

# The Triathlete Hour Ep. 52 - Aaron Schiedes mixdown

**Kelly:** Welcome to the Triathlete Hour. This week, we're talking with many time paratri world and national champion Aaron Schiedes. Aaron's vision has been deteriorating since he was a kid. And he now estimates that he has about 10% vision. But even with that, he's still one of the fastest guys out on the race course.

He was the first blind athlete to break two hours in an Olympic distance race. And he's since won seven world titles. Yet he's never raced triathlon at the Olympics.

He'll finally get that chance this summer, if everything goes according to plan—but as you'll learn from Aaron's story, nothing ever goes exactly according to plan for him.

He tells us all about what is like to race with a guide, some of his crazier adventures as a cyclist at the Rio Olympics and getting into para cycling, how he found triathlon and how paratri has evolved over the years.

And before that we're chatting with our own Laura Siddall for Sid Talks. Laura's actually preparing to serve as a backup guide in Tokyo for a blind British athlete, and she tells us a little bit about it from that side of things. And we dissect all the racing now that racing has finally started again in the U.S. Is every field going to be completely stacked this year?

All of that after this short break.

—

We're back this week with Laura Siddall for Sid Talks and Sid, I know you've been awake for like 24 hours straight, so you're going to have super great insight on the latest pro racing.

**Laura Siddall:** That's right, yeah. It was exciting though. We had, we had races again at the weekend, so almost like we were in a season.

**Kelly:** I know as someone said to me, so, uh, Galveston 70.3, Texas 70.3, happened this weekend, first Ironman brand race in the U.S. for 2021, kind of the start of the U.S. season now, and someone said to me: people are complaining on Twitter about Ironman's coverage of racing, so that really is back to normal, right?

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah. Exactly.

I mean, there's never been any coverage of the 70.3 races, really. Um, I think people are at the moment are just desperate to watch anything like watch paint, dry watch... They just want to watch a competition of something. Um, and it was a stacked field on the men and women's side and it would have been amazing to watch.

To see some live coverage. I mean, I, I was watching it through friends who were on the ground and like, they were just putting a few stories up and on their Instagrams. Um, I won't name names cause I'd probably get into trouble. I don't know if that's allowed, but, um, so you kind of saw bits that way. And then through the, obviously some of the photographers and stuff, but it would have been

amazing because there was some really great, it was a really great race for both, both sides that both men and

**Kelly:** women.

Yeah. Like the men, it was like the top three were split by like a minute. And the women, um, both, uh, Sky and Jeannie who are for a second, like ran their way up through the field and were again like separated by a minute. So it was pretty close, pretty exciting. Uh, and like you said, I think it was 68 pros on the start line or something like that.

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah, it was crazy. And even, um, you know, potentially we've got Challenge Gran Canaria in a couple of weeks here in Europe and that's going to be like the European world championships. Cause obviously there's not been a race in Europe at the moment. So everyone's racing that and then. Talking to Belinda Granger, who's, you know, pro liaison for challenge family.

She's just getting slammed at the moment with requests from every pro in Europe, like trying to get into the Challenge races. Cause they're the only ones that are happening. And yeah, it's just, if the race has happened, they're just stacked.

**Kelly:** Yeah. I mean, I think that's been our question is, is every race going to be stacked this year because there, and I'm going to get the numbers and the stats right, but Torsten did run some of the numbers and there are significantly fewer races so far this year that have prize money, there's significantly less...

So everyone then is showing up to every opportunity they have. And like you said, Europe hasn't had races yet. So we are getting a handful of Europeans, like coming over to the U S and staying here for a couple of months. Daniela is going to come over and do St. George, do Tulsa. Um, I want to say like, Joe Gambles came over, like there's a handful of people coming.

So it's just, every race is going to be stacked. And I can't decide if this is good or bad. Like, obviously it's more exciting, but it's also a little bit like, Oh, it's gonna be brutal..

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah it's like, it's going to be more exciting to watch or to be part of, hopefully at some point I'll be racing again, but it's totally brutal for, I guess if you go back to the conversation we've had, trying to earn a living because there's no...just the top tier are going to be battling out. And if there's no kind of that development path or being able to get a race with a slightly smaller field that gives you an opportunity or a chance to get a foot on the ladder kind of thing. So, I mean, it's exciting for the sport. We don't get those match-ups, we normally only get them a couple of times a year, all the big names, and now we're getting, you know, 10, 20 of the big names racing.

Cause they, they wanna, hey want to get out there and race cause they haven't done it for so long.

**Kelly:** But it is going to be hard for the kind of second tier. I saw the New York Tri was advertising their massive prize purse where they're going to pay third place \$1000.

And I was like, oh, that is not amazing. I mean, I get it like good for them, but yeah.

**Laura Siddall:** And then PTO announced, or they sent an email out to all the pros last week that they're supporting, um, I can't remember how many, but 10 or 12 independent races as well around the world. So that will potentially, maybe spread things out again a little bit, but there's still going to be, I think, you know, yeah.

You look at the start list for Tulsa--well St. George, it's the championships and then Tulsa's a championships, and there's a load of people flying in, like you said, and then Gran Canaria, because it's the first one in Europe. It's like, got everybody here. I think Javier Gomez announced he was racing. I think, Jan might be racing, you know, Kienle and all the boys. And so it's just going to be a, yeah, I mean, it's exciting, but then we don't know what's going to happen at the end of the year. So...I don't know.

**Kelly:** The other thing you and I were talking about is you can see now, if you know where to look, if you go to like the Ironman pro website or pro page, you can see now all the people that have already qualified for Kona and for 70.3 worlds.

And it's an interesting list, cause there's already 25 people qualified, for men and women, for Kona and 50 for 70.3 worlds. And a lot of it just says 2020 carry over. Like they just carried over. I mean, almost everybody just says 2020 carryovers as how they qualified, and you and I were talking to some of them, they seem like a little, like, how did that carry over? What did that carry over from?

**Laura Siddall:** You know, like we did have a couple of those races last year, but they were, you know, limited, look, whoever's got that slot deserves to go. They won the race or whatever it is, you know, you've got to give them that credit, but it is odd when it's..yeah, there were certain races, but only a few people could race because of the lockdown or the restrictions, or now, maybe it's the case of you're going to get to a race and the top five people have qualified or, you know, the top 10 have already qualified and then it's yeah. It's going to be a really odd year.

**Kelly:** is what I was wondering. I only looked at this cause I was looking for St. George cause St. George is a North American championships, so there's three spots, but then like all the, every ones are like all the big names are Danielle's already qualified. Paul is already qualified.

Holly's already... So I was like, am I going to get a spot? Is this going to roll? Like all the way down?

**Laura Siddall:** And I wonder, are they doing it the same? Like I know for the age group races there, and this was even in New Zealand where there's kind of no COVID and stuff, but they still weren't having awards and roll down ceremonies.

Like they email the first person and the first person got like 24 hours to respond and then it kind of goes down to the next person. So. You know, you could, you might find that depending on where you finished, you might find that if they've gone through that process, it could be like the three months later you get an email going well done on your race in wherever.

**Kelly:** I actually always thought they should have done that for, I always thought it was a little weird that you had to be right there at that moment with your credit card in hand. I always thought they...they, they could do the email system. Right. That's perfectly reasonable, but it's not as exciting.

**Laura Siddall:** It's not. And you said that the key thing about credit card in hand.

**Kelly:** Like my husband has been that person standing there with his credit card being like, should I do it? Should I do it many times? And you always, when you're standing there like four beers in after the award ceremony, you're like, Why not!!

