

## SEEKING THE EXTRAORDINARY

# Ep 8 - Olympic Mettle: Dan Jansen and Bonnie Blair

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[00:00:00] **Lisa:** [00:00:00] Seeking the Extraordinary is sponsored by The Colony Group, a national wealth and business management company that seeks the extraordinary by pursuing an unrelenting mission of providing clients with peace of mind and empowering their visions of tomorrow. To learn more about how The Colony Group manages beyond money, visit [thecolonygroup.com](http://thecolonygroup.com).

**Michael Nathanson:** Welcome fellow seekers Welcome fellow secrets of the extraordinary. Welcome to our shared quest, a quest, not for a thing, but for an idea, a quest, not for a place, but into deep inner unexplored regions of ourselves. A quest to understand how we can achieve our fullest potential by learning from others who have done or are doing exactly that. May we always have the courage and wisdom to learn from those who have something to teach.

Join me now in Seeking the Extraordinary [00:01:00] I'm Michael Nathanson, your chief seeker of the extraordinary In today's edition of Seeking the Extraordinary. We're going to go where we've never gone before, which is to speak to two extraordinary people at the same time. And when you learn who they are, I think you'll understand why they're quite different people and have their own stories. But you know them both as an Olympic legends.

Our first guest is one of the most decorated athletes in Olympic history. She competed for the United States in four Olympics, winning five gold medals and one bronze medal. One of the greatest speed skaters in history. Our first guest made her inaugural Olympic appearance in Sarajevo in 1984. After winning the 1986 short track world championship, she competed in long track at the 1988 winter Olympics in Calgary, where she won her first Olympic [00:02:00] gold medal in the 500 and a bronze medal.

And in the 1000 meters, she won two more gold medals in the 1992 winter Olympics in Albertville, and then another two gold medals at the 1994 Lillehammer games. But she wasn't through yet. She went on to be the first female to complete the 500 meters in under 39 seconds. And in 1995, she broke the very world record she had just set. A member of the United States Olympic hall of fame. In 2002, our guests carried the Olympic flame into the opening ceremony in Salt Lake City. She served on the US speed skating's board of directors. And as a member of the US Olympic delegation to Sochi. Now that's an impossible act to follow, but then there's our second guest, also a speed skater.

He too made his Olympic debut in 1984. By the time he made it to the 1988 Olympics, he had won the world sprint championship and was [00:03:00] the favorite to win the Olympic 500 and the 1000. But as all of us who are old enough to remember, know, all too well on the day of his 500 meter race, he was informed that his sister was dying of leukemia. A few hours later, she passed away our brave guest competed in his race, nonetheless, but fell, sadly. He had a similar experience in the 1000 meter though. He had been on a record breaking pace when he fell toward the end of the race. He again left the Olympics with no medals, but he did win the us Olympic spirit award for his bravery, and in the 1992 Olympics he came up short again, but he was not done yet in 1993.

He set the world record in the 500 and after winning his second world, sprint championship was a favorite yet again, to win golden 1994 Olympics. And then there was heartbreak again in the 500 meter, his best event. He had only one [00:04:00] event left the 1000, which he was not expected to win. He defied all of the experts and finish first winning his elusive Olympic gold medal and setting a new world record while doing so he was chosen by his fellow Olympians to bear the US flag at the closing ceremony of the 1994 Winer Olympics, and will forever be an example of the power of human resilience.

Please welcome the real dynamic duo, Bonnie Blair and Dan Jansen. Welcome Bonnie and Dan.

**Bonnie Blair:** Hi, thanks.

**Dan Jansen:** Great to be here.

**Michael Nathanson:** What an honor it is to have both of you. Have you ever both been on a show together?

**Dan Jansen:** Not a COVID Aero show, not a podcast, but other like television. Yeah. But it's fun. We always love to get together and chat.

**Michael Nathanson:** Well I'm pretty excited to have two Olympic legends on, at the same time. And two people again, who have again, displayed this level of extraordinary that [00:05:00] we're all learning about through these podcasts. So as I think about the two of you, you're both household names, at least for those of us who fall the Olympics.

And my introduction included what is largely the public information about each of you. But what I wanted to ask you about is for you to maybe each take a turn and tell us some of the, tell us about your journey to get to where you got and where you are. And if possible, I'm going to give you each a few minutes to do this.

Could you try to focus on maybe some of the things that aren't so publicly known, and maybe we could start with you, Bonnie?

**Bonnie Blair:** Well, first of all, loaded question, jeez. I think one of the, one of the neatest things about DJ, as I call him, Dan Jansen is that we really were connected before we were actually even born.

So our families go back [00:06:00] that far in the sport that they were involved in the sport and, by the time we came along, our families already had this connection. So for us to kind of continue this connection all the way till today and beyond I think is really pretty special. I think our sport itself, especially in those early days was so family run.

