, that's another story.

Kelly: That's another topic, not a triathlon podcast.

And then for somewhere doing it completely differently...you're heading to Miami tomorrow. So by the time this airs, you will be in Florida at Challenge Miami, which...The last big race we saw was Challenge Daytona. And my understanding is Miami is going to be structured very similarly. First off, it's going to be a track. So tell me some details about that. And then secondly, Daytona went off so well, they've attracted a bigger field to Miami, even though they have a smaller purse. So you have all the details on how we can watch, where we can watch, all that kind of thing.

Laura Siddall: So Challenge Daytona, or Challenge North America I think were going to develop a race series all around the NASCAR tracks. That's where they've got a

relationship. So I think we're going to see more races popping up in North America, but they'll all be at a NASCAR tracks. So if you want to try and predict the future, go look at the NASCAR race series and then look at Google Earth and find a track that's got water inside it or water nearby, and you'll probably get an idea of where races in the next few years might pop up.

Obviously Daytona was combined with the PTO Championships. So had that huge start list. But I think Miami as well, people saw the race, I hope that the athletes felt they were treated well by the race and enjoyed it, and so with Challenge Miami being announced, and at that point, or at this point, one of the only races as an option for many people... It's yeah. Once it's, once again drawn like a pretty stellar start list, which is exciting. Yes, less of a prize purse, but then people are just, I think, more, just desperate to get on a start line and race. And I think the other thing with these races that there's going to be live coverage.

And so all the pros, in difficult years that live coverage does give them an extra bit of leverage perhaps with sponsors or going in, saying that we are racing and we are being seen by... Challenge Miami, it's the same team that did the coverage for Daytona. So it's NASCAR productions.

It will be going out live this time. It's going out live on Facebook. I think there is a nominal fee to watch the pro race. It's less than a coffee fee of the day. So come on guys. Let's make it happen. I think the age group race is going to be live streamed as well, but that's going to be for free, but then it is going to be, and I'm just going to check the right timing.

It is going to be on NBC. Have I got that right? NBC Sports. Yep. So on March the 18th, 21st and 22nd, there'll be like a highlights show on NBC.

Kelly: So you can watch it live online on Facebook Live like we've all done. All of us-- Many of us have watched ironman on Ironman Live, on their Facebook live.

They do like it. It's pretty... it's what on TV. It's just on Facebook and if that's your thing, connect your Facebook to your TV if you want to watch on a TV.

Laura Siddall: That's right. And I think, knowing if you saw the quality of the production in Daytona, and if you give them their credit, that was the first time that the NASCAR production teams had filmed, covered a triathlon.

And I think they, as soon as that broadcast finished, they had already written like pages and pages of what we can do better. What we didn't do, what we missed. *[What are some examples?]* I think just probably getting more cameras...as with any race, having more cameras out on track to cover more of the other stories of the athletes.

So there's always that focus on the front athletes, but actually in a race like Daytona or Miami, you've got a lot happening further down the field and then not just having them show up at the run element, just go, oh, there's a battle going on further back. So I think having different cameras out on track, whether that's static or having more mobile cameras out there. I think things like that, I think we'll see a lot more of a development in technology for the racing. So I think they're going to be able to, when the camera shows us that an athlete, they're going to be able to

pull up a lot more stats around that athlete and actually combined with some of the work that PTO is doing.

I think I'm okay to say this. I think there's going to be some like comparisons of rankings against athletes v. athletes and things like that coming out. So I know that's what they want to do going down the line.

Kelly: It's Thorsten Radde does a lot of their like data for them. And I talked to him about some of the, doing some similar...let's do some rankings and figure out who would match up with who and see, and then great minds think alike...

Laura Siddall: I think that's what people want. That's going to make it interesting. Especially if you've got now I know Challenge North America, all their races are going to be around that middle distance or that odd kind of distance around the middle distance length. They're not going to do any longer distances, I don't think. Then what are the other ways to make it interesting for the viewer? It's about telling the stories of the athletes. It's getting their interviews pre and post as well.

So you can put those in when they're on screen, but it's showing them like, what bike are they riding and showing, giving that exposure. But also then having the stats up about like power, cadence, heart rates, how do they rank against the athlete that's in front of them when they come to the run or, things like that, that I think is going to make it more accessible to those of us that love the data and the geeks, but also trying to then explain it in simple terms to those people that perhaps new to the sport and just watching it for the first time.

Kelly: Yeah. I definitely wanna see everyone's power numbers up on screen, so great. I gather Belinda's going to be commenting again. Belinda Granger, who's been on the podcast. We all know she's fun. And are they going to have people on the track again? Like Alicia Kaye I thought did a great job on track.

Laura Siddall: I think so. And I assume-- I haven't fully heard that one. I know Belinda is going to be doing the commentary in the studio. I would imagine they will do the commentary on the tracks. I think that really, that works really well. So yeah, hopefully that'll be the case. Cause then you get a good, I really liked. Yeah. Alicia was great as well.

Kelly: She did such a good job I convinced-- I commissioned her to write stuff for us.

But part of the whole PTO thing is, this is their mission, they've been clear about getting, making professional triathlon a spectator sport, a mass sport, like up there on par with maybe not football, but you know golf, tennis, that people want to watch, that they follow, that they...now the thing is, and this is what I talked to them about a year ago when they launched, was they're not the first ones to try this. Every few years somebody comes along and says, I want to make triathlon a spectator sport.

Most recently Super League, Chris McCormick, Super League did it. And they're going a totally different direction. They're making it super short, weird format, like exciting, lots of crashes. But they also have really good coverage, really good commentators. Before that you had Hy-Vee threw a bunch of money at it. You had the million dollar challenge one a year with the.... people have tried things.

And I guess, all right, now we're going to solve the -- solve triathlons problem. What is it that we need to make triathlon spectator friendly? To make it a spectator sport?