**Laura Siddall:** All the family are coming to support. Yeah. We're all going! the accommodation as well.

**Kelly:** Well, uh, it's uh, it's some interesting choices have been made that way, so yeah, it's a, uh, it's, uh, it, it blew my parents' mind. The first time they saw it, that they were like, wait, you have to pay right here right now?...But they are doing, like you said, they are doing it by email. I just got an email for St. George, where you have to pick your slot to do your bike and gear check-in. Um, so they it's very, uh, like very set and you can, like, you also can pick, it looks like it's a, an adjustable system where you can pick bib numbers around your friends and family.

So that then you're like with them in the transition, which is kind of interesting.

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah, no that's cool. I mean, I do think from like what I heard from the races that weekend, the atmosphere is different. There isn't that. Everyone's so on edge, everyone's desperate to race, but because of COVID and the environment, it's like, there's not really that much interaction camaraderie of like, I thought it would be like, just, everyone's so happy to be on the start line together and racing again.

But it's kind of that more, they're in there scrambling for points and position and stuff, and then they're out and there's no like, oh my God, it's great to see people again, but we can't really do anything still because we're social distancing. I don't know if that makes sense.

**Kelly:** Yeah. I thought I was thinking about that too, because I was like, Oh my God, St. George is going to be, you know, for me, it's the West coast. Like it's a Western race. Like all my friends are gonna be there. Everyone I know is like, I finally get to see people for the first time, like a year and a half. And I was really excited. And then I realized I don't really, I mean, I don't think I've really ever going to see anybody.

Yeah, that's okay. I mean, and it's like a week before my vaccines fully will kick in. So I think that's the, we're all waiting for that, right, when everyone's finally kick in.

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah. Those who, those who, those who choose. And if you're in the States and not in Europe and trying to get one...

**Kelly:** Right, in the U S we have like a much higher rate, obviously.

But like you said, I mean, it's still very split up. There's still this thing where Australia New Zealand are only racing as Australia, New Zealand. It's still like,

everyone's only racing where they can. Cause I had, um, another race happened this past weekend. Uh, Challenge Shepparton, Ellie Salthouse one, Ellie's won four in four, this year, so far.

And so someone emailed me like, is she the most dominant, you know, athlete of the year? And you're like on the one hand, yes. But other hand she's only raced in Australia. Like she's and that's not to say that Australia isn't good. Like Australia is really good, but it'd be kind of like if we only could race in Colorado...

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah, definitely. Yeah. I mean, same in New Zealand, like kind of Wells probably. And I'm not saying that they are not world-class athletes. I really do think they are, but it's really hard to compare and judge rightly or wrongly when they're there that they're locked down there kind of thing, you know?

Yes. They've had life as normal, so to speak, but they can't get in or out. And that's where they've chosen to race and yes, there's incredibly talented athletes on the men and women's side, but there isn't the depth that there, so yeah.

**Kelly:** Yeah. So there'll be, and like you said, some of them that, I mean, not again like Hannah Wells probably like would get a Kona spot anywhere at any place in the country.

It doesn't matter. But there are some of these races where people only competed in their place that they could get to because of how quarantiness are working and then they get a Kona slot or they get a world championship slot. And we're not really going to know how they're going to perform at that level and tell them because everyone's still very in their separate places.

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah, exactly. That, I mean that, and that's like, I mean, who knows if they then even where we'll be at that point, when it comes to those championship world champ races, in terms of, are they going to want to take the risk, not the risk. Are they going to want to take it to travel again, to know they're going to have to quarantine or whatever it is at that expense and cost? Or can they actually get flights still? I mean, I still don't, I'm not convinced that Australia and New Zealand are going to be out of, uh, the quarantine situation by the, by October.

**Kelly:** Yeah. I think Hawaii may have ended their quarantine by October, because like I said, U.S, we're doing a good job vaccinating, but it will be a, yeah. It will be tricky. It will be interesting. Yeah. And you are also-- you're in the UK right now. You drove, I pulled a classic American. It was like, how do you drive from Spain to the UK? I don't understand.

**Laura Siddall:** Well, I was thinking like it is a mammoth drive. So it's about say from Spain to Calay, which is Northern France, it's like a 12 hour drive, which is huge for the Europeans.

Like, it's something that, you know, US, God, you guys do that to a race or to a training camp for a weekend. Really? Don't you you're just like, Oh, he just needs a good drive there. Um, so, and then I get the train. I get the cargo, the cargo is on the train. It's very exciting! Apart from the fact I hate tunnels. So I get really stressed about going on the tunnel under the ocean.

Um, but you drive the car on it, which is. for me in these times. Well, it's a 30 minute train drive, train journey under, under the English channel. Um, and you stay in your car. So there is no, like, so from leaving my house in Spain, I like stopped literally for like petrol and bathroom.

And then that was it. And I don't have to interact with anybody. I can wait, you know, whereas if you're on the ferry, you have to get out of your car. You're. Moving around. I mean, it takes a bit and it takes a bit longer. And then, yeah, so you kind of drove through the night, got a 4:00 AM or whatever it was train. Um, and then drove. Yeah. Drove, drove home today

**Kelly:** And part of the reason you're there though is because you are a backup para guide for the Olympics. And so you got to like practice next week. Cause you've never, and this is interesting cause we have Aaron Scheidies on today who is one of the US like blind athletes, world champion para.

And he talked to us a bunch about guides, but now I want to hear from your perspective, how one ends up being a guide.

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah, so like, so British, British triathlon or British paratriathlon, they have potentially two athletes and they both have race guides. Then that's all like been locked in for years. They've been training with them.

They have their training guides that British triathlon. Paratriathlon are in a position where they can take a reserve guide because obviously as, as the athlete, you've, you've trained for that moment. If your guide gets injured, sick in the last moment, then you still want to be able to perform. So I, we were talking about it last year and then obviously everything sort of went out the window and then.

Um, we sort of touched base again early this year and it was kinda like, I don't know what's happening yet still. Anyway, there was an opportunity to come back here and spend a week. Um, and I'm going to clarify here, I'm in isolation for this first week and I'm having tests every few days. Um, and then on day five, if I test negative, I can then leave and go into, uh, go into the training centers with the para athletes.

And then they have a strict protocol, any time I'm with a para athlete, we have to be lateral flow tested in the every day and all of that anyway, but yeah, so it's, I've not done it yet. So this is literally kind of an exploration week of going, how do we ride a tandem and like, how do we swim as a guide and running and guide.

And also probably more importantly for the, for the athlete, the visually impaired athletes is like, did they feel that there will be a rapport and a confidence with me even as a reserve? So, yeah. They've got to have that. Um, and you probably spoke about it, but they've got to have that confidence that the guide can do the job on the day for them to get there or give them the best chance to get that medal.

**Kelly:** Yeah. I mean, it sounds really interesting. And like Aaron told us, Aaron is also obviously very fast. So he has to call up like former Olympian men to like, guide him.

**Laura Siddall:** I'm a little worried about my swim ability at the moment. Oh God, I'm going to be the one that's sitting on the hip.

**Kelly:** Right. You're like, Ooh, that's a, you don't want to hold back your, your athlete for sure.

**Laura Siddall:** Exactly.

**Kelly:** Yeah. So, yeah, so you may, so you may end up going to Tokyo, which will be interesting. Um, like we've said, you know, it is very locked down this year. They're not really like letting any spectators in to the Olympics.

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah. So they're not letting any international spectators there. We don't know what restrictions they may bring in further down the line on sizes of teams and support staff as well that might come into it. But yeah, I mean, look, we'll see what happens next week.