So for instance, DJ's dad and my dad would always be on the finish line and be timers. And I don't know about DJ's mom, but I know sometimes my mom was a judge and a judge is different in speed skating than like in figure skating, it was more like who went over the finish line first, second or third versus judging their style or anything.

So it was a family sport where families were very much intertwined in volunteerism and things like that. And DJ's brother Dick Jansen but back then he was known as Dickie Jansen. He would [00:07:00] stay at our house with my brother when we had a competition down in Champaign and then vice versa when it was up in Milwaukee.

So, we really did have this connection really before we were born and, to think of all these years later we're still very much connected and that's really pretty special.

**Michael Nathanson:** Yeah. Have you ever seen the movie Molly's Game? Yeah. Yeah. Great movie. Isn't that a great movie.

I love the line where I think it's, I think it's the Molly character played by Jessica Chastain and she says, you know, how many girls at the Olympics have demanding fathers?

And of course the answer is all of them. Do you feel like that was the case for you?

**Bonnie Blair:** Not in DJ's and my case, our dads were pretty, they stood on the finish line and were pretty quiet people like, sometimes I wonder how much of a conversation they even had together. So I think that was the other thing. I think very much growing up in a situation where [00:08:00] it really had to come from us. And if you didn't want to be there, then don't show up and there was no harm done there wasn't that, hammer to our head that you need to do this.

**Michael Nathanson:** Interesting. That's great. So, so you've dispelled the myth that we learned about in Molly's game, Dan,

**Dan Jensen:** Well, along that point and Bonnie's exactly right about our dads in that they were both very laid back and neither pushed us to where, like we had to be out there but the one thing that, that we do have in common that may have been, let's call it for lack of a better word, a substitute for that is we're both the youngest of many siblings.

I'm the youngest of nine Bonnie, the youngest of six. And so our competitiveness probably came from our siblings, rather than our fathers. But yeah, again she hit it on the head. It's pretty rare that. I mean anyone let alone the paths we've taken, but that anyone can honestly say I've known this person really my whole life.

And that's true [00:09:00] with me and Bonnie and then to kind of, we started making world teams, national team, world teams at the same time and then four Olympic teams together. And so it's man, there are a few people that I know better than Bonnie Blair. It's been fun.

And like she said, it's, and I think we can both say this and it's all the things we were able to do on the ice It's and we look back on that and our whole careers and it's, wouldn't trade it for the world some of the best times in our lives but the best part of our whole careers is the fact that we, the people we got to know and remain friends with to this day. And, not just Bonnie and I, but other teammates, other skaters, some other countries we're still in touch. And those things you just can't replace. It's, that's one of the more special parts of, as I look back on, like,

**Michael Nathanson:** I find it really interesting that you both answered my question by talking about your relationship as well, which so do you remember the first time the two of you met?

Because it was just so long ago.

**Dan Jensen:** I just [00:10:00] remember again, like our families knowing each other and then, back then we skate at PSU. Now it's short track and long track. Right. In speed skating back then it was indoor and outdoor because. We didn't have any indoor old ovals 400 meter ovals when we grew up.

So we both skated short track growing up and, I certainly remember, Bonnie just always being there and I think the same for her, we didn't really probably get close until

**Bonnie Blair:** the Colorado Springs and going to training camp.

**Dan Jensen:** Yeah, exactly. Early eighties. And then and then from then on,

**Michael Nathanson:** So, what were your dreams when you were children, did you think you were gonna, you were going to grow up to be Olympians?

What did you want to do with your lives, Bonnie? You go first.

**Bonnie Blair:** I think kind of growing up, I knew I really liked athletics, so I thought I was going to be a PE teacher. And I remember sitting in my TV room and watching Eric heightened and even in Lake Placid. And even though I had taken part in the Olympic [00:11:00] trials before that I was kinda like, wow, that would really be pretty cool to be able to go to the Olympics.

And so, that was kind of my first, I don't know whether I really had dreamt of going to the Olympics or thought about doing that really until that, that, that year, because I had never skated what was called the Olympic style or long track, like DJ was talking about. It was, for me, it was mostly, short track and other what we call pack style events.

And I had never raced the long track until right before those Olympic trials. So, and short track wasn't in the Olympics back then. So it wasn't, something that was really on the forefront of my mind. Although I do remember a time when my dad introduced me to a coworker of his and said, this is my daughter, Bonnie, and she's going to be in the Olympics.

And I was well, I don't even do what they do in the Olympics. So, like I really [00:12:00] felt that my dad kind of had this premonition in a dream. And although you talked about earlier that forcefulness coming from parents, my dad was a man of very few words and I'm really not kidding.

So for him to say that and to stick in my head, I didn't take that as forceful. I kind of took it as like, he's nuts, like, and is he just trying to impress this guy? And I thought, well, whatever, it kind of went in one ear and out the other. And I really didn't think about it too much until I was really watching Eric Heiden and thought, well, it would be pretty cool to go to the Olympics.

