

The Triathlete Hour Ep. 50 - Chris Mosier

Kelly: Welcome to the Triathlete Hour. We have a special episode this week. We're talking to Chris Mosier, the first trans athlete to represent team USA, which he did in triathlon, and the first trans athlete to compete in the Olympic Trials, which oddly he did in race walking. Chris and I talk about race walking and about what running meant to him when he was trying to sort out the questions he had around his gender identity.

How he navigated triathlon and how he's trying to be a role model for other trans kids now. Chris is always interesting and thoughtful and I'm sure you'll enjoy this conversation as much as I did, even though we had a few internet blipping out moments, just stay with us and it'll be worth it. I promise. After this break.

All right. This week, we're talking to Chris Mosier, known for being the first trans athlete on team USA. First trans athlete to compete at the Olympic Trials, I just found out, in race walking. How did you...I got very fascinated by this and I want to find out how someone ends up race walking.

Chris Mosier: Yeah, it's a great question. It's so funny. People were like, was it harder for you to come out as a trans man or as a race walker? And I was like, definitely as a race walker. I just didn't tell anybody I was doing it. I, the way I got into it was that I have a friend who trains at the same place that I train and was, is the number five race walker in the country.

And he's always trying to recruit people for the sport. I did not know. He asked everybody and gave this pitch to everybody. I just was the one who fell for it. He said have you ever thought about race walking? And I was like, yeah, no, absolutely not. And he said I think you'd be really good at it.

And I think that you may have a potential to go to the Olympic Trials. And I was like, 'Oh, tell me more.' That's really... I'm a pretty easy sell I guess, but he gave me some lessons. He worked with me and, I did a couple of races and ended up in the Olympic Trials last year. So it was a very fun journey.

Kelly: It was one of the ones where the Olympic Trials actually got to happen before kind of COVID shut everything down, right?

Chris Mosier: Yeah. Correct. And so really, interestingly enough, no one actually qualified for the Olympics at that race just on time. And so it went to a point system and I'm a very newcomer, I didn't think I'd actually make it to the Olympics, but going to the Olympic Trials was just incredible.

It was so awesome.

Kelly: Yeah. I have so many more question about race walking but I suppose we'll talk about triathlon eventually... How does one practice race walking? How do you even learn? Because the rules are, you have to have one foot on the ground at all times, right?

Chris Mosier: One foot on the ground at all times by the human eyes.

So it's, if you slow it down then people are definitely going faster than that, but also your front leg has to be straight knee until it's underneath your body. So your foot has to be under your hips before you can bend your knee. And that's the biggest difference between... You know that and running.

It's funny because triathlon is my love and I came into triathlon through running, but to go into race walking, it's reminded me of getting into swimming when I first started tris in that we're not, I'm not, I don't have a swimming background. And I think any triathlete who does not have a swimming background can probably relate to me on this one: Of saying there are just so many things to think about when you are in the pool. So compared to running, I can go out and run. I can think about anything. I can space out. I can. I wrote my reading, my wedding vows when I was running ... like I, I'm a very good multi-tasker when I'm running.

But for swimming and for racewalking, it was like, there are so many technical points that make all the difference that I really had to be attentive to. So it was a, it was just a big challenge to do it. Yeah. Same like any other sport, you just practice a lot. So I was walking a lot and for me, the biggest challenge was like, I know I can run twice as fast.

So like slowing down, keeping walking and doing that, was tough, but it was super fun to learn a new sport and to be a beginner and a novice at something again because I think when you are in a sport, like triathlon, for a decade or more, we take a lot of things for granted, we take a lot of things for granted, and to have those experiences where I was showing up to a race and it was my first time there, and I didn't know how it worked, it gave me a lot of perspective on how people feel coming to races now. And my athletes who are first-timers or want to do their first tri, like the nervousness, the emotions, the process of that.

So it was a really good reset for me. Yeah.

Kelly: And you were, I want to get this right. So you were the first trans athlete to compete in the Olympic Trials in their like, identified gender. But I was under the impression that there had been, we think two trans athletes at the Olympics before from other countries, they just didn't come out.

They weren't like public about it. Is that, am I wrong about that?

Chris Mosier: There are, there have been no out transgender athletes in the Olympics ever. Okay. So that's... yeah. And right now we know that there's an athlete who came out after Rio who will be going to Tokyo. And so they will definitely be the first trans athlete.

Cause they've already qualified. There's a Paralympian who's already qualified. So we know that there will be at least two, if not more, in Tokyo, but never anyone who's been out and open about their identity and then participating.

Kelly: Got it. Okay. Because yeah, obviously we'll get some more into that and everything, but there were lots of rules and speculation and that kind of thing.