Laura Siddall: Yeah. The million dollar question. I think the other thing is again, so there's the PTO, obviously trying to make it spectator friendly and get, bring in sponsors that, but I think challenge North America as well, have their own kind of ideas and push too. Cause it's them, that's driving all this NASCAR production, doing the live shows and stuff. And also challenge North America got a big drive to make. What they want to do is really make it engaging. And this is probably more in real life at the racetrack, or at the race, but make it really engaging between the pros and the fans.

So they're working off the NASCAR model, where the drivers really have a great rapport and one-on-one, or, in real life engagement with the fans at the track on race day. And so at the Challenge North America races, obviously COVID makes it a little bit tricky with what you can do, but there's like the Pro-Am relay where you know, that there's a pro that races, the age group has get to bid on the pro to be the swim.

And so there's that engagement and then organizing the race that they've done the pro race on the Friday, so that then the pros can be there without their race at the back of their mind. As the age group has race on the Saturday and Sunday. That's the thing. Now I know that wasn't good.

Kelly: I did see a side point there.

I didn't see Jan Frodeno is part of the Pro-Am relay. And now, and I've been making bets in my head on how much people are going to bid to race.

Laura Siddall: Cause normally Lionel Sanders is the biggest is the guy that gets the biggest bid. He had something like 4,000 dollars on him, at least for one of the bike, I think for the bike leg in the last. So it'd be interesting to see. I'm pretty sure Jan would ...yeah. Smash through that. I don't know,

Kelly: but you're right. That is like at the race that is in person. And that's not what drives your TV coverage necessarily. That's not the same thing as millions of people watching an event.

Laura Siddall: It's interesting. Cause I will watch it cause I love the sport and I already am involved in the sport and that's perhaps why, so it's hard to answer that question cause I'm like, I'm just going to watch the race cause I love it. And then you know the people, but so I think if I say on that, I think it's about, it's not just showing the front of the race and the leader, it's showing the stories and getting to know the athletes as personalities and characters. I think that makes it more interesting when you watch, I think it's having good quality cameras that doesn't cut out or, and you're actually watching the race rather than watching the guys in the studio all the time.

Cause you don't want to be...you know however great they are at commentating, you want to be watching the race. I do think Super League are doing a great job at the coverage. Like the arena games and stuff like that was really cool, but it was very contained cause it was on bikes and treadmills. So that's, I think where you

have an opportunity with the NASCAR tracks because you can put static cameras up and you can have the cameras going round the track.

Kelly: It does sound like contained might be key to making really good coverage. Because that does... one of the big challenges with marathons, with Ironmans is just how spread out you get.

And even if you have two dozen cameras, like they can't be everywhere, it's a very large course. They are going to do another Super League arena games in April? I want to say? Lucy Charles has signed on to race it. So it should be fun to watch. It will also be streamed live.

There's plenty of triathlon to watch. I keep thinking about something you and I were talking about, which is for us, for people in the sport, we've watched Facebook live coverage. We've watched like Wits up Stef Hanson does, did her own like bootstrap coverage of the Ironman Australia Carnes Live Feisty, Sarah Gross -- one of my friends-- used to do set up a camera on the side and, cover Lake Placid and those got tons and tons of comments, people watch them. So maybe it's not as complicated as we wanna make it.

Laura Siddall: Yeah. That's it, isn't it? Yeah, I think I think there's. When you just appealing to the triathlon fans and with the limited racing at the moment, people are just desperate to watch something and to have the entertainment, like we're all like, a lot of us in lockdown and stuff like that.

You come just wanting to see that the race is happening and get that fix of sports. So that's where I think, like I think Stef at Witsup did an amazing job when she covered the races in Australia last year. And she did it on a shoestring and, but had someone on the ground and was doing some updates. We'd got some prerecorded interviews and questionnaires with the athletes and that sort of thing. So there are simple ways you can do that, but I think we'd get into a blocker of who controls it and the race events. Organizers... either its rights or they just want to have this control where it's we just want to get your race out to as many people as possible. However that is done. If it's literally holding a phone up at the side of the road, so we just can, people can see people racing. Yeah, I think we do sometimes I think the events try and over-complicate it... sometimes to try and hold onto the power. Whereas we're just trying to grow the sport. Surely just getting out there, however we can, to more people is going to be better for everyone in the long run.

Kelly: Yeah. Obviously Kona is the pinnacle of broadcast coverage. It wins. Every year it's a very good broadcast. It's not necessarily live. It's not live sports coverage, right? It's an hour and a half very good mini documentary. But then as to your point, I heard in the last few years, so many people were Instagram Live-ing or God, back when Periscope was a thing or live streaming the race on Kona that it would crash. Like internet networks couldn't handle it because so many people were trying to just put on their own rod...

Laura Siddall: To be fair. I do remember the year that Kona was sponsored by a camera company. And I remember sitting, watching online as the camera was focused on transition on the pier. And nobody was there. Like you'd have one person maybe running every five minutes and then the race was up the road and we're like fixated on this camera in transition. So yeah.

Kelly: Yeah, but Kona, obviously, that's the other thing that I think triathlon has to overcome when we talk about spectator sport. I don't know if overcome, but grapple with, we have to really get in here and think about, is... Regular people think of Kona. They think of the Kona coverage that they've watched for 40 years.

And that's what it means to them. That's what triathlon coverage means to them. And if we want to do something different, if we want to do live coverage, if we want to do shorter things, if we want to make it more splashy and fun, like that's going to take a kind of an uphill battle.

Laura Siddall: I think so. It'd be interesting to see what happens with the Collins cup and the broadcast for that. I think they probably... Obviously they were in Daytona and involved, so they probably took a lot of lessons. But they also want to elevate it even more. I think, they've talked about having the athletes mic'd up to the team captains and so that could be quite interesting to hear conversations going on during the race, as well as again, it's that data and giving more of an insight into what's happening rather than just watching an athlete on screen that you don't really know much, much about at that point.