So, for me, those those thoughts really didn't enter my mind. Cause I didn't skate that style of skating where, DJ, it might be a little bit different because he lived where they had a rink where you could, do the, what we call the Olympic style back then or long track.

And he can take it from there. But yeah, it wasn't like this childhood dream, although, kind of watching it, it [00:13:00] kind of grew into this dream. And then my dad kind of, I guess, made it putting a seed in my head in the first place.

**Dan Jensen:** So for me, it was, yeah, a little different, but ultimately the same.

And you'll understand that the second ... so I remember, it was in 1972. 1972? I was only seven years old, but that's the first Olympics I remember watching pretty intently. And if I think about it now, it's seven year old sitting in front of the TV, kind of really getting into it was kind of strange, but so then it went on and then 76, but at that time, again from seven to 11 years old, you're just kinda doing your thing.

We we skated in the winter, we played all other sports. I was, I loved baseball. I played football, all that stuff. And then I started to get, pretty good for my age group. And then you start to win, state and national titles again for 12 year olds or 13 year olds.

But what [00:14:00] really did it again, the same as Bonnie in 1980 watching Eric Heiden and because Eric, so I skated at the same track in Milwaukee, in West Alice, Wisconsin that Eric trained at every night I grew up two miles from the track.

And so I always kind of had this, all of Eric and and then watching him in 1980, I was 14 and just kind of getting ready to to grow through it, go through a growth spurt, I guess, which is kind of when and then I saw him do that and I knew then I wanted to go to the Olympics. I had no dreams of a medal or being Eric.

I just, I wanted to go to the Olympics.

**Michael Nathanson:** I remember that too, by the way. And I also remember being inspired certainly in a different way. So, let's get a little bit more now into the sport and I'm going to come to other aspects of your lives as we as we proceed with a conversation. So, spending a lot of time learning more about the two of you and looking you up to the best of my ability.

And you've each said some things over the years that I thought were really interesting. [00:15:00] Some things that I thought we could spend some time on, just to try to understand a little bit better, how you think Bonnie, you said that skating is a joy. It's a solitary sport, one in which you claim all the rewards as your own, nobody makes you do it.

It's just you. And I thought that was an interesting quote, assuming it's a real quote. But it, I did see it a few times. I found that a few times, so I'm, I think it's verified. So I thought it was interesting that you refer to it as a solitary sport. And I'll tell you why. Like as I watched swimmers, for example, I think swimmers would say, sure, it's an individual event, but my sense is that, swimmers think about it as a team sport.

And I thought it was interesting. Do you still feel like it's a solitary sport?

**Bonnie Blair:** For. I guess different reasons, I guess I look at it as that solitary sport in the sense that we're going against the clock. [00:16:00] And so there's no judges awarding points for anything and it's really all use. So you either do it or you don't now the time away from racing and the training and things like that.

It can be extremely, very team-orientated because we would, for the most part train a lot as a team together. However, nobody's pushing you to do, if you want to put out whatever effort you do during that's up to you. Like you're the one that has to make the decision of how much I put into this, how much I put into that.

Is this a time where maybe I kind of rest? Cause I know in two days I need to be taking it to a higher level or, whatever, but all of that really, has to come really kind of from within and unlike, a team sport where your teammates are constantly relying on you for XYZ.

You, you better [00:17:00] show up. But I also know that if I don't show up when I really need to, or on those specific days or whatever other people training all over the world are showing up, so I better show up and be ready to do it. But once again, it really has to come from me now there's since DJ and I both retired, they've added some like team aspect sports to long track speed skating.

So there is a little bit of that draws a little bit more team to it. That means you better be getting along and you better be pushing each other and things like that. So, yes, it's solitary, but it's in specific instances I guess, is how I really looked at.

**Michael Nathanson:** Thank you. On the topic of winning, here's what you said.

You said winning doesn't always mean being first winning means you're doing better than you've ever done before. And Dan you seem to agree with your friend because you are quoted as saying you and you alone are the person [00:18:00] who should take the measure of your own success.

I do not try to be better than anyone else and we try to be better than myself.

I actually think that's, I, as I looked up, things that Dan Jansen has said, that's one of the things that comes up over and over. And I have to say, I read that the two of you are clearly people who have won extraordinary things. I have to say, I read that with a little bit of skepticism. How can people who are who seem so competitive and so successful in what they have done?

Do you really feel that way that is really just competing against yourself? Or is that something you just tell yourself so that it's just a way to motivate yourselves. Dan, you want to go first?

**Dan Jensen:** I think I actually kind of have two, two responses to that one is that, we we both Bonnie and I both were. Fortunate enough, good enough, whatever you want to call it, to get to a point where [00:19:00] we actually were we're the best in the world at our events. And so we, we knew if it was, if we went out there and skate our best, we there's a good chance we're going to win that day. And so sometimes you have to change the way you look at your goals.