Um, if I can be part of helping them, the, the two athletes to get there, to get their dream, to achieve what they want to at the Paralympics, then that's kind of a once in a lifetime opportunity for me to be involved in something like that and helping, helping them and, and to see it and be part of it. So, yeah.

**Kelly:** Yeah, it does sound... Cause I've been talking to a few athletes, obviously, uh, Olympic qualification and para qualification is about to restart like the points restart on May 1st and then they'll have Yokohama is kind of the first big race. Uh, first big, like world triathlon series race in the second weekend.

So I've been talking to some of them and it does sound like it's going to be very locked down. Like we couldn't even get really a photographer in there or anything, even if they were already in the bubble and already like it's, and then it's going to be even more locked down once they're in total. Like it's going to be completely only IOC people.

Not even world triathlon. So it's, it's, they're, they're running like a tight ship.

**Laura Siddall:** The thing that's interesting as well. Like you mentioned about the qualification. So for, so let's take the Olympics. Um, and we were talking about this off air as well with some of the selection, um, conundrums that some of the countries have, but the national country picks your three athletes.

So, you know, British triathlon pick the three females that will represent Britain and USAT you know, or the US Olympic committee, they pick the US athletes. But for paratriathlon, it's done on global ranking as far as I understand that. So. It's not that like British triathlon can say, well, we're going to take our two best athletes.

They have to be ranked in the top 10, say, in the world.

**Kelly:** There's a, it's like, it's similar but different. Yeah, you have to, you have to be eligible for qualification, right? Like you have to be at the top X amount.

**Laura Siddall:** Yes, that's right. But it's not, the numbers are so much smaller for para tri that they'd say we're just going to take the top 10. Don't quote me on these. Like, we're just gonna take the top 10 in the world. Doesn't matter what country they're from? Like to get a spread. It could be like that there was, I don't know, five of those top 10 were Americans or whatever. I don't know if that would happen.



**Kelly:** Yeah. Well, that's not the, each country still only gets a set number of spots. And I know this because I talked to Melissa Stockwell who, uh, yes, cause there are three Americans in her division in the top 10, but that's only gets two spots. So it's a whole thing. People can spend a lot of time in the Olympic obligations.

It is very detailed. And uh, and we are going to run some more stories about this, but like for the US cause since most of our listeners are US-based the US currently has three spots for the women. And *currently* it's three spots for the men, but that's still like to be determined with points because it depends on how many men are ranked in the top 30.

And if they get three spots for each, they'll be the only country that has 3 spots for each. Yes. And this is the Olympics, but then who gets those three spots is not necessarily the top three people. But then there's a whole, you can auto qualify if you're in the top eight or if you podium at Yokohama and then if nobody podiums at Yokohama, then it'll go to whoever's in the top eight.

And if nobody's in the top eight, then it'll be a discretionary committee. It's a whole pro-- And then in para is a similar thing. But for each category, Oh my God. I've read so many Olympic documents.

**Laura Siddall:** that's interesting. Cause for like for Britain, they've obviously they've got three women again, they've got three women qualified, but they only have two men, two male spot at the moment, which is unheard of for British triathlon. When you think of the caliber of men we've had in the past few Olympics of champions.

Um, but they're on the they're risking or looking like they're on the, yeah, it's not guaranteed that the third spot is going to happen for the British.

**Kelly:** Well, we might get it instead. So there it is. And like what you and I were talking about, it is also a tough thing for like the American women, the British women to a degree, the Australian women, because I think British and US women both have six people in the top 30, which is usually the third, top 30 is the cutoff, but you only get to start five at a race at a world cup.

You only get five starts for country. So some of these people can't even get a start to get the points to.

**Laura Siddall:** It's rough. Yeah. It just like, yeah. We complain about, you know, half and full distance and racing

**Kelly:** the ITU, like understanding the point starts and then being on a waitlist, some people fly around the world to be on a waitlist for a race and hope that they get in.

**Laura Siddall:** I remember, I remember, at Bañolas, um, there was a race a couple of years ago, Flora Duffy was on the wait list and she found out 20 minutes before the start of the race.

**Kelly:** You're like, yeah. And we were all, I was following her journey on the wait list on Instagram.

The Olympics is crazy, but it will. I do think it's going to happen. I do think it'll be really exciting if it, you know, if, and when it happens, hopefully knock on



something. So yes. Yeah, well, we're excited to have racing kind of, kind of back starting. We're going to be talking all about it this year and I hope you ...all our insight.

**Laura Siddall:** And we've got some, yeah, we've got some big races coming up, potentially.

**Kelly:** Yes. Uh, well, thanks for all of the European insight and input.

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah. Hopefully there's some more races happening in Europe. Yeah.

**Kelly:** All right. This week we're talking to Aaron , who is a seven time para tri world champion eight time national champion, but you've never actually been to the Olympics in triathlon. Is that right?

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah, that's right. I've I went to the Paralympics in Rio, but I, uh, for cycling, but I've never been in triathlon, which is my, my main sport.

**Kelly:** And that's because they haven't had your cat, like categories, I think are a little confusing to all of us. They haven't had your category in the Paralympics, right?

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah. It's, it's very confusing and that doesn't necessarily help the Paralympic movement to make it confusing more than it already is. Uh, but they kind of pick and choose classifications or different disability categories. Um, each Paralympic, um, Like cycle and the games and cause they only have a certain number of metal events.

Um, the part that I don't necessarily fully understand on triathlon is that we don't necessarily have that many, uh, categories to begin with. So I think we should be able to get our categories and they could probably cut some track and field categories, there's like 57 or something. So, um, yeah, so basically in 2016, the, the blind/vision-impaired females, uh, competed in Rio, but the blind/vision-impaired males did not.

**Kelly:** Okay. So now this time around, are the women not competing and the men are?

**Aaron Scheidies:** No, no. So they also have to keep gender equity, you know? Um, yeah, this time around, um, it's both the blind male and female. Uh, categories, uh, they realized were the most fun to watch for everyone. So, uh, they better put us in or the sport will go downhill really quick.

Um, so no, it's basically in, in 2016, we were one of the most competitive categories as well. So I don't really understand this process, but, but anyways, uh, yeah, we were not included in, in, uh, in Rio, but, um, I had a fun and interesting experience, uh, with cycling. It was, and it definitely helped my cycling in, in triathlon. It became a, it allowed, um, then, uh, Collins and I, my guide, a chance to kind of work and improve our technical skills and, uh, our power around the bike. And so I think. That's that's definitely one of our, our weapons in triathlon

**Kelly:** But I assume that the fact that it's finally in Tokyo, I mean, you're what, you're 39. You have two kids. I'm assuming the fact that it's finally Tokyo is part of why you haven't retired.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Right. Um, that would be a good reason. Um, would probably be one of the main reasons. Yes. Um, I didn't want my, my career to end, uh, let's say, in Rio, in the sport, that's not even my main sport. So, um, so yeah, I, I, I knew that it was going to be in for Tokyo pretty much.

And, um, I've been just trying to hold all the pieces together and, uh, hopefully put it all together in Tokyo.

**Kelly:** Ah, that makes sense. I mean, I would hold on for like one, three, four more years if I go deal and fix. Right. So. Let's uh, I mean, you've obviously explained that you raced in the blind category. Um, let's talk a little bit about...How that all came about how you got started in triathlon. So you have, --and you made me say this right before-- juvenile macular degeneration, which, um, essentially that means that your eyes just are deteriorating since you were a kid. So you COULD see at one point?