Kelly: We can also bring... the one nice thing about, or not the one nice thing. I actually think the Facebook Live coverage the last few years has been very good, that iron man live did, but the one thing that they have that we do not have on TV is all the live comments that you can leave comments. You could probably just have live commenting on our TV broadcast.. would be great...

[laughing]

Kelly: Yeah. Some of the comments are kinda terrible, but I do think it's one of the oddities of watching like a professional sporting event live on Facebook, you get like every person has an opinion.

Laura Siddall: It is... everyone's like that-- but I know going back to Stef and Witsup, like often when she's showing a race she'll get loads of comments like, can you show the men's race? Can you -- And it was like, the name of the company is Witsup! Women in triathlon. We are... and you do show some of the men's race and she does go and take pictures and stuff, but it's quite funny from that respect as well.

Kelly: Yeah... and sexist comments online... We're not going to get -- that's another topic for another podcast!

I'm looking forward to Miami and I also looking forward to super league and I'm looking forward to iron man live coming back. All of them. We're watching all of the triathlon all the time. So

Laura Siddall: I think everyone, yeah, everyone just wants. And then, the ITU races as well, they were always pretty good to watch. I think we just all the craving for that start line now aren't we? And whether that's, whether we're watching it or we can be there in person and they were just hoping it happens at some point soon. Yeah.

Kelly: I binged the Olympics straight for three weeks, so

Laura Siddall: Well, there's some sports on the Olympics that I do...I do probably draw a line at, but most of them, most of the sports when it's Olympics, I'm like just I'll watch anything. I just love it. Absorb it.

Kelly: Thank you so much for giving us a breakdown and letting us know how to watch all that. And we will keep our eye out.

Laura Siddall: Thanks, Kelly.

Kelly: This week we're talking to Gabriela Gallegos, founder, head of race El Paso. Also, you serve on all the boards you serve on the USA triathlon board. You serve on the America's boards. You serve on now, the world triathlon executive board, which I want to talk about because I think people don't even know what all those boards do and they are, and it's very confusing. But first off you're in Texas. Are you able to train right now in the snow? Is it...Do you guys have the gear?

Gabriela Gallegos: Yes. So I'm El Paso, right? And I'll pass this on the far West tip of Texas, so right...snuggled up against Mexico and New Mexico. So we did have snow this week, but we still have power, thankfully. So yes, people who've been outside nobody likes going outside when it's too cold, but we can, so we're good.

Kelly: Okay. So you like are still racing...training outside, biking outside.

Gabriela Gallegos: Training outside, biking outside, yes all that.

Kelly: And you actually--

Gabriela Gallegos: But not pools! pools have been closed all year. So that is the one thing that we have not had access to for awhile.

Kelly: Wow. I didn't realize pools were still closed in Texas. Cause Ironman Texas is supposed to happen in like...a month.

Gabriela Gallegos: Well Texas is a very big state. So El Paso pools are closed. Austin has had them open pretty much the entire time and other places as well. But ours have, there's a few that are available, but the most used like city pools, the biggest network is not.

Kelly: That does make it hard, obviously both as an athlete, but as a race director.

Cause you guys, you put on five races and I know you...you had to cancel them last year. You've been able to do a lot. And then you like to give your athletes obviously enough time. To kind of prepare, get back in the water. And how has that all been going? Are you even planning for races this year?

Gabriela Gallegos: So, yes. We just announced Mighty Mujer triathlon El Paso for April 24th, and we are doing a little bit differently in many different ways. One of which is that there will be no swim component for two reasons, but both of them have already been mentioned. One, we haven't really had, you know, equal access to pool space, right?

During the summer, some clubs pools and the Ys have been open, but that's not that many pools, across the city and the city pools have been closed, the county pools have been closed. I don't think adequate preparation is likely, when nobody's

been in the water for a year and we didn't want to throw everybody in a couple of days before.

And then also it's an enclosed space. So we do that race as a pool swim because we're in the desert and there's no open water. And so that created its own public health concern. So any of those enclosed spaces were not going to be a good idea,

Kelly: Got it. Okay. And so let's, before, like we're going to talk all about race directing and what it involves, because I don't think we've had a race director really like on the podcast yet, but first off, you didn't grow up doing triathlon. You did your first triathlon as an adult, and then you just got stuck. Like you just kept doing it. And I think it was just like a friend convinced you come try a sprint, right?

Gabriela Gallegos: So it was like... I was on a business trip, actually. I'm a lawyer by background and I was on a trip with another attorney and ran into her at the hotel gym and then talked about it later.

And she was training for an Olympic distance race in Austin. I lived in Dallas at the time and she gave me the intro of...Oh, there's different distances and this is what that looks like, and yeah, I'm doing it. And, so it kind of opened that door because before that I had been active, but never really been, aware of how races worked.

Of course you knew about runs, but not so much about triathlons. So I got into it and bought my first bike since I was like 12 to do a triathlon, which which, the bike shop thought was pretty funny, but it was great.

Kelly: And and I guess like there just, aren't a ton of races in El Paso. You mentioned there isn't open water, but once you started getting into it, you realized that there just weren't a ton of options.

I know, obviously, like you said, Texas is big. I'm from California. I always say that. California is big, lots of different things. And so there are races in Austin, sure, in Dallas, but not so much like where you are.

Gabriela Gallegos: Yeah. So I was living in Dallas when I started racing. So I was doing events there and then Austin and I am from El Paso. I moved back a few years later and kind of was starting my life and career and stuff here. And that was one of my biggest concerns about moving actually is I found this thing that I love. I'm enjoying it. There's sprints, there's access to clubs and people who are doing it on a regular basis.

I know where to find a bike ride on Saturday morning that I can just go join up with. And I didn't know if that was going to be available here. And so when I moved to El Paso, it was --gosh I think I was. It was about 12 years ago. And it was, I'd been gone for 15 years and so it was not, an easy entry in that, I didn't know people who lived here anymore in the same ways that I did when I was in high school.