But you mentioned that learning to triathlon and finding running, I know you played team sports as a kid and you kind of quit for a long time and then found

running and then found triathlon later in college. What kind of drove you back to sports, you know?

Chris Mosier: Yeah. So I stepped away from organized team sports in college.

So I was a three sport all-conference athlete in high school, volleyball, basketball and softball. I actually despised running at that time, which is funny. And my story, now when I made it to college, I wanted to play college basketball and then sort of realized that I didn't want to be on a women's team, but at that time I didn't have the language or the understanding about trans identity.

I didn't know I was trans. And so I just, like, all I knew is that deep in my soul, I did not want to be like on a team where they were saying, "Hey, ladies, let's go." And that, that became maybe the beginning of me really investigating what it meant for me to be identified in that way by other people, because internally I just, I've always felt like me.

I just always felt like this is just who I am and I didn't know how to explain it to other people. And that was really the problem. It wasn't that I felt something was wrong in me. I thought something was wrong with the way people were talking to me and addressing me and what they were expecting of me.

In college I played co-ed sports. So any intramural thing that you can do, team sports, I was playing just so that, in that way, I didn't have to be identified as a woman and I didn't have to be on a women's team. I didn't necessarily have to use locker rooms or restrooms. You just show up at the park and play. Sport has always been a place where I've felt most like myself. I felt like I, even if people didn't really understand me in the rest of the world or in the classroom or outside of school, when I was on a corner of the field, I was respected because we have a common goal because that was my team. That was my family. So sport has always served that purpose for me.

And I think I really missed that when I moved away from competitive sports. I wanted to get back to that. So that's really where I started back in running. You know after college understanding that it's hard to, as an adult to be on a team, right? Once you're after, once you're out of college, you're not going to be on like the rec teams and whatnot.

But for me, it was just more what can I do that would be comfortable for me to do without having to maybe go to a locker room and without having to go to a gym right now and running served that purpose. And so I started running and worked my way up through running and then looking for a new challenge, found triathlon.

Kelly: When you say that you didn't want to, you just...something in you just didn't want to be on play on a women's team, a girl's team, to be referred to as, 'Hey girls.' Let's.. all right, obviously, a lot of our listeners are not trans and so, what does that, what do you mean by that? Why do you, why did you not want to be identified as a woman?

Chris Mosier: It's just because it didn't fit. As a kid it's almost like if my name is Chris and someone was calling me John or Sarah. It's just, that's not my name. That's not who I am.

And so that's exactly, that's as simple as it was for me. It was like, when I was a kid, I had a picture when I was like eight years old. I had a picture of a men's torso, like from a muscle magazine of six pack abs and a flat chest. And like that, that was on my wall. Like, "that's my future." And...just thinking about that. I was an eight year old white girl in, like I'm sure my family was like, I don't understand, I don't get it. We didn't know any trans people and in my mind while I didn't, I couldn't see a future for myself as the person that people told me I was supposed to be.

I never pictured myself getting married and, like I just couldn't picture myself having a job when I got older, because I didn't see what I might look like, what I might be like, how I might be treated in the world. But there was something about that picture where I was like, just envisioning that's my body when I get older. Like I was in karate at that time. I was working out and I was like a little kid, but that's what I thought of myself in the future. And when puberty hit, when I was in school, when I wasn't fitting in with my peers, like the other girls in my class, I was definitely not like them.

There was this... I dunno, it's like a lack of alignment with the expectations for me and the way that I thought that I most comfortably showed up in the world. And so the way it felt like anybody can relate to this feeling of just like something is just not right. Like I just don't feel comfortable with people saying that and the discomfort was that it just wasn't true.

And it just wasn't true. And I just didn't know how to say that to other people, because like you said, the statistics are like 86% of Americans have never met a trans person in real life, or believe that they've never met a trans person in real life. So if you don't know someone like me, then you're not going to know how to talk to me, how to treat me what I, like it's very easy to make a trans person into a monster or into a caricature if you've never met one in real life.

Kelly: I like the "believe" they've never met, because a lot, like you don't know.

Chris Mosier: Okay. Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Kelly: So you started running cause obviously running, you can just do, right? Like you can just go out and run... no one. And I know it took you awhile though, after you started running, and you were racing even as a woman and then it took you awhile kind of to, I hate the term transition, cause I know it comes with all these connotations, but to say no, actually I should be racing in the men's category.

Because then it opens up all these questions, right? Like race directors are like, I don't know how to deal with this. I don't. What do you, like, how does this work?

Chris Mosier: Yeah. That's exactly it. So part of it was, I was racing and I was racing and running because I wanted to reconnect with myself, like my most confident self, my most feeling like I belong the most happened in sports.