**Aaron Scheidies:** It's a genetic, uh, recessive eye condition.

Um, the, the cells in the center, part of your eye, which is your macula, basically, uh, don't get a certain protein. Uh, and so the, the cells slowly kind of, uh, die off it's, it's kind of like, uh, it's very hard because people see me and they kind of like, don't understand. I get around so well, one I accommodate really well and I have adapted really well, to get around so well, but also, um, the condition I have is just, it's, it's kind of like having a, uh, a big, uh, high definition TV. Let's just say everyone has a high definition TV as their vision. And then you start like, picking out little like pixels one at a time, you know, starting when you're younger in the kind of the center part of the screen.

And it kind of starts going out into somewhat for free, but not totally to the edge of the screen. And then after a time you have no more pixels left kind of in the middle part, but I don't see black in that part of your, my eyes kind of, you know, fill in with blur.

**Kelly:** Like your brain fills it in with blur...

**Aaron Scheidies:** Completely blurry. And if you throw a ball or something, it might like, I might see an object and then completely not see it.

And then it hits me. That's kind of why I stopped playing soccer.

**Kelly:** I was going to say, cause you, I mean, obviously you could see as a kid and you played sports and stuff. At some point it was like, I can't do this anymore. Like this is not working.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah. It became, it became so, um, and that's basically what happened is I was getting. So frustrated and depressed over, uh, not being able to, uh, compete in and perform at the level that I knew I could just because my vision was, uh, kind of failing me, so...

**Kelly:** Yeah. Okay. And so, and so I know, I mean, you talked about this in like other news stories and stuff. I know that you kind of were understandably like pretty depressed in your teens then, because you lose your vision, you can't play soccer

anymore, you can't--- I would think that'd be really hard to get over, but at some point you basically like, no I'm going to move on.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah, no, I mean, it was, it was not a, an overnight thing in terms of like, I definitely, um, my, my years as a teenager were, uh, definitely a lot of searching and seeking for normalcy and trying to just fit in and be like normal, like be like everyone else.

Right. But it took time for me kind of to go through the grieving process and, and realize that normal for me is, is not normal or not. It's not like everyone else. So normal was, is different. And I think, um, I think we're all kind of have a different, uh, normal in, in some way shape or form. Some things are just not as obvious as others, but, um, it, it kind of started off with, well, I probably started off getting depressed and whatnot, but then it started off, uh, with obsessive-compulsive. Cause I was kind of starting to check things like, oh, did I see that right at the clock? And I check it, I see that. Right. And then it, it kind of expanded to other things with OCD. And then, uh, so I basically in, in high school, middle school and high school, beginning of high school had OCD and an eating disorder and depression.

I mean, I was like 5'8" and a hundred pounds going into high school. Um, so yeah, and I was, I mean, it was not a good situation. I mean, I was definitely kind of downward spiral didn't necessarily know if I wanted to live anymore or that kind of stuff. And I mean, it took some time I think, but the, the thing that really got me out of it was like, my brother asked me if I wanted to join the swim team.

And, um, I decided to do that. I think just getting in the pool and kind of that like freedom and outlet from being away from everybody in the world and, uh, Maybe pressure, stereotypes and all that. And just the water, I think in general is relaxing. Um, and then I just started to really like, uh, endurance activities and, uh, and started like, I think that's where I started kind of gaining that, learning how to be resilient and, and seeking out new challenges.

And then the look has been, I joined the cross country team and track and field team, and then, uh, going into my senior high school. Um, my cross-country coach had given us a piece of piece of paper in the summer, just, uh, you know, here's some running events and there was, there was a couple of little triathlons.

And so I was like, oh, I want to go do that. And, and that's, that's how I, like most people, you know, once you pop the can't stop, it's kinda like pringles doing triathlon, so, right.

**Kelly:** Okay. So you just got started kind of in high school, off of, uh, off of cross country training getting started, uh, at that point, I mean, did you, like, you could still just do it on your own, right? You didn't need a guide, like figure it out.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I, I did it on my own in high school and swimming was in the pool and then cross country. Uh, I S I still ran on my own. I mean, could I run better probably with a guide? Probably. I mean, my vision was definitely still legally blind then with all the correction that you could do, but, um, Uh, yeah, I mean, I started doing triathlon on my own and I just, uh, would

basically, uh, the night before my parents would drive the bike course and drive the run course.

And I would-- they'd tell me like landmarks at certain corners, memorize everything and in the water, I would just follow splashes. The only problem was, is I was, I was, you know, pretty good and I wasn't racing like in an elite category sometimes we'd get out near the front. And then, uh, well, I got some stories from that following splashes, basically.

Um, and then, uh, on the bike, I would, I would just try to get up to the like, you know, find somebody that's really fast I wouldn't pass. And then also use those landmarks that I kind of remembered. I could, at that point I could see the white line and the yellow line and I could stay between it, but I had to remember potholes and all that kind of stuff that my parents had told me about.

And, and, uh, I just tried to stick with somebody that I could keep in my. My limited, uh, site. So, um, I, you know, I managed to do pretty well those first couple of years, actually with, uh, without a guide and I didn't even have a crash in a race or anything.

**Kelly:** I was going to say, did this ever end badly? Cause I feel like it could end badly.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Oh, it could have ended very badly and I had, uh, you know, there's, there's multiple times that the funniest things are too is like, cause I was, you know, I was racing on my own and nobody really knew I was blind per se because you know, I was doing it, you know, except when I'd be like doing the run course or, or, or the bike course and somebody holding a sign that says like, you know, right.

Turn and volunteer. And I'm like, Oh, well, which way do I go? Which way to go? And they're probably like, Oh, this sign here, it's got a big arrow on it, sir. I could go that way. Um, but, uh, Yeah. So, you know, or, or stories of, you know, trying to get a, uh, a water from the aid station and I swipe the whole water table, you know, all of the, all of the cups off the water table down so, um..yeah

**Kelly:** They probably just thought you were a jerk.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, that was actually that one actually. Um, when I did that, I actually had a guide, it was at the New York city triathlon and the, and the volunteers hadn't, hadn't gotten to the aid station. We must have beat them there or something. And I decide... my guide's like, Oh, there's a base station up here.

And I like just put out my arm and just swiped the whole water off all the table, all of the cups off the table. Uh he's like way to go Aaron. Now my guide gets my water.

**Kelly:** Okay. How do you, okay, so let's talk about guides, obviously at the, like. Olympic level at this really elite level. And at this point, like you have a guide at, but how do you find a guide, especially if you're pretty fast.

I mean, you need someone who is as fast as you or faster really, so that they're not holding you up. And like, you guys have to practice, right?

**Aaron Scheidies:** It's like a reality TV show where you go out and you have this big auditions and, uh, but you, you limit them to basically, uh, they have to first set their times and everything like that.

So the first, the first like cuts are like, your times are good enough. You don't even get a chance to go to their show. And then, uh, and then once they get on the show, you know, then, uh, they have to do all of these like communication and, uh, or like, you know, these, these. Challenges. Yeah. You know, make sure that it's like speed dating, you know, you gotta make sure that they, uh, you guys, uh, match and, and everything like that.

No, no, I, well kind of like that I sent out, um, you know, at one point I had sent out kind of like a Facebook message looking for guides and here's the kind of times and things that I need the person to be able to go. And I got some, I got some pretty good guides from that, um, over the years. And then, uh, Ben Collins, actually, I was living in Seattle, uh, at the University of Washington going to physical therapy school.

And I'd heard about Ben Collins. That was when he was kind of winning everything. When he started as an amateur, uh, you know, national championship, world championship, whatever I'd heard of him. And so I knew he was from Seattle, so I reached out and, uh, I think it originally, when he got the email, I think he was like, wondering if I was really serious or just, you know, joking about it.