And had to really look to connect with cyclists and runners. And there is a strong swimming community because we have really strong high school swimming here. But figuring out what does that look like as an adult was challenging. I was able to find kind of a small tight-knit community that were very experienced athletes,

triathletes, runners, cyclists, and that was helpful because they could show me like where to ride, right?

You're not going to go, just go ride on a main street in the middle of the city. You're going to figure out what are the routes that cyclists are using to train. So I got introduced to some of that and then realized that the group of triathletes that were already triathletes were traveling for events.

So they were going to Tempe. They were going to Austin. We had some that were nearby at White Sands missile range. So they were on base property and they were very small and very bare bones. That's your timed. It wasn't a USAT sanctioned race. It was, again, fun and nearby, but small bare bones and not of the quality and scale of races that I had been used to and that I had been really introduced to.

Kelly: Obviously there's people all over the country that that's true, right ... there isn't a triathlon in the backyard. And most people are just like, oh well. *You* decided to make one though.

Gabriela Gallegos: The other thing that was happening at the same time was that, so I moved to El Paso and realized that there was...I was noticing things around town that I had never seen when I had been in high school. Like, dialysis places and not a whole lot of trails. And all of those things I think, combined with the, and we don't have events..In my mind to think that, if people had the opportunity and had a goal that they could set and had a good introduction to that, it could be a gateway to a healthy lifestyle. And so those things for me, converged at the same time where my eyes were opened to, we have challenges with obesity, diabetes, heart disease, all of the diet-related diseases that come into play in a more sedentary community.

Kelly: And what does it take then to be like... Okay. I want to get-- I, I've done, I've put on races and I don't think they ever grew more than 50 people. What does it take to really put a race on and make it, successful, big, get it on TV, attract like hundreds and hundreds of people?

Gabriela Gallegos: So I, my first step was to go get trained as a race director through USAT. Like honestly, one is that I'm an attorney, right? So I see liability everywhere. And so I needed to make sure that I had done my homework to understand what I had to consider. And then I assembled what I thought was the best team I could find. And so I went a little bit overboard with that, right?

Like my registration captain was an accountant and my safety captain was the highest ranked marine in El Paso at the time. So I really did assemble the best people that I could find to help. And we sat around the table multiple times, going through every scenario that we could imagine. All of us had been triathletes. So we knew it from the athlete perspective. So as we were doing that, we were walking through our own experience and trying to troubleshoot if this happens, what do we do? If this happens, what do we do? How do we make a better experience? So one of the things that happened is that first race sold out and we had 450 people sign up and over 80% of those were first-timers.

So I freaked out. Because my experience had been that as a newbie, you ask the person next to you, how to set up your stuff, right? Like you're in transition kind of

a little bit nervous. You don't know what to do, but you can watch and ask. These guys will not have anyone to ask ...

Kelly: If 80% of them are new.

Gabriela Gallegos: Right. And I was getting calls and questions that were. Who watches my bike and where do I change? And just, they were already excited about doing it and the concept, but really didn't have... there was no friend they could ask who had done it before. There was no colleague that they'd met on a business trip that could walk them through it. And so that was... that was when we started doing clinics. And so we held a beginner's briefing and took out a bike, took out all the equipment that you would need for a transition. We had over 150 people show up to that. And so right away it was... okay. People are hungry for information, excited about doing this, And we just need to make sure that they're going to be as well-equipped as possible so that they can have an enjoyable race and so that we can keep it safe because that of course was the other side of the concern. If people don't get it and show up ill-equipped, nobody's going to have a good experience.

Kelly: I've definitely seen that, like the people who've been riding inside all winter and then they do their one race with that... So it's always a little dangerous for sure. But it ended up being really successful. And now Mighty Mujer obviously has become an example for other race directors on how to -- one, both grow from a small grassroots, but also attract a really wide range of beginners, a really diverse community.

Mighty Mujer was an all women's race, but. And then I'm trying to, it wasn't like a super beginner ... pink it and shrink it women's race.

Gabriela Gallegos: Right. Yeah. So the first race was actually Eagle in the Sun triathlon. And two years later was when I started Mighty Mujer. And part of that was because I saw what we saw in the triathlon industry at the time. I was getting 70% men and 30% women. So started from there and realized that there was a real need for there to be an opportunity for women to race with each other and to feel well-equipped. So that clinic idea that we had learned from that first event was just carried to the next level with Mighty Mujer.

The race in El Paso is on a challenging course. So it is a sprint or super sprint, but the course itself is tough. So it's very hilly. You need to be able to control your speed, both going up and down. All of those sorts of things were at play. Even the run is a hilly run, even though it's short, so did not want it to be easier, lesser than...kind of a throwaway because it was an all female race.

So that was all very purposeful that it was going to feel like an accomplishment, no matter who you were, whether it was your first time or your 37th time. I felt strongly after what I had seen with that first race, that it is important for very experienced athletes to have a fantastic experience, as well as beginners and that when they're in the same race, there's a lot to be learned on both ends.

The person who has done 30 races and is asked a very basic question by a beginner is transported to like...Oh, I remember my first race. Like I remember what that was like. Maybe I haven't been around a whole lot of people who were beginners at

this point in my triathlon experience. But they're transported back and they can give tips and they enjoyed that, and it kind of takes some of the the blinders off, of-- I'm here to race. I'm only thinking about myself. I only do this when they are asked, where do I put my, like, how does this work? Do I set up here? And so it kind of disarms both directions.

Kelly: Do you ever worry though? I remember my very first iron man and iron man was overwhelming because of all the bags and the, and I was asking some random person. And in retrospect, his advice was terrible. It was awful. He was going to smoke a joint, like in the middle of the race, put it in his special needs. Do you ever worry about that? You're like, Ooh. This isn't great.