So I wanted to reconnect with that part of myself when I left college. But also, I liked what running did to my body, and it made me feel comfortable in my body because in running and lifting weights, as somebody who -- I couldn't at that time have told you that I was trans, but I knew that I felt more comfortable when people called me "he" than "she" and I knew that happened more if I like had a

little bit wider shoulders or if my chest looked a little flatter in my t-shirt. Like those were things that I would think about constantly. And so running and working out helped me to... quote unquote “transition” a little bit before I even knew that's what I was doing.

Yeah that's part of the reason why I got back into it. But when I finally understood my identity, when I knew I was trans, I waited over a year and a half to, to say anything to a race director, because I was terrified I'd lose sport. I wouldn't, if you don't see someone like you doing what you want to do, it's hard to believe that there's space for you, I think about that often in terms of the whiteness of triathlon, right? Like it's a similar journey of saying I didn't know many queer people at all, like lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer people in sport when I was thinking about coming out. I certainly didn't see any transgender men competing with men.

And, I thought like I'm a competitive person. I don't want to give up all of the things that I love about competing in sports in order to be my authentic self. But then at the same time, they came to a point where I was like, I can't not do this because sport is not full-time. Like I need to be comfortable in the 95% of my life where I'm not in a race as well.

Kelly: And I think, we talked a little before. You said that for the most part, your experience with triathlon was fairly welcoming, fairly open once you were like, no, actually I am competing in the men's category. That is where I'm competing. What was people's reactions? Were they like sure, come on. Or was there a lot of skepticism?

Chris Mosier: There's a lot of sexism in sport. And so I think that's like the first part that we need to frame up. So like the perspective is, first of all, I'm a case study of one, right? So while I'm definitely not the first transgender athlete and I know that folks had probably come before me, I just didn't see them.

When I was coming out to different race organizations, different national governing bodies, the reception that I got was largely a shrug of the shoulders and “Okay. We don't know what exactly to do with you, but I don't think this will be a problem because you were assigned female at birth”... and I've actually had people say there's no way you'll be competitive against men.

So just go ahead. And so largely I received the benefit of flying under the radar because of sexism in some ways. And because I also transitioned into privilege. So I went from being an androgynous, quote unquote “woman” or someone perceived as a woman in a relationship with a woman who then transitioned into being perceived as a straight white man.

And, the amount of privilege that I received just in that transition that I was completely unprepared for. It was just like, I got the benefit of the doubt and people were like, okay, whatever. Like it just, it hasn't like it's been almost a non-issue and I've certainly, I've had difficulties, I've had challenging situations.

I've had discrimination. Certainly never read the comments, I've had people at races say things, but largely my teammates, my competitors, even at races, I've just been really welcomed and embraced by the community, which has been really

cool. And there are always outliers of people, but I think overwhelmingly, I've had a very positive experience in transitioning and then even making teams and making ll American, people have just been like, "okay." Just like really an interesting but nice sort of reaction.

Kelly: You blipped out for a second -- but I think, fundamentally your point is that it's perception. You're not going to be competitive with men. A lot of the worry and the concern definitely goes the other direction where there's... for various reasons, right?

Like a lot of angst around men transitioning to women. And you're just like your just saying you didn't have that, right? Like that just wasn't an issue for you.

Chris Mosier: Absolutely. My experience is completely different than any trans woman who just wants to participate in your local weekend race. Me representing our country internationally has been a fraction of the issues that a trans woman faces on a Sunday in her local race.

Kelly: Obviously you ended up being competitive, wasn't an issue. So you have competed, I want to get these all right, you competed for Team USA. And we mean this as an age group level, not at the elite, but you competed for Team USA at the age group level in duathlon worlds, like triathlon worlds, six times. Is that right?

Chris Mosier: Six times. Yep.

Kelly: And now obviously you competed in the Olympic Trials for race walking, and I guess like a lot of people are gonna want to know, how... are you like more competitive now than you were as a kid? Are you, is the competitiveness comparative? How do you think it evens out?

Chris Mosier: Yeah. So there are so many factors, right? And I think one thing that people love to do is to make some hard and fast rule about how competitive a trans person will be if they transition categories. And for me, I think people assumed I would be less competitive. For trans women, they assume they'll be more competitive, but by and large, first of all, we don't have a lot of trans athletes to study who can give you stats on this. And so we're largely lacking information. Anecdotally, I'll say most trans people that I've seen who transitioned that continue to participate in sports are about the same level as their cisgender peers in the category with which they identify.

For me, I felt like I was a competitive female athlete. And then when I transitioned to male, I wanted to be as competitive as I could be. So part of that is that I worked twice as hard. I worked my ass off, because I knew that people would be looking at me and say, you don't belong here.