But, uh, we, we ended up, uh, getting together and, you know, did, uh, the first race that we did together was, uh, to try to break two hours at the US open in Dallas, Dallas Open for the lifetime fitness by, and, uh, we went like, I think 01:59 something or whatnot. Ben looked like he was ready to do an Ironman after that at the same pace.

But, uh, I was like falling over. Um, but, uh, yeah. And then since then, we've, you know, we've traveled and competed in, uh, well, multiple triathlons before Rio, but then we competed in a lot of cycling events and then since have traveled the world competing in paratriathlon events.

**Kelly:** Yeah. We had Ben on, uh, [??] and he told us about guiding from his perspective.

And, uh, and he said, you just go full speed, like right through traffic go crazy. Like you're just, you're crazy. Um, yeah, it sounds, interesting

**Aaron Scheidies:** When I'm riding my bike on my own or--? cause I did ride my bike on my own for awhile, which is very, very dangerous. And then, well then I hit a parked car and my face through the back of the truck hit and then I had a fan started a family and kids and I stopped that. It was very dangerous, very, very dangerous.

And I would not recommend anybody do it.

**Kelly:** But it does sound like you two have a lot of fun too. And you spend like a lot of, I mean, basically now you have to spend a lot of time together to get ready for like big events. Right? Like you practice. And I mean, I know you're in different cities, but you have to practice and everything.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah, I mean COVID is kind of made that difficult, but, uh, we, you know, it's, it's really good to be able to meet up with your guide and train together because, you know, it's important to be in sync and working together, communicating well together. Um, I try to always keep it pretty fun and, and, um, I've always had good relationships with my guides.

Uh, you know, there's a lot of people that kind of hire and fire guides, like they go through, you know, relationships when they were 20. Um, so, but no, I've always had good relationships with my guides and, and, uh, I think it's just because I, I value what they're doing and, and. Try to always make it fun and try to always make sure that they know that I appreciate what they're doing.

**Kelly:** Are there things that make like a good guide or a bad guide? Like, are there...?

**Aaron Scheidies:** Uh, if they're in it for the wrong reason that doesn't make it a good guy, necessarily situation. Cause if, if the guide's in it to, to like glorify himself or, or, or, um, not realizing that the whole event and everything is about is about the, you know, maximizing the blind athlete's potential and working together, um, then it can, it can go wrong pretty, pretty quick.

Um, so yeah, I think, you know, because in some guides, if you're, if they're working with a lot slower athlete and then themselves, you know, they might get into like their own competitive mode and then they kind of forget like, okay. You know, I can't get frustrated if I have to slow down and I'm not going my fast pace because this is not about me.

Um, so, and then there is just, you know, you're, it's just like a marriage. She, you know, there's, there's... people get on people's nerves and things like that sometimes, especially if you're spending a lot of time together and if, if the stakes are high or trying to compete and win, you know, a medal in the, in the Paralympic games, you know?

So, um, yeah, I mean, it's, it's not, it's not necessarily an easy thing. And I think that, um, it kind of, it takes a special person to, to be, uh, a really good guide. And, and, uh, so I, I think I, I always value, um, when, when somebody, uh, wants to guide me because, um, they're kind of. Doing it for the good of someone else and giving their time and everything like that.

**Kelly:** It's and there's also like rules, right? Like they can't be a current pro, they have to, but like for you---

**Aaron Scheidies:** When I came into the sport, you know, way back when, \*I\* made the rules, you know, the blind athlete, you know, like you go up to the registration table and well, if they let you to race at some points, there was a question with, you know, with the guidance, but most races, you know, they just say, oh, what are you, what do you need?

I just say, well, five guides, uh, you know, a motor on my bike and, and, uh, okay. We can do that. No. Um, so, uh, yeah, I mean, there just wasn't a lot of rules because it was so beginner stages of paratriathlon, but now with it being, you know, an Olympic Paralympic sport and, um, All these, there's all these rules and regulations.

And, um, yeah, so, I mean, in terms of the guide, they have to be same gender, same country when you're racing kind of internationally. Um, and they, they can't be an ITU pro or now it's world triathlon I guess pro um, and raced the world triathlon pro event within the last year, um, they can be, uh, you know, be racing, uh, Well, I mean iron man type stuff.

Um, but there's, I've raced to world triathlon, but, but there's so many rules in terms of the tether rule. It's like the swim tether can only be, uh, 80 centimeters long, which basically makes us like bashing each other in the water. So, so, you know, so, uh, small then the, the run tether can only be 50 centimeters along between us.

So we're really close. Um, and the guide can never go in front of the blind athlete, um, because that would be considered, like, pacing. Um, the guide can never pull the athlete or push the athlete or help them move forward, per se. Um, and then except in terms of going in front of them, except there's on the run, there's a leading zone.

So around turns, aid stations, there's leading zones where the guide can go in front, which it, it totally makes sense that when, you know, if you're a guide and you're leading a blind athlete or, uh, around the left-hand turn, there's you turn, let's say, and you, even though you tell them why not, that there might be a lag or that the tether or perceptive input from the kind of.

Uh, tension load tether takes a second. And then the blind athlete kind of delay and they might drop behind for a few seconds. And so there's leading zones and you got the, the blind athlete has to cross the finish line first. Um, I mean there's a lot of rules and lists rules after rules after rules.

**Kelly:** Do you guys change tethers then? I didn't realize there were different links.

**Aaron Scheidies:** We have to change. Um, because well, the swim tender there has to be bungee cord and the run tether has to be rope. I, I don't understand. I don't know why it needs to be rope because they don't want it to like [bungee?] some of the rules and regulations. Some of the rules and regulations are very, very good.

I, you know, but some of them, I think it's just, you know, it gets a little redundant, a little, little too.,,Obsessive.

**Kelly:** Right. Right. I mean, there was obviously even at one point a rule that said everyone had to wear blackout glasses to like level the playing field for blind athletes. And you fought that pretty hard because it was a... it was rough.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah, that was a horrible rule.

Um, but it was just a rule that was unethical and 99.9% of the blind athletes, even the fully blind athlete didn't agree with it. Um, but, uh, the actual system that



they're using now is actually the system that I gave them when that happened. Um, with, with a little bit of progression that it's a factor system basically.

Um, there's a factor portion of it for the swim and a factor portion of a, for the run, um, because there is a difference between completely blind athletes and partially sighted athletes in, uh, a difference that is completely due to the difference in vision or not having vision. So I think the factor is too big right now.

And I think they probably know that, um, uh, the whole reason I say that is because, um, so the population of the world that's completely blind, um, of the population, um, percentage of the population that's legally blind is it's only, it's only like five to 10% of the people that are considered legally blind are actually totally blind in the world rankings right now, I think six out of the top 10 people are completely blind.

**Kelly:** So when you say a factor system, do you mean that it's just like an algorithm?

**Aaron Scheidies:** Uh, yeah. Yeah. So originally it went off, uh, the Paralympic, uh, track and field and Paralympic swimming kind of times at, uh, at the Paralympics and other world championships and things like that. And at the distances that we do, and then they kind of made a, a factor and then they, they added a transition kind of factor, but now it's pretty much now completely transition to, to, uh, using all the data from paratriathlon events in the swim paratriathlon events, in the run and the transition factor. So it's, uh, so yeah, they basically create, create, uh, a time and the totally blind athletes start for the males is three minutes and 21 seconds ahead of the partially sighted. So I start three minutes and 21 seconds. And that's what makes it really hard is because, you know, when we're in this day and age, there's, the competition is getting so much better.