Gabriela Gallegos: We have had a *lot* of clinics and we also, you can include in pockets a, I think we've done it as an optional handout, like at packet pickup what to expect in your first race. So anybody who's going through who is like, oh, that's me grabs that.

And it literally is a step-by-step what to expect. So how did that, there's been some... I am anti-bucket people, right? Bring the bucket to set up at their transition. I get it. I understand, having a little stool is helpful. But it is not great for space and for, all that kind of stuff.

Kelly: Okay. So when I'm sure... At this point, a lot of people come other race directors. Like I know that like Mighty Mujer has been really successful and I know other race directors come to you and they're like how do I make my event attract more women, attract more communities of color. What do you tell them? Cause there's ...where it's not just do these three things.

Gabriela Gallegos: It is not "just do these three things". Really it's integrated into everything you do. Mighty Mujer had generally starts with a social kickoff, right? And that is meant to be a non-intimidating place where you can come learn more about the event, ask your questions, hear people.

So we invite a number of women to share their stories and who is invited to share their story is very deliberate, right? So it is a range of ages, a range of athletic backgrounds and body types, a range of race. We want to see that intersectionality come out in who we ask to speak, because anybody who's there should be able to identify with something, if they're listening to somebody and then they learn oh, they're a single mom with two kids who are in high school and they're juggling all this stuff. Like oh, I can identify with that. If they're identifying with a 65 year old black woman who did her first race last year, they might identify with the "oh, I've never done this before, but if she could do it at 65, I could".

Or they might identify with "you look like me, this is for me, and you felt like this was a great community". So trying to make sure that we're not portraying one stereotypical vision of what it means to be a woman or a triathlete, I think has been important. And then that carries through everything, right?

That carries through the branding, through the social media, through the stories we tell, through the instruction through... it has to be really integrated in how you see what you're doing, and I think that makes a difference.

Kelly: It's tough though, because if you're not involved with every single Instagram post...how do you make sure it's exactly right.

Gabriela Gallegos: You can't, right? Micromanaging is very hard. But there's some things that, can be weighted. There have been times I'm like, we need to make sure we're showing a range of ages. We haven't been lately. What does that look like? We want to show a range of women, right?

And like women from different backgrounds. I haven't seen-- so even if it is not necessarily in every post, if you are thinking about showing a big range and have certain things in mind that you want to be able to convey. I think that kind of becomes part of your brand, right? And that becomes part of your team, and what they are thinking about and caring about.

Kelly: And now I know last year, I'm pretty sure you quit. Your, you were doing this on the side and then you quit your actual big lawyer job to be a full-time race director and then COVID happened.

Gabriela Gallegos: So I actually have not practiced law full time in about 10 years. [Oh, okay.]

But you still, I quit. I did quit my big law job, but that was quite a while back. So I did that. Gosh. I don't even remember the year, but at a certain point, once we had added three events, I decided if I really cared about trying to get the community more active and really play a big role in that, that I needed to do it full-time.

So I had been doing kind of small appointments here or there and there, but not...but not practicing law full-time. I actually started a new position a year ago, which is what you might've been thinking about because I don't have enough on my plate. And that was, I had just started that in February before all of the COVID hit in March, so.

Kelly: Okay. And that was with the University of Texas as like a. Yeah...like a public health professor? And I think that kind of ties together what you were saying before about triathlon and public health. And do you see in that job, do you see triathlon playing a role in improving public health in the community?

Gabriela Gallegos: I really do. I think that... One of the things that I think I approach triathlon in my own work was I wasn't approaching it as a, I'm just putting on a race and then leaving. And then I'm putting on a race and then leaving. It's a, I need to help people get ready for it. I am not trying to make this a one-time bucket list deal.

I'm trying to make this something that now helps you fall in love with active living. This is a gateway to that. It's going to be more races in the future, which is going to be good for me. So it's not as though I'm setting that aside, but it's the sort of thing that we've then seen, especially with Mighty Mujer--the woman has led the family, and you see kids wanting to go for a bike ride because now they know that their mom goes for bike rides to train and you see full families outside. More and going for walks and going for runs. And maybe the mom and dad are running and the kids are on bikes behind them, or, whatever that looks like. It has been

something that opens that world up for more people. And so it really has been treated as a, we want to, I've always wanted to shift culture.

And that is what I felt like this could do. So I think that triathlon can play a part in that, by being that gateway because. It's accessible to a lot of people, of course we have the added benefits of cross training and switching things up if you get injured, and all of those sorts of things, it's also something that you can do, with kids with older folks, it has a big range, so you can come in and out of the competitive piece of it, but if you fall in love with the swimming, biking, and running...you'll come back.

Kelly: We call it the lifestyle... Okay. But you were going to expand last year. You were going to have a race in Miami. It was supposed to be ...

Gabriela Gallegos: So Mighty Mujer had expanded... at this point, it has been in Tucson, El Paso, Miami and Austin. We were able to do Miami and Austin one year. And then COVID hit. So we did not have any live racing anywhere last year.

Kelly: So how does one maintain a race production company with no races?

Gabriela Gallegos: It favored the creative, right? So we did do virtual events and pivoted to that in, I think the first kind of virtual something that we put on was in May, because of course the first thought was if we postponed to July, we'll be fine by then. Like surely if we shut down for a few weeks, like this will pass and we'll be good in July. So we were kind of doing that as many of us were, not realizing the extent and longevity and critical nature of what was to come. So we did pivot to start doing virtual events. In May we did one that was purely a fundraiser. So we got a sponsor to help... I started worrying about all the people who are going to be affected if we can't race. And one is our charitable partner.

And so we did that first virtual event, just as a fundraiser. So people would run, walk or bike a mile. We got a donation for that mile. So that was how we started out. What we saw right away was that everybody was hungry for a goal because it all been in, shutdown and things have been very restricted. You were in California, right? So you were at some points, not able to train outside.