It's it becomes I'm not. I can't worry about the competitors at all. If I keep getting better, if I keep making myself better, they're not going to beat me. And so it becomes, as Bonnie was saying, you're just competing against that clock. And so, maybe it's your goal becomes a, a personal record in our case maybe it's a world record.

**Michael Nathanson:** Oh, it's amazing. I love that. I think what you just said is that you had achieved such a level of success that the best person to compete with. Was you because you were the best in the world. ,

**Dan Jensen:** it's interesting. Okay. So then the other thing that we both have in common is that although, I had more [00:20:00] more troubles if you will on the ice, at the Olympics we both went through things personally and obviously I lost my sister, Bonnie lost her brother, Rob was fighting brain cancer for many years and my sister was leukemia.

And so, so your perspective becomes different. It did, for me, it was like, look this is, I love what I do. And I love the life-style provides. I love working hard and I love going out and winning and skating well, but this isn't life or death, it's just not. And so that became, perspective became a huge part of my outlook and how I saw.

**Michael Nathanson:** Thanks, Dan. Yeah,

**Bonnie Blair:** I think to add onto that and DJ touched a little bit on it and yeah, like he said, you get to a certain level and you have to find ways to. Challenge yourself. So for instance, us being able to kind of compete at different tracks all over the world. I tried to remember those times and DJ yes.

I wrote [00:21:00] them down because Lord knows I wouldn't remember them. That I skated at different tracks so that when I got back there, those were the times that I was also chasing besides maybe a personal best or whatever. So, trying to focus more really on that clock than versus like DJ said, the competitor that's on the ice next to you and yeah.

Challenging that clock competing against that clock. If I beat the clock, then chances are I am going to beat the person that's on the starting line next to me. So, so that was really it. And when I said, sometimes it's being fourth. So at the Olympics in Lillehammer I was nowadays the better athletes went first and the not as good athletes went whack.

Now it's reversed because everything's pretty much inside. And, back in the day, they always thought that, the ice would be better for those earlier payers and conditions. But of course, [00:22:00] Lily Hummer was inside anyway, but that's just how they did it. And I was in one of those earlier pairs, but.

One of the Russians had put one of their top girls in the later pairs, just because which you could do.

And so I was sitting in third for, the whole first grouping they resurface, I'm just sitting there waiting like, am I going to get third or not? But in that third place, I had a set of personal best set, an American record, know whether American female had skated faster in the 1500 than I did.

So, I mean, I was like I was ecstatic. And when I look at. The three races I skated in Lillehammer that probably really was my best race, but that Russian girl came along and she got third or no, she got second. She bumped somebody else down to third and I wind up getting fourth. So, and I did, I kind of went like this and my coach is like, first of all, there's nothing I can do.

But you [00:23:00] know, the main thing was to me, I was just as proud of that race as I was of those two gold medals, because I had done something, no other American female had done, I had set an American record. I went a personal best by a huge chunk of time. And so, yeah, those are the things that I have to look at.

What was success for me in that race was fourth. And, maybe for others, it could be 10th or 12th or whatever. And I think that's what we have to really look at it and anything that we do sure. You can compare yourself to others, but I think first and foremost, we always need to kind of have that competitiveness within us to try to keep raising up on that ladder.

**Michael Nathanson:** What a wonderful answer. I love ... that's inspirational. And actually I did not know that story. And the reason is because there are no headlines about that story, right. Because you were in fourth place. Exactly. Yeah. And I just really think it's important to tell that story for that reason. Yeah.

[00:24:00] Dan, you said, I don't think there's any such thing as setting your goals too high, the higher you set your goals, the more you're going to work. So I have some thoughts about that as well. I certainly ascribed to that, that, that line of thinking as well. And yet I'm mindful of that.

As you both talked about your childhoods, it's clear you both talked about athletics generally and I have to tell myself a story that the two of you are just, Supreme, natural athletes. And I was thinking about, as I was thinking about the things I wanted to ask you about, it was I was thinking about asking you if do you think that anyone can do what you have done if they put in the kind of effort or don't you think it takes a lot of, sort of natural talent as well to do what you would with the two of you have done?

**Dan Jensen:** I do. And I'm convinced of that. And I know that for several reasons, because my brother Mike is a great example, Mike but 20 months older than I am.

And he was, he just, he wanted to make an Olympic team and he was [00:25:00] close. He was, he missed two of them by about a 10th of a second. And I thought, I used to think all the time what's, what's the difference. We train together every day. We do the same things basically. And probably the bottom line is I had more of a natural feel for the ice than he did.

And so technically I was better. And so yeah, there is for sure. Bonnie is the same way Bonnie was, probably the best term skater in history to this day, in my opinion. And it's so that, yeah, a lot of it. Came with natural talent and natural field. But if you don't cultivate that, then you're still going to be middle of the pack.