And if, if you have, uh, some completely blind athletes that start really improving, you know, their abilities and things like that, then they get three minutes and 21 seconds on top of a headstart, plus they've gotten a lot better. So it makes it really, really challenging.

**Kelly:** Interesting. I didn't realize it was a, like a chase format.

**Aaron Scheidies:** It's a chase format.

**Kelly:** Huh. Crazy. But, uh, so the whole, the whole like blackout glasses thing, I mean, it basically like it. It made you and anybody else who's partially blind. Like they struggle even more. Right?

**Aaron Scheidies:** it, yeah, it was probably dangerous was what I mean, like, uh, so anybody that has any sort of vision at all, even if you have 5%, you're going to use some of that. Your visual system is one of your balance systems.

And so, um, knocking out that system, when you normally use that, it throws off your balance, your equilibrium and things like that. And, um, and so, um, also just, you know, the fact that we don't let people use, um, headphones in races, so to make themselves, which would basically make them deaf. Cause they can't really hear cause they're listening to music per se.

So, uh, because of safety issues. But at that point they were saying it was okay. He said, basically you make yourself completely blind. Right. Um, but you know, it just is, it was a bad rule and, and since they've, they've transitioned to the new rule and, um, and we've got a visually-impaired working group that has helped kind of develop and progress, good rules.

And I think right now we're at a good spot. Um, I think, I think eventually they'll kind of, again, modify the factor and maybe we'll get back to the whole classifications maybe at some point, um, they'll be able to separate it into, cause right now there's in Paralympic sport, there's kind of three blind categories.

There's B one, which is completely blind, B two, which is kind of like has a little bit of vision. And then B3 is the least of the...least category of blindness, but still legally blind. Um, I'm a B2. Um, so at some point they, they could make it three standalone events or they, uh, like a B1 race, B2 race, and B3 race, but that again adds medal events, so...

**Kelly:** Right. I mean the whole classification thing in para is... there's a lot of classifications.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah, yeah. Not so much in triathlon. There's only, you know, five, but in, yeah, there's a lot of classifications.

**Kelly:** Yeah. And like cycling or swimming or running like the other athletes I've talked to it kind of like kind of a lot of, of being good at cycling or swimming or running comes down to classification and like which one you're in and on managing all of that. So ...

**Aaron Scheidies:** yeah. Yeah. And then, and then people try to get into a lesser classification things.

**Kelly:** Yeah. Yeah. It's weird. But you

**Aaron Scheidies:** We call it classification doping.

**Kelly:** Oh, okay. That makes sense. Because yeah. I've heard people trying to trick the system--well not trick the system, but you know.

**Aaron Scheidies:** yeah, yeah. Use system to their advantage.

**Kelly:** Right. But you actually filed a lawsuit about that whole blackout glasses. This is like going into Rio and you won, but then they didn't put your category in Rio. Like we talked about it.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah. I mean, I, wasn't never going to compete under those. I, I was, I stopped racing. I was never going to compete.

That was basically what potentially would have ended my career right there. Right. Uh, cause I was never going to race under those circumstances where it was something so unethical and, um, Unsafe and all that kind of stuff. And, um, that's what happened in 2011, New York city triathlon, all the, all the blind athletes protested and by not, uh, wearing blackout glasses and I walked the run in protest.

And so anyways, um, but yeah, you know, it's, it's one of those moments in, in kind of history, you know, at that point, like, you know, I definitely took the stand and my reputation and, you know, I kind of got a bad reputation for a while and all that kind of stuff, just because of any sort of, when you have any legal stuff, you get into a bad reputation.

Sometimes people look at you differently and whatnot and all that kinda stuff. But, um, you know, I have great relationships with USA triathlon or world triathlon now and everything like that. I think it was just one of those things that needed to be done. And, uh, there was people involved in creating the rules that kind of needed to be removed from that position. And, and, uh, we needed to move on and it's been a progression and kind of growth of the sport. That's been a positive thing. And the factor system now is, is now used in the wheelchair category as well.

**Kelly:** Oh, okay. Huh. But coming out of that was when you were like, all right, well, if I'm not going to race triathlon in Rio, then first you thought about running, right. But then you got a stress fracture that you have a track or track about cycling, tried to TT, and you guys like dropped your chain at the TT nationals, and then you thought it was all over. And then they called you up and were like, can you come to the Olympics next week? It's kind of like very up and down to be you.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Um, that's, that's just the, the first cycling event that I did it went over to Italy. This was, uh, before the, the trials event that you're referring to. And I was with Collin Riley and, uh, and in the time trial we got a flat. And then, uh, but that was the time trial was that's....That's what we do, you know, we're time trialists in triathlon, but then you got to the road race.

Oh man. This was like on like cobblestone roads and 30 tandems. And uh, like through the small little streets in Italy and man, Oh man. Like the first lap around, I heard, you know, like somebody's chain come off and then I heard like a crash and bang. And then, you know, then later in that race, we're going to make a turn on the cobblestones, a right-hand turn.

And we sweep a little left to, to open up some space in this Canadian team kind of cut us off and Colin moved a little more, but didn't know there was a curb that stuck out and we went straight into the curb and it severed our severed, our front fork, the off our front, like whole wheel was only hanging on by the brake cables.

And the mechanics had said they had never seen that before. Basically that was what helped save us because that took all the stress. And my guide went over the barriers and probably, you know, dislocated some ribs and stuff like that. But, uh, that made me be, be like, whoa, this is, this is some real stuff. Uh, I finally got to really like those, those, uh, road races.

I mean, after I kinda got over the initial, like whole, what did I just get myself into? Because I mean, I was freaking out that first race. I was like, Whoa, this is, I mean, when I looked at the Dutch team, I mean, they're both like 6'5", and the guy looks like he's a linebacker for the NFL. And I mean, these were some legit, you know, people and they, they knew what they're doing.

They all conversed in different languages and were talking. And, you know, I didn't know what the heck they were talking about all these strategies and whatnot to

see all these crashes, the first race. And there was another crash on that same race that the ambulance was in the road. And we had to. Quickly swerve out of their AIS, but yeah.

And then in the time trial, we didn't think we were going to the trials for, for the Paralympics. We, we, we thought we could maybe get a chance and be able to make the team. We were doing a great, having a great race and about three quarters, a mile to go, uh, we, we were going up this hill and start to make this turn.

And our derailleur just shattered and the chain broke and we had to run the bike the rest of the way. And, uh, that took us out of, you know, contention to, to make the team to Rio. And then, then, uh, Russia decided to dope and, uh, get kicked out of the games. And we were ranked sixth in the world at that time.

Um, and, uh, so they, we got us an invite cause there was a Russian team that, um, I guess would have gone. Um, they weren't ranked higher than us, but it's a long, it's a long story. Because there's... just because your team gets a spot doesn't necessarily mean like, if I, if, if I earn a spot for my team, it doesn't necessarily mean my team has to use that spot for me.

**Kelly:** Right. Like if, if, if America earns three spots and you were one of the people who earned those spots, that doesn't mean they're going to give it to you.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Correct. And the cycling team is so predominantly good at like, and their wheelchair athletes, the U S cycling team that, uh, and they have a wheelchair hand cycle relay, and you only have certain number of spots.

So we weren't going to get a spot. And we, and we can't do track relays and, and relays. So, you know, we're not part of that. There'll be there. So if you only have nine spots and you can use those nine spots for people that can also make up a relay, then. Yeah. So, so basically what we got in, cause Russia-- like we were sixth in the world, I mean, it wasn't like, we were like this, you know, 25th in the world and just got invited because Russia, you know, doped.