And I knew, I felt like I had not just my own athleticism on the line, but also I was doing it for my community. I want to be a great representation of trans people for every young kid to be able to look to me and say, no, I can continue to play sports and be who I know that I am. And other people's perceptions of me can, or don't have to be my own limitations.

I felt that responsibility. So I worked extra hard, and I think that, when I first got into triathlon, I only competed for maybe one season? Maybe half a season in the

female category. So I was very new to the sport, so I had a big learning curve too. And so of course my times have got better.

Of course my performance improved because I was new to the sport. It wasn't like I dropped minutes off my mile time. Like, transition doesn't impact us like that. So I think there are a lot of myths and misconceptions about what it means to medically transition. But I think that a lot of the factors are the training and the fact that I just feel free to be myself now.

I would show up at races, I would show up at training and be spending so much time thinking about what other people thought about me, or if someone might say something to me and harass me about my gender, or questioned me about something... that, that is exhausting to spend that much time worrying about how you're standing or if you said something that might out you, or those sort of moments, questioning every interaction.

When I let all that go and just said, this is who I am, and you can like it, or you can hate it, and I don't actually care, because now I feel more comfortable. That was when everything started to change for me in terms of performance, in terms of the effort that I could put into my training and my racing and my relationships and how I showed up in the world.

All of that improved when I just said, you know what? I don't care what anybody else thinks. Yeah.

Kelly: I've actually wondered that about some of the, the larger, bigger fights going on, at the international level about how much testosterone is too much and what quantify, what kind of parameters there should be, that maybe some people perform well just because they don't have to be stressed about all this anymore. They can just be themselves, right?

Chris Mosier: Yeah. A hundred percent. And that's such an interesting topic to bring up too, because I'm always like, do you know *your* testosterone levels? (*Uh, no, I do not.*) Not a lot of cisgender people do. The folks who do know is because there was some sort of medical issue or, if they're transitioning, then we know our levels, but otherwise it's not something that athletes know. And there's such a wide range for both cisgender women and cisgender men. And it overlaps between the two categories.

And so I think that's important to say there's been so much focus on testosterone as the "it" factor for performance, but like 95% of athletes don't know their testosterone levels and testosterone doesn't play sports. So to undermine your training and your performance, simply by an assumption about how much T you might have in your body is a real... It's a real slight to you. And I think that's unfair.

Kelly: There's also, not to get like super in the weeds on this, there's a lot of interesting research on natural testosterone levels. Versus like obviously... like doping causes performance enhancement, but when they've measured testosterone levels, your naturally occurring, and performance, they don't really correlate.

It's not like the people with higher actually do better, but if you boost it artificially, then yeah, you do better. Yeah. So there's like different parts here that are actually really complicated.

Chris Mosier: Yeah. There are certainly some professional cyclists who have screwed up the conversation in terms of transgender athletes.

No, you're absolutely right, like me taking testosterone I'm in the international testing pool, I submit my levels to USADA and WADA, I'm regulated and I'm within the range that cisgender men are in. I did not Hulk out. You can see me...I don't think this is a video podcast, but anybody can go to my Instagram. I'm not like, I didn't beef out, I'm largely the same body type and size that I was before I started taking testosterone. I'd been on it for 11 years now. It's been a long time so it's not a magic substance.

Kelly: You're like, for better or worse, whatever.

Yeah. You said that like you started running and I would imagine coming over to triathlon from running would be a lot more emotionally fraught because running, like you can wear baggy clothes, you can do that, like people don't, but triathlon has changing tents and swimming and lots of spandex. It feels a lot more of a minefield for somebody kind of coming into.

Chris Mosier: Yeah, absolutely. Do you want a funny story about changing tents? I think this is like something that, I heard about changing tents prior to my first Ironman race, which was my first race as male.

And so I was very excited to like, be able to fully show up as myself. And it was the first race that I ran a section, like from the water to the changing tent, without my shirt on, because I had just had top surgery. So I felt the most like myself I had ever felt like in any race. And I had asked the day before, because some of my teammates told me about the changing tent. I just didn't ...I didn't put it together of what it was. And I was like, so are there individual like stalls in there or what? And one of the volunteers the night before told me, yeah, there are individual stalls. So I'm expecting to go into it's like a H&M changing room, which might have like doors or curtains or something.

And I walked in and I was like, oh, I was drastically unprepared for this. I was just... it's certainly something I had not walked through in my mind of of the race beforehand. And I figured out it was easy for me to navigate because I had been in locker rooms before, and it was not a problem, but it was certainly unexpected.