Right. And that's where it comes to what Bonnie was saying before about that's when it's up to you to put in that work and some don't, we've both known a lot of pretty talented skaters who had great natural talent and just were kind of lazy if you will. And they just didn't want to work.

And so, they I don't believe they [00:26:00] ever reached their full potential.

**Michael Nathanson:** So maybe the lesson behind your words is for each of us to find those things where we do have some natural potential and to apply that level of effort and this concept of setting goals high so that we work harder to do what we are naturally capable of doing better.

Yeah.

**Dan Jensen:** Let me add to that real quickly because I say that, and I believe that if there's not, you can't really set them too high. However, having said that you do have to be, have a bit of real realism in there. If I'm not saying drop everything in your life, because your goal is to be a gold medalist and quite frankly, he just had, you don't have the talent and you're not going to ever make it.

I don't mean keep working every day and don't have a backup plan. I'm just saying. If this is something you're really after yeah. You'd be realistic about it, but then why not set those goals high and go after it?

**Michael Nathanson:** Yeah. [00:27:00] Bonnie, anything ?

**Bonnie Blair:** Yeah. I guess I would just add that, in the very beginning winning an Olympic medal or gold or whatever was not really in my thinking, it was more as I started going and.

Started being able to chase that podium and then go, of, now a medal is within reach. So I think like DJ said, you have to be realistic, so, in the very beginning it was about just trying to make an Olympic team. It's not like all of a sudden I'm going to start speed skating. I'm going to go win a medal.

Like it was not that easy, no matter how much you want it or how much you put in the work. But you know, there's, I think it's about being realistic. It's about, setting those goals and trying to accomplish then resetting them, once you get there and that's what helps keep you trying to keep moving up and but it, for sure, like, like you gotta be realistic, and like, for some people like to [00:28:00] think like my husband. He made four Olympic teams. Like there's not a lot of people that can say they made four Olympic teams, he wasn't, chasing that medal. He would have loved to have been in that group to chase that medal. But, and I'm not saying that he was just satisfied with making an Olympic team. He was trying to get there. And, but he was also still taking everything into account and, those are the things you have to look at after the fact and go, there's not a lot of people that made four Olympic teams and that's something that's that is successful and how you worked hard and what you did and the things you've learned in the process that take you on the rest of your life. And then you hope to kind of transfer on your kids about, working hard and setting those goals and resetting them and there's frustrations along the way. And you figure out how to deal with them and you keep moving on.

**Michael Nathanson:** I'm now going to I'm going to ask you one more question before we [00:29:00] move on to some of the some of the challenges in your lives, including including cancer and how that hit both of your families.

But before I get into that, I do want to ask you one more question that I often ask our guests, because I'm always curious about the role of mentors and coaches and teachers in people who are able to achieve these ultra high levels of success. Could you both speak to that? Were there mentors, coaches, teachers that made all the difference to you?

Bonnie you want to start?

**Bonnie Blair:** So yes, of course I think, number one Eric, if you're in our sport and you're not looking up to Eric Heiden, like you need to look up Eric.



I, because what he did in one week's time will never happen again. So, he, for sure was that role model. Another thing, when I go back to that 1980 Olympic trials, I just happened to be paired with Leah Polis Mueller.

And so [00:30:00] this was like, one of my second five hundreds of long track ever. And, and I knew that she's like the best we've got. And so my more specialty, especially back then was my, my hundred and I got down the a hundred really fast and we finished that race and she set a track record and she came up to me and thanked me.

Forgetting, you're going to be able to set that track record and here she goes on and wins medals and I'm like, she's thanking me this high school kid from champagne, Illinois. And, like that meant so much to me. And it, it was that enticing thing. I was like, Oh yeah, well, maybe I could keep kind of doing this.

So, there were different pieces like that that for sure, made a difference from the competitors within our sport the coaches one of my coaches, Mike Crow, I remember him telling me that. Kind of back in the day [00:31:00] when I lived in champagne, I would get like a piece of paper that would have our training program on it.

And it was up to you to go out and do it. And, but as I started getting more success in the sport, I became more diligent about that piece of paper. And when I started getting better results, I remember my CRO telling me, I've seen, you finally become a student of the sport. Meaning you do your homework, you get the results, you do the training, you get the results.

And, I was kind of like any other high school kid. I enjoyed being with my friends. And if that meant going to the basketball game or, a group was going to go bowling, I'd want to go with them. But it got to the point where, all right, maybe I'll catch the second half because I've got to do a workout first.

And, I was always kind of, I'll just do that later. So I did become more. Dedicated to the sport that I was in. And, that goes back to kind of that loneliness because I was really the only one in champagne doing this. I was [00:32:00] doing it all by myself. So, later on I moved to where I could be with a group on a more, regular time.

So, so that was, something that, ticked in my head. But yeah, I had a lot of different coaches along the way, and I really felt that they all gave me something at a time when I really needed it. And I'm very grateful to, to them and their dedication to our sport and the other athletes and things like that.