I mean, we had, we had medaled multiple times in the, in, on the world cups and all that kind of stuff.

**Kelly:** So are you going to call and are like, can you make it to Rio in two weeks? Like how does that go down? Is that super expensive first off?

**Aaron Scheidies:** well, it's like super expensive because you know, I, I'm not working my job for three weeks, four weeks, but it's not super expensive because if you get selected the team, I mean, all your expenses are covered and everything like that.

But, uh, I had to, you know, still talk to my wife and my family and the blanket ban on kind of stuff because we, you know, we had, we had kind of checked out. I mean, we were not really training that much. And we were like, you know, not really playing on that. And then we got to kind of like. Re pull it back together, pull it all back together, like, Oh, okay.

Let's uh, let's do a really quick bootcamp training camp and get out there.

**Kelly:** Yeah, that sounds, uh, I mean, on the one hand it'd be hard, but on the other hand it's awesome. So, whatever.

**Aaron Scheidies:** it was a great experience. I learned a lot from that experience because, um, you know, I didn't have the greatest performance, I wouldn't say in Rio, but a lot of it, um, was just lessons learned.

Like the time trial, that's our specialty. We could have done really, really good probably. And, uh, you know, we, we, uh, we gave them our tandem to go do the checkout process. Like we got it all thought out in no time, timely wise, but they were, they were doing the bike check and it just took forever and ever, and ever, and I had warmed up a little bit, but I had planned on warming up more and basically from.

30 minutes until the time of the race. I, I just sat there. I didn't have any bike or trainer or anything like that. I said to sat there and then kind of went into the race cold. Um, so probably something that impacted our race and stuff. And, uh, well, and then I met on the road race. We in Rio, it was an insane road race. Cause it was--

**Kelly:** or is it the same course with --

**Aaron Scheidies:** the same course as the Olympic race. And there was this crazy uphill climb switchbacks, and then it goes downhill and steep off-camera stuff. And we going down the second time around and. All of a sudden, I thought we had a flat or something. The brakes, uh, Ben was like just pressing the squeal and the brakes to try to keep the bike.

Cause like it went off like a cliff, you know? And, uh, so just to keep the bike from going off the cliff and stopping it and, uh, it come to, and he somehow managed, we somehow managed to get it to the bottom of the Hill and our, our team car, uh, was there to change our wheel. But the, uh, it was so steep and everything like that, that the, um, the brakes had totally melted the rim.

Uh, it was like, the rim was like a, like a wave. It was completely melted. It never seen that before. Uh, but, uh, Yeah. Then we got, I mean, we lost the, we were in the front pack and we lost the front pack and, uh, we, we got back in and had a great race from then on, uh, cause like I got a new wheel and stuff like that.

And we got going like, uh, 62 miles an hour down this descent, which is insane. You just hold on. And you do not move.

**Kelly:** Yeah. I mean, I mean there's a point at which you start to like speed wobble and it's very ...

**Aaron Scheidies:** yeah, yeah, yeah. Uh, 62 miles now on our tandem, it's a, it sounds like you're on the wing of a jet and uh, and if you're on the back, your hands are in your guides hands---Your life is in your guide's hands.

**Kelly:** Oh, man. I feel like, I feel like somehow I feel like you have no fear, right? Like all your stories later, like, Oh yeah. And then this insane, crazy thing happened

**Aaron Scheidies:** and it was fine. I mean, as you're, when you're blind, you, you have to trust people. And so the thing about blind, blind people and stuff like that, you know, we have to learn to trust people, but, but if someone, you know, is someone loses my trust, they're gone.

Okay. You're out of the circle of trust. Like you're gone. Like I, you know, cause I mean, if I have to, if I have to entrust you with, with like telling me if the street is safe to cross and all these other sorts of things and, and, and then you lie to me, not necessarily lying to me, telling me to go on the street and, you know, get hit by car.

But, but you know what I mean is like, We value. We have to, we have to trust other people. And so if someone's not honest, that's, that's a major kind of, um, not good thing. So make sure that you're always honest at all the blind people that you know,

**Kelly:** I will keep that in mind. All right. So given like all of the different things that have happened to you and everything, uh, do you think this last year with COVID did like prepare you better for that for the last year or not?

For like, for the postponement of Tokyo? For all of the lockdowns, for like everything rough. Do you feel like you handled it better because of that? Did you, do you feel like you handled it better, given everything else you've been through?

**Aaron Scheidies:** Um, I mean, I think, I, I think I probably could handle it a lot better than someone else.

I mean, we, that's just the tip of the iceberg because in 2019, our, our now two year old was eight months old and, uh, um, got RSV, which is a lower respiratory infection kind of like COVID and almost died, had to be put on a ventilator and to do CPR for seven and a half minutes to revive him.

And so, um, uh, and then the PTSD from, uh, my wife and even me from, from that situation and then COVID and him being kind of a vulnerable population or compromised because of that. He's doing great now, but, uh, um, it's just a never ending rollercoaster ride. My life is...so every one of those circumstances has definitely made me stronger and be able to handle more stuff.

Um, but. Um, I still get frazzled sometimes once in a while I get frazzled, but the COVID thing was more of a, just like a stressful situation of like, Oh man, I have to plan all this over again. Not like I'm freaking out the world's gonna

**Kelly:** right. Right. Okay. You, you, um, so obviously we've been talking all about your triathlon.

Uh, you work like a regular job too.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah. I'm a physical therapist. I, I work, uh, with, with, uh, in a skilled nursing facility with, uh, with old people

**Kelly:** See that's got to be stressful during COVID...

**Aaron Scheidies:** It teaches you a lot of patience, older people, but, uh, yeah. And then, you know, of course in the COVID situation, you know, every single day, cause we did have an outbreak in my facility, um, as well.

So then, then, you know, I'm coming home to my kids. Um, yeah, that was just, and my, and my wife, I think took it harder or had a different, more difficult time dealing with the concern of our children, given everything that had happened or like that than I did, but I still had to deal with her stress. You know?

**Kelly:** I hate dealing with my husband stress. It's fine. I get that.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Right. But it's still that stress of her being stressed can also lead to my own kind of a little bit of stress and anxiety of the situation. So, um, yeah, so I mean it's, and then the COVID thing is just, I think, taught everybody just, uh, you gotta fly by the seat of your pants. Be flexible. I mean, I've always been flexible because that's another part of being blind.

You gotta be flexible and trust people kind of, but, uh, but the COVID thing is plans have just gone out the window left and right multiple times now. So.

**Kelly:** Uh, was it also, I mean, I know somebody else told me that, uh, one of the other athletes on the national team, they couldn't like, you couldn't meet up with people.

They couldn't run with a guide and they like, so they had to do everything indoors and it like made it really challenging.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Yeah. I mean, that's made it really challenging. I went down to Ben's place to train with him once the one time I go down there to train with him and get ready and then he blows out his back and gets hurt.

So he's, he's injured right now. And we having, um, so, but it's been very, very difficult cause you know, you, you pick and choose, uh, well, everybody has their own degree of comfort level of what is okay to do and what not to do and everything like that. And you pick and choose based upon kind of risk mitigation strategies.

Um, so now, now, right now I'm racing with Greg Billington. I pulled him out of retirement from his Olympic, uh, uh, triathlon career. He thought he was done. Next thing you know he's getting phone calls, uh, from me. So, uh, we raced in Sarasota and he did an amazing job. Uh, but he's going to raise with me, hopefully in the Yokohama race that's coming up, I've been kind of continues to rehab and I think he'll, he'll be fine come when he needs to race.