The body consciousness of triathlon, I think, was a challenge for better and worse for me. More than that, I think swimming was my hardest part. Not only because I was new to swimming, but because for my gym to get to the pool, you had to go through one of two locker rooms. And so like initially when I started, I was still competing in the women's category.

I am, I was very androgynous masculine presenting prior to transition. So going into those spaces in a women's room was really contentious for me. And then to change into a women's swimsuit and have to go through that, there was like this question mark of you don't belong here, and then, oh wait a second, actually my bad. Like getting in and out of that room was really problematic. And then when I had top surgery and felt comfortable using men's spaces I started my medical transition. Then there was a fear factor going into those spaces too, because they were unexpected.

I didn't know what it'd be like. I didn't know if I'd be safe. And so swimming became that point of both in terms of my body presentation at the pool, and once you're in the water, no one cares. But like for me, getting to the water was the hardest part. And then, in racing as well with the spandex.

But I think it challenged me to think about my body and what other people thought about my body in different ways.

Kelly: Do you think triathlon and running to a degree then helped you recognize, like who you were in your identity or did it, or was it a challenge, right? Or did it present more obstacles?

Chris Mosier: Swimming was an obstacle, but I think largely, on the whole, it helped me greatly because of the fact that when I'm in competition, I felt like I could fully be myself. And I think I'm my best self when I'm training for something, when I'm, when I have that purpose and when I'm connecting with my body and myself in that way.

So I think it was, it largely helped me. I'm like I said, running, it was my therapy. I could think about all of the things that were related to my transition and how I wanted to show up in the world and issues that I had faced. I can think about that while training. And so I think I just channeled that energy into training more.

And doing more and trying to be better so that I could offset some of those challenges that I was really feeling related to the uniforms.

Kelly: And now, obviously, or maybe this isn't obvious, but you're sponsored by Nike. You like coach, you train. I'm not, there's a whole lot, I'm not sure if you are a professional or if you're essentially like living the pro lifestyle, but you, that is what you do. Like you, you are a full-time athlete pretty much, right?

Chris Mosier: Yeah. Full-time athlete and advocate. And the part that is really important to me is that I think sport is a vehicle for social change. And I think that so many great moments in history have started from movements that happened in sport.

And I truly believe that the acceptance of transgender people can start in sport and it can accelerate conversations outside of sport simply by me being present and me being visible. And my, my goal in using sport is to have that platform. Being sponsored by Nike is an incredible platform. Being affiliated with Team USA is an incredible platform. And that allows me opportunities to talk about things like inclusion for LGBTQ+ people, to be a visible role model for young transgender people, and to help accelerate that social change that I want to see in the world.

Kelly: Does it ever impact your performance though? Like I know that are definitely like trans athletes out there who are not open because they don't want to deal with the hate and the death threats, the everything they just can't like...and it would impact their athletic performance to be out. Does it ever then impact your performance to be so vocal?

Chris Mosier: Oh sure. I had a, there was a national championship race that happened in North Carolina when they had just passed their bathroom bill HB2. And

I was like how am I supposed to go to this state? Where if I need to use the restroom in the gas station, I might potentially be harassed or kicked out or worse.

I have, I've had this fear of being open sometimes. At that race, actually somebody came up and tapped me on the back and was like, hey, are you Chris Mosier? And I jumped like I, I was terrified and it ended up being somebody who had read an article in USA Today about me, about me being afraid of going to North Carolina. And it was an ally, was supportive.

But I was on high alert and I've definitely had those moments in sport of being concerned a little bit for my safety in all honesty. But largely, I know that my experience is very different than any trans person of color and than any trans woman in the sport who faces so much more discrimination. As well as, I chose this. I didn't have to come out publicly. I didn't have to talk to the New York Times and have an article when I first came out. I made that decision because I wanted to fill the role of the person that I wished that I had seen when I was going through my process. Like it would have changed my life to see an out trans man competing with men in sports. It absolutely would have changed my life. So I know that I have the opportunity to be that person for my community now, to create a pathway for a trans person, to go to the Olympics, to create opportunities for trans kids to participate with their friends and not be harassed and to be able to fully show up as themselves.

And so my goal is to do that and I'm fueled by that. I'm not really, I don't think that I'm negatively impacted by that most days.

Kelly: And you just said, do you get a lot of trans kids reaching out to you now? Do you get like people asking you questions, that kind of thing?

Chris Mosier: Yeah, I do. I think that's the beauty of social media. I am extremely open on my social media. I talk to anybody who writes me, who's a kid. I've had to use some filters now, but yeah, so trans kids, their parents, their grandparents, their family members contacting me to say that they have a trans family member or that they've been helped by my content in some way.

And the kids like looking for either affirmation or inspiration to, to be able to fully show up as themselves. And yeah, that's been an amazing thing that's happened.