**Dan Jensen:** Yeah. I mean, a lot of them. A lot of the same, I think back about that. And you could, you really could go back to when we were, when I first got on skate for five, six years old, and you're, you got a club coach they're just teaching you how to do crossovers, things like that. If you just don't know, like, if they weren't there, who knows, maybe somebody else would have taught you, but you don't know, as I got older for sure.

And Bonnie and I had several of the same coaches and all of that goes in Intuit. Also [00:33:00] my teammate, Nick Thomas as we were, in the top couple of, in the world for a lot of years together, and to be able to train with a guy that's that good is PR you can't put a price tag on that.

He, we would train together every day and push each other to get better. And so you look at that and Yeah, it wasn't my coach, but he was as important as anyone in my whole career. And then Peter Miller, my final coach, actually my first and last he he's a character, but he had a way, at least with me to just make me believe he is a very good motivator and he's done it with a lot of skaters and a lot of different countries.

And, I just, I remember one, one day we were training and it just was, I was skating really well. It was, I think it was Olympic year. It was the last year of my career. And he came up after a tempo workout one day and he said, he goes, you know what, the sport's really going to miss something when you retire.

**Michael Nathanson:** That's awesome.

**Dan Jensen:** Like that was like, that's pretty cool [00:34:00] to hear. Yeah. From another golden medalist and stuff, things like that, kind of, they stick with you.

**Bonnie Blair:** I think I want to add the, of something that he was talking about him training with Nick, but you know, me being the female part of all that I was, they were my rabbit and for me to be able to escape behind them and then bring me to speeds that I could never imagine going on my own, that when I got to those world record paces, I knew how to handle it because I had been skating with these guys.

So, they were like my motor pace and, they didn't have that. Because, they were all they didn't have that motorcycle that could get out on the ice and bring them up to speeds. But I had that. And so that to me was very that's priceless. You can't, girls are lucky in that sense that we could chase these guys and then I just made them my killer [00:35:00] brownies as a thank you.

**Michael Nathanson:** Yeah. As a, as someone who has been spending a lot of time thinking about what it is that makes people achieve their greatest potential. I do see this over and over this willingness to learn from others, this lack of defensiveness this feeling of maybe some competition, but rather the ability to just learn from others and be inspired by others as opposed to feeling any kind of negativity.

And I just see these traits, regardless of the circumstances, whether it's an athlete or a business person or a philanthropist. And the two of you, I think are speaking very much to that. I'd like to now get into some of the tragedy. And and it is part of both of your stories. And and so I think it's fair game and I know you've both have talked about it.

Bonnie you've spoken about a publicly. You said what I've learned from my own journey and from my family's [00:36:00] experience with cancer is how important it is to stay positive and move forward. Not every day is going to be perfect that's life, but staying positive is going to get you to the next day. And yet you've dealt with tragedy and Dan, we all know your story.

It was all over television for many years. They made a movie about it and it's a very well-known story and I'd like to give you both an opportunity to speak a little bit about your experience and maybe as you do, if you could also just also. Talk a little bit about how you think about this concept of resilience, which I mentioned earlier, someone asked me this question yesterday completely unrelated.

And I talked about resilience being a me of the ability to deal with adverse conditions and to spring back. And I I'm a student of Chinese philosophy and there's a Chinese philosopher allowed to who said that the unbending tree is easily [00:37:00] broken. And it's this concept of being able to be flexible and adaptive when life throws really hard things at you.

Love to have you both talk a little bit about your experiences who wants to go first?

**Bonnie Blair:** DJ can go first. I keep going first all the time.

**Michael Nathanson:** Yeah, sure. It's,

**Dan Jensen:** I think that on some level and not always. And probably most of the time, not, in front of the world everybody goes through really tough times in their life.

I mean, nobody goes through life without any difficulties or any setbacks or any sometimes, even tragedies or loss of life, whatever that may be. But yeah, I think it, it does come down to, how you get by past that. And when in 88, when you know this all happened on my story with my sister and the timing of it all in the morning and my race, first of all, nobody there was there.

Wasn't anyone for me. To go to and, and say, [00:38:00] well, what do I do? Like, nobody had really been through this. And so, I could talk to my family and my friends, and my teammates and that was about it. And so we kind of decided, should I go, skate is number one question.

And that didn't take that long to answer. And that it was just like, what would Jane want you to do? And I, right. Then my mom said that to me. And I said, I go, I knew right then I was going to skate because she was super sensitive person. And she would like, if she would have felt bad, if I had pulled out of the race and not skated.

And so, so I thought, all right, I'm going to skate. Now. That doesn't mean that I did all the. Normal mental preparation that you do before race. In fact, I really didn't do any, we spent a lot of the day, in tears and talking with, my teammates and team meeting. And again, Bonnie, Nick, Tom it's crucial for me at that point.