Kelly: There were some places that were pretty locked down for sure. For sure. Not as bad as like Spain where you literally couldn't leave your house.

Gabriela Gallegos: Yes. We did not have to show anything to be out and about, but even still, everybody had been... Feeling this abrupt transition of life.

So everything, all of a sudden had changed. People were managing school and their own work remotely, not quite knowing how also, not knowing how to go from... I can't go to the gym and I like doing this, but I'm not supposed to do it with people, but that's how I do it. So all of that, I think was such a shock to the system that after, as soon as we hit May, it was just please, what can we do?

And it's okay if it's nontraditional, because we want to feel like a community because we have felt isolated and we have, our routines had been disturbed and we're trying to figure out what is that going to look like now? So that was, I think, a good introduction to see what that looked like. And then we did start hosting virtual events.

So when it was all said and done, we did seven last year, different kinds and all came strong. Really like we... our smallest, I believe was about 250 people and our largest was just under a thousand. And so we really did see people excited about it, wanting to see a goal. We did some really fun things with our Mighty Mujer virtual event that took place in July.

Really aiming to make it feel like it was a community event. So we had we had people do videos and we ran them all race weekend. And this was from the city councilperson and long-time volunteers, all familiar faces that they might've seen at the event plus others. And that *felt* like race weekend.

We had people sending in friends and family giving their, shout out to their person who was competing and... that was exciting. We did little things like a finisher kit. So they got a a finish tape to run through at the end and chalk to mark their course and put down motivational messages.

So little things started feeling more like you were part of something that was just not you doing another workout.

Kelly: Cause I've been like, I've been thinking ... looking a lot at the different kinds of virtual events, because I think we're all a little tired of the “oh, just go out and run a 5k on your own and let us know how it went””.

So yeah, I've been looking at a lot of the different designs, like the, doing it over like a rolling week, having a course mark that you can go and do any your time on your own. There's like some interesting models out there. There's one. Oh, I've seen like one where you go into it, but then it's like age graded... The results so that you can feel like you're still in like an age group and all that kind of stuff. Yeah.

Gabriela Gallegos: And so I did not do awards for my virtual events because again, [I know it's weird] not clear... is there's a lot of problems with that. I'm... I applaud the race directors who found an effective way to do it.

I also didn't do it on a specific course just because people were all over the place. And I started seeing that was better for attracting people from outside of the city, so that we had people from a bunch of different states that were all doing it. For that event in particular, doing it over one weekend was important because it started feeling like race weekend, because you really knew that everybody was out doing it those couple of days, rather than, like it's over two weeks and that sort of thing. An event that I did put on at the end of the year, and that was the one that was just under a thousand people was supposed to be focused on El Paso specifically. So that was called a Run the 915. 915 is the area code.

And we challenged people to create teams and to either do 9.15 miles 91.5 or 915. And so we ended up having these giant teams from, I think we had something like 25 different States and a few other countries. Yeah. All joining on this team. And 915 miles is a lot! So you had to kind of build up the number of people who were part of your team.

And we did it over 15 days. And so that was one that we really saw people who might not have already been runners get in on it. That one was just running specifically. So the good thing about the virtual events is that we have this

opportunity to bring in people who were not previously active. And since people have been confined, what they can do is go outside, go for a walk, go for a run.

And so I think we're trying to engage them and hopefully they'll become part of racing, when...

Kelly: Oh, yeah. That's our plan too is I think, or not our plan, but our hope, there's a lot of people who took up running a lot of people who bought bikes... now let's convince them to do a triathlon. But virtual events are great and it's good to give the community something. Do you make...do you stay in business? How, like, how does the race directing business work?

Gabriela Gallegos: It is tough... the good thing, I told my admin assistant race director who has been just amazing and does a lot of the production side.

And when we were done with the first virtual and we're like, so virtual events. Just as much work, no permits. And that was kinda like...hmm. So. It takes a lot to put those on. What has been important is relationships with vendors, right? And I think a lot of people don't think about all of those next level components of race production, right?

So the, certain vendors and timers, cause I bring in an outside timer. So all of that kind of stuff, they've all been affected too. And so because I had long standing relationship with certain vendors, we were able to negotiate good prices, we were able to bundle things. We were able to do some of that at a decent price point.

We also got smarter with what was being offered and how to do it and how to hedge because you don't want to worry about sizes, or that kind of stuff. So we kind of learned how to do that. The part that was a little bit tough was making that work right for everyone. So my philosophy was looking at different events separately. So Mighty Mujer had, has a very specific brand. It has a strong following and people love buying the merchandise. And so that event in particular, we upped what that looked like for our participants. So our fall Mighty Mujer had, they got leggings, they got a beanie. They kind of got a winterized outfit.

In the spring one, there was also a tank top. So we added to what they would be receiving so that it was a package that was really valued at more than they were paying. But on our end, we were able to control those costs because we were working with vendors that were really long-standing partners.

For other events, we made it very simple, right. For Run the 915, you got a hoodie and a medal and that's it. No bag, no number, no anything else, because we could control the costs. We could set a certain amount that was going to be our sellout point.

And we could afford to mail it. We could do all of these things to keep certain things under control. We got creative really. For that event, as well as for the Mighty Mujer that was originally based in El Paso, we had a lot of community members, right? So our strongest number of participation -- of participants was from here.

I did the math on what the mailing was going to be, and it was insane. And it was insane because we had not initially planned for it to be virtual right... stuff. And,

the swag and all that was not stuff that was easy to mail or light. Like it was not designed to be that. So we ended up getting creative with that.

And I have an ambassador team that is incredible and we asked them to do home deliveries. And so literally developed by zip code who will deliver where, got gift certificates for gas. And, they got a magnet to put on their car with the race brand. And and they got an outfit so that if they were delivering to somebody's house, they knew who was coming since it obviously wasn't UPS this time.