Kelly: And you and I were talking before we started, about a lot, there's been, they come in waves, but there's been a lot of concern recently again about... typically trans girls, this fear of guys coming into girls' locker rooms and pretending to be girls. Like that is the fear. And so there's been more and more bills about we have to make sure high school girls are girls, which seems like they're suggesting they're going to look at girls' genitalia, which would have been really weird if that happened to me when I was in middle school.

Chris Mosier: It's actually part of some of these bills. I'm glad that you mentioned that. So nearly half of the states in our country have now presented bills at the state level to try to ban trans kids from participating with their peers and more specifically to ban transgender girls from participating with girls.

Up to this point, every single state has a high school athletic association that creates the policies and the rules for the states, for the sports in their state. And

there's a patchwork of policies that exist. Some states have really great inclusive policies that don't make kids do things they didn't, they did not need to do. Some make them participate based on their birth certificate.

There are some states that have more stringent requirements than the International Olympic Committee. And so there's a variety of states and there are states that don't have a policy at all, but right now, 25, 25 states in the country, approximately, it might've changed actually today, have a bill on the table that would prevent trans kids from playing with their peers.

And it is what you said, it's this fear, it's this lack of understanding who trans people are, but it's also... it's conflating two different things, right? Trans girls are not boys pretending to be girls to gain access to, or accolades in sport. Every single sport, every single state has a policy that prevents boys from playing with girls. That's not what we're talking about. This is about people's truth of who they are. Trans girls are girls, and they're not pretending to be girls to try to win the state high school championships. Like I'll telling you, no trans person would transition for athletic glory. Even the Olympic gold medals, it's just not happening.

What a trans person faces in the rest of their life, all you have to do is probably read the comments on this podcast right now. And you could see...that would be, a good indication of the way trans people are treated and it's just not happening. So lawmakers are manufacturing a problem that simply does not exist. And they're doing it under the framework of quote unquote, "protecting girls" and "protecting women in sports." So it's, it's offensive. I think it's offensive to do that. Yeah.

Kelly: To your point, yeah. There isn't anybody who's pretending to be a girl. One, because of what you just said, they're going to get so much hate.

They wouldn't go through that. They wouldn't put ...like a 12-year-old boy isn't going to put himself through that just to win a cross country race, right? Like it's not happening.

And then the other half of what you're talking about, like what you and I were talking about, is the executive order that came down in the country, which was just to give trans kids access, which is to your point, you were talking about before, about what it means to those kids, to be able to compete in the sport that they identify with, right?

Chris Mosier: Yeah. So this is a large national and international concerted effort to ban trans people from existence. And that might sound aggressive when I'm talking about high school sports, but let me lay it out for you. As you mentioned, like genital inspections, there are multiple states in the country right now as part of their bills, they would require that any young athlete who is questioned about her gender identity, and for context when I was a young female athlete, I had a great jump shot in basketball and people would be like, is that a guy or a girl? It didn't matter that I had a ponytail, that I had the same uniform as my peers, that I didn't identify as trans, like none of that mattered. That was just like, like how people would harass me.

And it was based on my performance in sports. And I know a lot of women in sports who have experienced some version of that, oh, you couldn't beat the boys, you

cheated. Or 'you must be a man.' And there's all of these these odd quote norms that we put on people of how they should look, how feminine an athlete needs to be in order to still be a girl.

And so this is what is potentially going to happen. Any young athlete could be questioned on whether or not she's actually a girl, and then would have to undergo a genital inspection of her internal and external reproductive organs, plus a chromosome test, plus a hormone test in order to play girls' sports.

Now, like you said, could you imagine being a 14 year old, wanting to play volleyball with your friends after school and having to have somebody, an adult look in your pants to see if you were actually "a girl," quote, unquote. Like it's just ridiculous. And these are adult lawmakers who are introducing these bills and it's not a one-off.

There are many that have that same exact wording. And so it's just really troubling that there are these attacks and these attacks on sports are often paired with healthcare bills that would prevent trans young people from receiving gender affirming care, which is recommended by every major medical association.

They're often paired with ID laws, which would prevent a trans person from changing their driver's license to match their authentic identity. And if I can't, if I don't have a driver's license that matches who I am, it makes traveling incredibly hard. It makes getting a job incredibly difficult.

It complicates a lot of the rest of our lives. And so all of these are being funded and fueled by anti-trans hate groups, some of which focus on sports and prison reform and identification laws, like these are, that's their area of interest. And so it's really troubling to see just how much this has come up in 2021. It's been the worst attacks we've ever seen on trans people legislatively.