And then but the way [00:39:00] it turned out was like, okay, no. So I felt that night I fell again four days later and then it becomes, do I want to continue to skate? Do I want to but before it could do that, I had to sort of, kind of take everything in and ask a lot of questions, and how important is skating? Is it as important as life? No, but it can be, it still can be you can, I could still make it. Here's what I'm getting to for a while. I thought, well, look, if I train and really focus only on skating, then actually felt guilty about that because Jane lost her life.

She's not even here anymore. She was 27, she had three little babies she's gone. How can skating be this important? So it took me a while to get over that feeling of guilt. And then once I did, it does take time, but time does heal. And once I did, I was able to start focusing more and start feeling like, okay, we still have to go on and live your life.

And my mom was really good about that. I always had this great [00:40:00] outlook on life and yeah, you rely on a lot of other people sometimes without even knowing it. But but they're the ones that really helped me get through all of it. And it's still there. Like it never goes away completely, but you look at it differently now, I can look back.

With a smile and great memories of my sister rather than looking back, and crying about it. Just because man, it's been a lot of years now and again, you've there's a lot of parts in our life. We have no control over.

**Michael Nathanson:** Yeah. I can still hear the emotion in your voice all these years later as you talk about it. And you've created a foundation in her honor.

**Dan Jensen:** Yeah. Yeah. It's been amazing. We we just celebrated our 25th anniversary and yeah we started it with, not really knowing where it was going to go. It was a lot about funding, research, things like that. And then, but what it's really become is the biggest part of it is a family aid fund where we help families.

So Jane, when she was sick she had a bone marrow transplant, Seattle, . And we're from [00:41:00] Milwaukee. So traveling back and forth, my mom and dad lived there for a better part of a year. And I saw the expense that it has on families. And so we, we fund non-medical expenses. Like I said, the travel, those kinds of things.

We we pay bills for families that because of one parent might've had to quit their job because their child is being treated. They can't afford gas for their car. They can't their gas and electric bill. So we, those types of things are what the main part

of the foundation is doing now.

But it's, I mean, we've helped over a thousand families now and given out over a million dollars.

So it's, that's great.

**Michael Nathanson:** So if our listeners want to learn more just look you up on the on the internet.

**Dan Jensen:** Yeah. DJ foundation.org can find the website and information about it. Yeah. Thank you.

**Michael Nathanson:** Thanks. And Bonnie, you had your own experience with tragedy.

**Bonnie Blair:** So I even though DJ's, family's bigger than mine, I've had [00:42:00] more elements within my family. So, my dad actually in 1988 was battling one cancer. And so he was there for 88, but literally had just finished some treatments right before going to those games. And, I can remember seeing him underneath, like in a tunnel after I won in 1988 and. The smile on his face was electrifying.

Like I had said earlier, my dad was just a man of very few words, very few emotions, but like that smile was electric. And to know that I had some part of giving him that excitement made that excitement for me all the more greater. So anyway, I had a dad with with one cancer who then passed away about a year later.

I had another brother who passed away of what we think was a heart attack. Not totally sure. [00:43:00] My brother Rob battled a brain tumor for over 23 years. I have a sister that passed away of leukemia. And then I've got another sister with a liver disease. So it's like, Oh my God. Like, there were six kids, there's three of us left.

And so yeah, that's shitty. That was basically the bottom line. And, I feel lucky, although I don't have the foundation that DJ has, I have, what's called a charitable fund and I feel that I've been very lucky to be able to do different things where you raise money for charity.

And then I can kind of channel it to different directions of where I want to go. So, I've been involved with the leukemia foundation here in Milwaukee and the brain tumor association, and, I've done stuff for the liver disease and, there's [00:44:00] different things where I definitely went what my name too, but you know, it's nice to know that you can do those types of things because of the success you had and maybe you can touch somebody's life and you hope that you're making a difference.

And that's kind of like a icing on the cake from the success that I had in the sport. And my brother that Brattle battled his brain tumor One of his models was always that there were 10,000 things that I could do before I had my brain tumor. And now there's 9,000. So I mean, his glass was always way more half full than half empty and, the smile on his face, even in those, why asked trying months and spending some time with him. And he had like a visa paper of like a lunch items, because he really had a really hard time talking and, we'd have them point to [00:45:00] different things.

And then it was like, okay, ham and cheese. It was like, Yeah. And his eyes would light up and he'd start nodding. Yes. And no, we're like, mustard and mayonnaise and, we probably should have had those on the list and, his eyes would light up and then he'd nod. And then they were like, well, yes.

And he's like, yeah. And we're there. And he always seemed to more nod. Yes, then no, when he really probably meant no, but we would find ourselves laughing at this. I mean, him too. And so just how you can like laugh at yourself. And I think to me, those types of things were priceless and he was never about why me he just kinda like took it like this is happening to me and I'm going to make the best of it that I can.