So we got creative with that and it ended up actually being this personal touch, that I think everybody appreciated. So we started hearing stories of wow, somebody put a sign on their door, welcoming us because they knew that their delivery was coming today. So it ended up being this way to have community. Even when we were just dropping thing at doors, we set up a good system.

Kelly: I ... I did I did my first like virtual kind of race ...or not virtual, sorry, first race. That was like socially, you had a time over two days to go. Met some guy in a parking lot, gave me my stuff out the back of his van. I feel like we're all going way grassroots these days.

Gabriela Gallegos: It's just like with, zoom and WebEx and all of the video meetings. Everybody has a glimpse into the other part of your life. You see backgrounds, dogs, like you see what real life actually looks like.

Kelly: Rightt. So yeah, it's interesting.

You're also on the USA triathlon board. And you've been doing that for a few years and I know. On a larger national scale. They've been seeing these issues and these problems like across the board. And what is you---what is USAT doing? What can they do? What are you seeing? Cause they obviously have also been hit by, the lack of races, the lack of memberships, all of that kind of thing.

Gabriela Gallegos: Yeah. So USA Triathlon is a great organization, and really has a broad array of functions within the industry. So for those who don't know kind of the range of that, there's everything from race directors to athletes, to coaches, to elite, to the Olympic team, all of that is kind of under different functional areas through USA Triathlon and kind of touches it one way or another.

A lot of the revenue comes from memberships and most people are buying memberships because they're racing. And because that race is a USAT sanctioned race. And so that's where the insurance comes from and, that's a big piece of that. So that part has been, devastating like it has been in a lot of places.

I think USAT has done an amazing job at also getting creative, figuring out what's next. And they've really been a leader in developing return-to-racing guidelines, and did that early and did that for, the full race director community. It also helps give athletes an idea of what this might look like, going forward that I think was really important. Changing what the value proposition looks like for members and really thinking about that, I think has been important.

Kelly: You mean like now they get a triathlete magazine also! You know, things like that.

Gabriela Gallegos: Yes! exactly like that. So it, it matters because it's more than like it's the question early on is can you be a triathlete if you're not doing triathlons? What does this look like? And will you be a member? If you are not racing, because if your only reason for doing that was because you were required to, because that was the race's insurance, what else do you got?

So really looking at resources and I think developing those, offering members more benefits with partners, right? Like it, it could be different sponsors that can be in know Triathlete Magazine is a great example of that, but really trying to figure out how to be efficient and effective. But really offering members great value that is beyond just racing,

Kelly: And what does, as a board member, -- we've had Ben Collins on before and he kind of told us -- what are you guys actually doing ... with any of that? You're not actually deciding like how...what a membership is going to include and what discounts a member is going to get. So what do you guys actually decide?

Gabriela Gallegos: Yeah so it is, of course, USAT has a staff, right? And the staff does the day-to-day operations and we're not involved in day-to-day operations of the organization. It's much more thinking about the strategic leadership, right? Like where do we want to see USAT going?

What are the important goals? How can we serve members? What are our values? All of those kinds of things are happening at the board level. So it's really the governance, right? And the strategic leadership, a lot of people are familiar with nonprofit boards of directors. This is a nonprofit board of directors, and so it is coming from a different place in people's lives. So they may not think of it that way, as that kind of an organization. But it is, it truly is. And it needs that strategic leadership to go in a different direction, or to consider what's next. So it happens at that level rather than at the ... "how much is a good discount".

Kelly: And what is the strategic direction of USAT? What is next?

Gabriela Gallegos: So we go through this every couple of years, right? As we're looking at, like the next quiet it was how the direction looks. So we've looked at things like diversity. What does that mean for the organization and what is that going to look like going forward? What are the priorities? Members, how do you better serve members and how do you increase the number of people who are triathletes and make triathlon that sport? Just like we talked about, like, how do you make it that gateway for people that can be a lifelong sport? It can be more than just an event for them. It can be a lifestyle where they're getting healthy, being active, all of those sorts of things, too.

Kelly: And have you come up with an answer?

Gabriela Gallegos: It's an ongoing process. And things change and things come up and, how do you do that? And what does the organization structurally need to be able to move forward?

And that changes here and there. And then some of it is very basic, right? Like the things that USAT has now invested a lot in are trying to like get technology where

we need it. Cause some of that has been a challenge. If the membership system is really cumbersome and nobody likes it and they're not going to use this as a resource. So things like that to be able to offer more and better, I think is a big piece of it.

Kelly: And then you were elected to the world? Well, it was called ITU. Now we're calling it World Triathlon Board-- earlier this year and I believe I don't know that the USA, sorry--the executive board cause World Triathlon has a number of boards.

And I believe like there, you're like the first woman of color on that board? Which is cool. And then what exactly does the executive board -- cause world triathlon, I think a lot of athletes like don't how does world triathlon even affect me? Isn't that just the Olympics? What do I care?

Gabriela Gallegos: Right now, a lot of it is the Olympics.

Kelly: So, can you tell us if the Olympics are going to happen?

Gabriela Gallegos: This is a lot of what we're talking about right now, but yeah ... so world triathlon, formerly ITU has an executive board much like the, USAT board in terms of talking about the strategic direction of the organization and priorities.

There are also a bunch of committees, right? So there's a women's committee, a coach's committee, that are focused on more specific things. World Triathlon strategic direction has been trying to now increase the number of age groupers and how do they get pulled into what world triathlon events look like?

And then a large part of it is looking at that elite level competition, especially right now. So they're governing, how do you get into the Olympics? And when, and what does that look like? And although each country has different ways of making that determination. There's also things that happen at that world level that are trying to ensure fairness and equity for all.

Kelly: There's like a world process. So are you deciding. Like the world, it's this ... you? Yes.