Kelly: Yeah, it's been everywhere. And I think there are a couple issues that people are conflating. Like you've mentioned. Like we were just talking about kids and the vast majority of kids are never going to be Olympian, right. The vast majority of kids, like you're playing the sport because you learn lessons, because you get community, because you make friends, because you work hard, exercise, all that stuff.

So that's like a whole, like one issue. And then the other half that people then started to conflate and wrap in is elite performance, and this concern that somehow particularly trans women are going to have an advantage. And those definitely get conflated and they're separate issues.

And the fairness one is obviously a little more complicated at an elite performance level. And I'm sure you've been involved in like lots of discussions around that.

Chris Mosier: Yeah, absolutely. But there have been policies in place at the Olympic level. There have been policies in place at national governing bodies that have rules of what trans folks need to do to participate fairly with their peers. At the IOC level, the policy has been in place since 2003. They've had access for trans athletes. And in that time, over 54,000 people have become Olympians and zero of them have been out as transgender. And so if we're, we're talking about the way that people are framing this up is that there's a real problem with dominance in

sport, but like literally zero trans people have become Olympians. It becomes a little bit more challenging to understand that argument. When, we've been able for nearly two decades to get there.

National governing bodies, we've seen that they each individually have their own rules as well. USA Triathlon recently rewrote their rules to make sure that they're being inclusive and also with respect to fairness. And these are things that every organization is considering and not taking lightly. And there are rules in place that are working right now. So these legislative attacks and writing discrimination into law is extremely problematic.

Kelly: What rules do you think work well in sports right now? I, there are different models, I'm just curious.

Chris Mosier: And I think that's important say, right? Like to your point, I think that we can't conflate high school athletics and kids just trying to move their body in gym class with elite performance and the Olympics.

And unfortunately what makes this so incredibly complicated is that there's not one model policy that would work for all sports or all levels of sport. And so even when you get into certain national governing bodies that have under-23 programs or youth programs that have recreational elites that have professional sports, those will often have multiple policies written within to address the different areas of competition.

And so there's a lot of nuance that goes into it. And then it's also important to remember that there's not just one way to be a trans person. And that's also what makes it complicated is that not every trans person transitions medically. Not every trans person takes hormones or has surgery or changes their gender marker or, like it becomes really complicated when you're thinking about the rules for me at the Olympic level and at the world championships are different than the rules for a transgender woman. And so there are multiple layers within policies that makes it incredibly difficult to understand even as a trans person, it's a lot to manage.

Kelly: Yeah. There's different levels that regulate, like we talked about earlier, tests, like your testosterone, there's places that are like you had to have medically transitioned for at least a year. There's other places that just have self-identify rules. So it varies wildly. And it's interesting, you brought up that there's no one right way to be a trans person because I do think a lot of people can get their head around the idea that, okay, you medically transitioned, you are a man, but the concept of not medically transitioning, I think a lot of people struggle with that.

And that's where you get into that whole "he could just say he wants to be a woman," and that's, it's like, it's a little hard for, I think a lot of people to figure out.

Chris Mosier: Yeah. That's so right. And I think part of that is because sport is so incredibly binary, right? So like our categories are men's and women's categories.

And so it doesn't leave a lot of room for people who fall outside of that check box. And one of the things about being trans is you can be trans and non-binary. You can be non-binary and not be trans and not consider yourself transgender, you can not

subscribe to the two little check boxes that we've been told are our only two options in this world and in sports.

And so for somebody who falls outside of that, like somebody... a trans person who-- I'm trans and I identify as a man, so I made a pretty binary transition, but I also am comfortable a little bit along the spectrum. I don't consider myself non-binary, but I don't need to subscribe to the stereotypes of masculinity and of being a man that I was taught when I was a kid and that I've seen in the world. And so anytime that there's flexibility or people moving along on the spectrum, it becomes incredibly challenging to assign them one of two buckets to compete in. And so what we're seeing now is that more and more national governing bodies, sports organizations are starting to talk about nonbinary athletes as well as part of this conversation.

And like you said, I think people struggle with the concept of transgender identity, to layer on the fact that someone wouldn't be transitioning from one category to another makes it even more complicated for people to try to wrap their minds around. And part of that is just the lack of education and understanding about what trans and non-binary identities are, what it means. And, what it's like as a person who identifies or who is trans or nonbinary.

Kelly: Yeah. We had Rach McBride on before who obviously identifies as nonbinary, I think is the only pro currently who does. And it's one of the things where "But yeah, I have to pick a category to race professionally".

So ...otherwise you're going to be the only person in your category.