So, uh, but you know, I just, haven't got a chance to train with anybody and that's the thing is I haven't got a chance to really ride on a tandem, even out here too much, just because of, well, you know, the, I guess, risk and what, I don't really think there's too much risk when you're outside, even if I am behind him and whatnot, but you know...

Everyone has their own degree of, I guess, comfort.



**Kelly:** So, uh, so you're going to Yokohama, Tokyo process restarts. Like the qualification rate starts in may you'll know, like that'll all be determined by late June? Early July?

**Aaron Scheidies:** Extended to July 15th. Yes. They extended. So they have to, we need a continental championship. Basically. We haven't had Cottonelle championship and that's a lot of points.

And so they got us, they got to kind of scrunch one in there somehow. Um, but these races it's, um, you know, looking at these rules and protocols, I mean, I'm, I'm going to Yokohama Japan, but I'm not really going to

**Kelly:** Japan. You guys can't leave. Can't do anything...

**Aaron Scheidies:** No like, I'm going to prison. Like I fly to Yokohama and I sit in my room for five days and I can't go out.

**Kelly:** Yeah. And then I, uh, yeah, I was talking to somebody they're not even, yeah. They're not even like letting it. USAT or ITU photographers in, they're not like it's very, very,

**Aaron Scheidies:** it's like a bubble... it's it's prison. So yeah. I mean, I'm not really going to Yokohama, just going to a prison. It just happens to be in Japan.

Right. Right. But, you know, the, the good side of it is, is that we're going to be able to race. And, uh, we're getting special permission basically to fly in, you know, without the crazy quarantine time periods and all that stuff. And, um, we will be able to race, um, you know, they'll test, they'll do testing that they're doing, you know, they're doing a lot of strategies to try to mitigate things and, um, and all that.

And, but in the humor side of it, it's like prison, but, um, it will be interesting to see because they do let us have like swim sessions. But as of now, we don't know if. If we can even go out to run, like we can't out of our room literally. So I don't think I can run there's no, other than there's like a familiarization that, um, happens, I think the day before.

Um, I, I mean, so it'll be interesting. What other countries do, I mean, do they, do they bring treadmills into their rooms, but you can't, you can't go into other people's rooms. You can't, you have to, I don't know. It's a very interesting situation.

**Kelly:** All right. And that's like, kind of, I mean, you need that for the points for the qualification that you'll find out. And the final, like deadline for making a team is kind of whatever you just said, July 15th. And then the Paralympics are end of August. Is that right?

**Aaron Scheidies:** End of August. Yeah. I mean, we have to have that because there's been a lot of people. I mean, I've never not been on the podium in my life in an international race.

I'm 17th in the Paralympic rankings right now, because I haven't raised very much. And the races that I did, well, one, they were two years ago. Cause there hasn't

been any races and they, the points decrease like the Tokyo test event, you know, it gets switched, the swim got canceled. So then it became a duathlon.

So then the points only get, get cut into one third. And then I was coming off hip surgery. So two years ago. So I didn't race a lot because while I was planning on doing the Tokyo test event at the world championships and then racing a bunch of, you know, big races in 2020 beginning of the year, and all I needed basically was to do pretty good in those or do, you know fairly, well in those? And I was assured a spot, but now those points, you know, lose over time...

**Kelly:** huh? It sounds like your, uh, your, your kid just woke up from a nap too.

**Aaron Scheidies:** app too. Yeah, he's probably, you know, I dunno, mad at something, something,

**Aaron Scheidies:** don't worry, someone else down there with them.

**Kelly:** You're not just leaving him, but you also started a foundation. Right? That's what I was trying to ask you about for, for kids. I think for. Like inspiring them, getting them out.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Uh, well, no, no. I mean, I was a part of the See Different foundation, uh, which was a organization to help blind for individuals get into athletics and things like that.

That was kind of the beginning part of my career. I didn't start that actually, Matt Willer, who owns Base Performance started see different foundation, um, that kind of organizations kind of, uh, dissolved. And when, you know, people have been filtered into different other organizations. Um, I've done other things like I'm right now, uh, involved with the children's center for the vision impaired in Kansas city.

Um, that puts on the trolley run. And actually this was my first kid's shirt. It says, stay focused on your dreams and, uh, has my eye logo chunked in the eye, on the, on the sidewalk with a Sherlock hall was dog, you know, we want a magnifying glass. And, um, so I've, I've tried to. Kind of really transition, um, and be more about kind of family, community.

Um, so these shirts, uh, you know, the proceeds go to helping raise money for this children's center for the visually impaired. Um, so just kind of giving back to the community, uh, I didn't start any sort of foundation.

**Kelly:** I don't know why I thought you started I don't know why for some

**Aaron Scheidies:** reason, one of them is a better person than I

What do your, I mean, do your kids, I know they're young, they're obviously like two, and so they don't really. Probably even know anything there, but today think of like, dad is blind or is it just sort of like, dad's just dad?

**Aaron Scheidies:** Uh, well, it's funny because they'll like, bring me my phone and cause my phone talks to me all the time and they'll be like, daddy, you need this, but they'll never do that to my wife.

Like daddy, here's your phone? This is yours. They won't play on my phone ever. They'll play it, try to play on her phone or mess around, but they won't play with my fucking phone. Uh, they'll just give it to me like daddy, you need this. The funniest thing is, is though my, my oldest, you know, this was about a year ago.

He, every time he would see the American flag, he's up seeing it all the time. Cause I'm wearing it on shirts all the time. And so now it's-- that's daddy's flag. And so every year that we go, Hey, it's daddy's flag it's daddy's flag. Um, and then also he, he's also starting to like, you know, get into the, having a little sass and he's like, daddy, just go ride your bike, ride your bike, daddy.

[Nice.] So he tells me often to go ride my bike and, uh, and go back to the garage, which makes me feel really good. Um, but, uh, yeah, th they know, they know something like, they know like that I, that I compete kind of, and do this, I think they know kind of for something, but I don't think they fully understand kind of obviously everything about it.

And I think, I think they know that I'm got something wrong with my eyes, but they might not completely understand it. Right. Whatever.

**Kelly:** Okay. Um, all right. Here's my last question for you. I usually end with a, would you rather, and now I'm just like, I don't even know if that's a good, I just am curious. Do you prefer, I mean, obviously at this point you're used to racing with a guy, but do you prefer like running solo or running with somebody at this point?

**Aaron Scheidies:** Um, I mean, I, I would rather, um, with someone else, I think running with the guide will one, it, it, then you feel like more like you're a team and it makes more individual sports, more like a team sport, you get to work together. Um, but also it allows me to like maximize my real potential and not have to worry about, am I going to hit this or that I'm able to just relax and focus on kind of doing the best that I can, uh, physically and not have to deal with the obstacles and things in my way. So, um, I really would rather, uh, race and run and train with other people. I'm much more of a social person

**Kelly:** anyways. It's always, yes. I was wondering if at this point you're like, Oh my God, I just want to do something solo, leave me alone.

You're tired of it.

**Aaron Scheidies:** And so this COVID thing has like, totally, I'm just like, please just give me some people, you know, can I just. Can I just have some people here.

**Kelly:** Exactly. Well, good luck, uh, qualifying for Tokyo and Tokyo. And, uh, and thank you for chatting with us. Yeah.

**Aaron Scheidies:** Thanks so much for

**Kelly:** having me on thanks to Aaron and Laura for chatting and good luck to both of you in your respective races, we'll be watching.

And if you liked what you hear, be sure to subscribe and share with a friend, keep training and keep listening. .