Gabriela Gallegos: We are not deciding all things, but we are deciding something. The qualification period froze in mid-March last year and that has not been reopened yet. And it's very, it's... A big challenge and it's been very eye-opening to see how things are dealt with in different parts of the world.

And then also to understand how COVID has been affecting different parts of the world, developing nations versus much more developed large versus small, regionally, all of those sorts of things. And for people who are thinking about world scale competition, and then we're talking about athletes who are...they are at the very top of all of this. How is that going to be kept fair? If not everybody can travel, if not everybody's had access to training opportunities. Maybe couldn't go to events that would then be qualifying them for Olympic competition. So it's. It's very complicated, and there's a lot of different things to consider in addition to the basic, how do we keep people, everyone keep everyone healthy.

Kelly: I thought they only did a couple of races this last year. I thought they had pretty good protocols. Obviously there were some very last minute like... it's going

to be a world championship in four days, the decisions that were kind of nutty, but it happens.

Gabriela Gallegos: And now, the situation. Keeps evolving, there seems to not be like a, “and then by this date we will have an answer!” so it's that challenge that I think we've all been facing in different parts of our lives. It's not unique to those parts of our lives, and it's happening at every level.

And then when it's happening at the world scale, your... the travel stuff has been even further beyond what we're imagining, cause some. Some places are restricted from traveling, not just outside their country, but within different states or provinces.

Kelly: You talking about Australia? You're talking about Australia.

Gabriela Gallegos: I actually have been thinking about a couple of places in South America...might be restricted from traveling outside of certain areas. So even like within the country, there's restrictions on mobility based on where you're located. So one area of the country might be much more open, much more, even much more ready to host an event. But another area of the same country is under a much stricter mobility restriction.

Kelly: So the World Triathlon Board. Exactly what, obviously you're like, I'm assuming you're meeting on zoom. You're all meeting on zoom. You're like voting on, we're going to not open the qualification period until May, all this stuff.

You mentioned that you're trying to expand in age group too, because on an age group like day-to-day regular triathlete level. Like most of us think, oh, like the 70.3 worlds, Kona world. It's... and then you have to think, Oh yeah, like ITU world triathlon has a Worlds too. So what are you guys doing that affects the everyday regular...

Gabriela Gallegos: So it's one of the things that has been really eyeopening is seeing what that looks like in different parts of the world. So I think in Europe, the age group interest and participation in world triathlon events is much stronger, but then in the US Ironman kind of has that same kind of level of participation, even though it's obviously it's private, not world triathlon, that kind of stuff, but in the US I don't think that there's the same level of exposure to those types of events, even though some people travel for them, of course.

But it is something that I think could be expanded. We just have a different kind of network of events that are here, but in other parts of the world, the age group component of world triathlon events has been gaining a lot of grounds and it's been more than just an elite competition, even though frankly, who doesn't want to go watch an elite competition? That is fun.

Kelly: Yeah. There are obviously world triathlon-- ITU has events. Everybody does compete in age group worlds. That is like a very large thing. And they've been expanding in recent years, you get like long course worlds now you get to -athlon where there's a whole multi-sport festival. Yeah, it's an interesting question because I think people don't, there's even like rules world triathlon makes that then trickle down to, USAT that then trickle down to like your local event that people, not everyone necessarily realizes...

Gabriela Gallegos: Oh, absolutely. So one of the things that happened last year with. I'm trying to remember. I'm like, if I say last year, how far am I? I'm actually talking about the end of 2019. So there was, rules harmonization that, one of our board members, took the lead on and was really working with a committee on and is to make sure that our rules are close in line with world triathlon, right? So that it's not this, well if I'm racing here, it's a totally different set. And if I'm racing there and we will still have differences, but certain things that could be made more uniform so that if an athlete is racing at multiple multiple levels or in different places, they have closer to a standard of this is just the rule.

Yeah. And those do end up affecting individual athletes at any race that they might be in large or small. Whether it's, if it's a USAT sanctioned race.

Kelly: And obviously there have also been recommendations about moving forward with things now and on world triathlon, can't tell some race director in Texas what they should do, but they can make recommendations that USAT adopts it, then...

Gabriela Gallegos: Absolutely. Yeah. And hopefully if you're, racing somewhere, you can kinda go anywhere and know what a race looks like, and what's expected of you when you're racing.

Kelly: Back in times when we traveled places, it would always be wildly different. It was like in Europe, they followed some rules. In China they were making it up as they went. It was always like, whoa, this is crazy. All right. We usually finish with the, would you rather and here is my, would you add it for you, Gabriela? Would you rather race or race direct?

Gabriela Gallegos: Oh, GOSH. Oh, you're making me choose, this is terrible! I'm going to go with race direct because of the amount of... I think satisfaction and like, it has been so incredibly rewarding to watch so many people find this and to be part of helping them achieve that. And I've seen, I've gotten so many incredible stories from people and as a race director, you sometimes lose sight of that. Because you're in the technical. Yeah. And trying to produce and be very detail oriented, and make sure things are moving forward and efficiently. And then sometimes I'm just hit by this out of nowhere random email with a story and a thank you. And you are [back] grounded, and realize like it, it does actually matter.

And it really is making a difference in people's lives that I don't know. And so that I find really great reward in that community aspect of things.

Kelly: I get that. Yeah, we're not all... we can't all inspire people with our racing.

Gabriela Gallegos: I am not going to, I cannot imagine that I'm going to inspire a whole lot of people while they, just see me riding my bike...others might! Because they will have a different story that has gotten out there, but me personally, as again, a recreational level athlete, it's a different story.

Kelly: I get that. It makes sense. We can't all be Gwen Jorgensen. It's fine.

Thank you so much for chatting with us. And and I really hope there are races this year.

Gabriela Gallegos: There will be. We're making it happen.

Kelly: Thanks to Gabriela and to Sid for talking with us and thanks to all of you for subscribing wherever you get your podcasts. Keep listening and keep training.