Chris Mosier: And that's like something that we often hear. One of the comments that people will say when they're trying to be rude and not, I get when it's like a question that people are like "why not just this?" That's separate than the way that people often frame this up, but often I hear, and at some point in this conversation with people will say "you should just compete against your own, there should just be a trans only category." And the fact is like trans people are somewhere between 0.6% and maybe like less than 2% of the population. And of that, the people who want to play sports is even smaller.

And then the number of sports that we might play, the levels of play, like I couldn't go to a race and only compete against other trans people. And it's, it would be like, I think logistically impossible to find a competition. And so we know that separate is never equal. And so saying you should just go and be with your own people is definitely not a solution to the problem that people are trying to create in sports.

Kelly: I would...it would be a very small field, very small triathlon field, for sure.

So what are your plans? Right now, kind of next. Obviously you're doing a lot of advocacy work. I know that takes up a lot of time, but are you still racing? Are you going to try and make the Olympics race walking? Are you back to triathlon? Is it all like duathlon now? And are you racing at an elite level or is this still like competitive age grouper trying to make Kona?

Chris Mosier: So in the Olympic Trials, I had to pull out, I tore my meniscus. So the last year has been recovery from that. And I'm in the same boat I think as many people with being like, is racing even a thing anymore? Are we still doing this? So

I'm excited when COVID is, I don't know if COVID is ever done, but like when races get back on, doing national championships, world champs this year and exploring race walking a little more. But I'm back to multi-sport right now. And, it's a matter of figuring out what is a reasonable goal at this point? I've done sprint races. I've done Ironman races. I love both, parts of both. And I think that's been part of the fun that I've had in my sort of like athletic careers, being all over the place and not specializing.

It's just. I love the community of racing. I love the training of racing. Racing is pretty okay. But I really love there's just so much positive that comes out of sport and of being with other athletes, of meeting people that I would never have met before and talked to outside of my, outside of the sport that I become close friends with because sport has brought us together. And so as many of those opportunities as I have. That's what I'm about right now.

Kelly: So we haven't went over like goals yet. We're all like still waiting to see what's happening with COVID.

Chris Mosier: I have a couple of races on the schedule for this year. We'll see if they actually happen. And race walking is a future thing potentially, but I, like I was so mad when I race walked and tore my meniscus, a decade in triathlon and running all the team sports that I ever played. I'd *never* suffered an injury like that. And then, like three weeks into walking, I blow my knee out or something like...

Kelly: How do you blow your meniscus out race walking? I don't like, I don't even, I can't even picture.

Chris Mosier: I think part of it might be that straight leg situation. Landing with the straight leg... I don't know, it, wasn't a very intuitive an intuitive movement for my body.

Kelly: All right. So here's my last question for you out of all of the things you've done, what is your favorite sport?

Chris Mosier: Ooh, favorite sports. Gosh, I almost said badminton or pickleball, but I think those are fantastic and that's a future for me potentially, but I think of all the multi-sport, duathlon has really, I've just fallen deeply in love with duathlon and more than that, draft-legal duathlon. And yeah, and it's just, I never raced bikes.

I never did drafting races, cycling crits or anything like that. I always had a desire to, and then I just had that fear factor as well of doing that. And specifically living in New York City. I just like... being in Central Park seemed like a crit sometimes. Like I just wasn't quite sure.

But I think, playing to my own strengths, I'm not a strong swimmer. And I had a lot of complicated feelings and emotions around swimming. So running, run-bike-run was like a very reasonable solution for me. And that is something that, I found that I excelled in, in terms of what what my body can do. And so that's really my favorite multi-sport right now.

Kelly: Are there that many draft-legal duathlons?

Chris Mosier: There's not that many. No. And I think that's what probably would also make it super exciting. It really is, after doing many races that were not draft-legal and you are intentionally not drafting, it's like very conscious of that, to have the opportunity to get that free speed and to work with the pack. And it, it makes multi-sport more of a team sport. And I think there was something that's really exciting about that, of feeding off the energy of other people and maybe having a little bit faster bike leg than you would have alone.

Something very exciting about that. So I'm excited for when those races come back. USA Triathlon has put on more of them and they often come in championship forms, but I know that there are other races that are picking it up. And as you look at the international circuit, that's become one of the most exciting things is these little super sprints and the group super sprints and things like that. Yeah, if you haven't tried draft legal tri, take a bike clinic and then give it a shot

Kelly: So we were actually just looking because of the Olympics this year at like places that age groupers could do draft-legal races, mixed relay races, like how to get more people into this. So, it would be cool. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you so much for chatting with us and hopefully we see you at races. Hopefully we have races this year and we see you at races.

Chris Mosier: I agree. I'll be out there if we do. Thanks so much. Appreciate it.

Kelly: Thanks to Chris for the insightful chat and to all of you for sticking with us through our technical difficulties.

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