And that, that was pretty special and something that I for sure, carry with me on a daily basis.

**Michael Nathanson:** You both do remain very positive. Neither of you sound [00:46:00] spiteful or angry about something so difficult. Then I admire that. I think it's you both have been through a lot, Bonnie.

I, myself am a brain tumor survivor. I don't have brain cancer, but most brain tumors are not cancerous, but I have an inoperable brain tumor myself, and it's a three centimeter brain tumor right behind my eyes. And under what's called the optic chiasm where the optic nerves cross. And I become a very passionate brain tumor warrior myself and I served on the board of the national brain tumor society for many years and was the chair for almost six years.

And it's become a real passion of mine as well. And it's one of those, all cancers are bad. There are no good cancers. This particular horrible.

**Bonnie Blair:** Yeah. At one point, my brother's tumor from what we understood was inoperable. And when I was sports-woman of the year with Johana loft costs and they did a huge story in sports illustrated, [00:47:00] somebody read it and sent me a letter because they're like, Oh, our daughter, we thought had an operable brain tumor.

And we went and saw Dr. Mitchell Berger in Sanford.

**Michael Nathanson:** I know Mitch Berger really well. Yeah,

**Bonnie Blair:** totally a coincidence.

**Michael Nathanson:** When I was at national brain tumor society, we did a lot of work with Mitch Berger. Yeah. And

**Bonnie Blair:** so that, through that article, We connected with Dr. Berger and he was able to take out over half of my brother's brain tumor. So, it's kind of one of those things where you never know what you're going to say, and you never know how things are going to progress that, hopefully, maybe next year something could be done for you because they figured something out.

And I think that's what you look at is the hopefulness of it.

**Michael Nathanson:** That's exactly right. You have to understand the severity, but you've gotta be, you've gotta be hopeful as well.

[00:48:00] **Bonnie Blair:** So I was actually visiting Brian Boitano in San Francisco and he has a rooftop and his next door neighbor had a rooftop party going on and he was like, Oh, Hey, I just want to say hello.

And here's a, another Olympic friend of mine, Bonnie Blair. And he's like, She's in my office. I operated on her brother and I'm like, what? So yeah, like, I mean, how small is that word? That after all these years later, we connected again and just the world's really way too small. And that article shows it the next meeting I had by seeing Brian boy tunnel, your connection, like how weird is all that, but the world's way too small.

And I think there are a lot of good things in our world. And we hope that by doing different things, being involved in a lot of these organizations are gonna make things like you be able to take that tumor out and live an extra long life.

**Michael Nathanson:** Yeah, well, there's a medication that I'm able to take that [00:49:00] keeps it from growing.

It doesn't make it go away, but it actually does keep it from growing. And so I'm fortunate for that. But these connections that we all have, I, again, I think this is also an important attribute of being successful and making the most of our lives is to appreciate these connections that we all do have with each other.

So, we've got about 10 minutes left. I'm going to ask six questions to each of you. I want quick answers. And didn't she just say the same thing about you earlier? So we're going to, I'm going to ask six questions and the first are going to be just some key learnings for us. And then the last three are what I call part of our teaching moment where I'm going to ask you some questions that I think hopefully will lead to answers we can learn from.

So, the first question is for each of you lightning round, what has been your biggest mistake? Who wants to go first? Tough question. I don't know for the benefit of our listeners, we don't feed the questions [00:50:00] in advance to our guests or life, or what's your biggest mistake. And I'm much more interested in you as a person Dan than anything else.

Wow. Wow. Okay. You can think about that a little bit more. I'm going to ask you the next one. What are you most proud of? I want answers to both. Yeah.

**Dan Jensen:** Okay. I'm most proud of my daughters. I have two Jane and Olivia they're 27 and 25 and they've just grown into beautiful young ladies but it did for me, I think at different times in your life, you're more proud of one thing and then another, and right now for sure, my kids.

**Michael Nathanson:** Yeah, terrific. , that's your real legacy. It's a, all the fantastic things you've done, it's really how you've left the world better. And certainly our family is part of that. I want you to think some more about that biggest mistake, if you can think about an important mistake that you've made.

So, then the last question in this segment would be, what are you doing now? And [00:51:00] what's the future for each of you? Go ahead.

**Bonnie Blair:** So right now I'm still, I guess, partly a mom. I still do some motivational speaking here and there. I sit on the board for the Pettit center, which is our 400 meter enclosed facility here in the Milwaukee area.

Yeah, I guess that's really chasing my kids. Like, and the kind of through COVID it was, there wasn't a whole lot going on. So I was doing a lot of the workouts and training with them. So I probably got more ice time this year than I have, like almost since I retired. So that was a lot of fun.

No, I'm not racing, but it was fun to be able to have the the time to take to skate in and feel like you can go out and do more than just one lap and not have your legs shake.

**Dan Jensen:** So for me few different things. I work I do a lot of training. I was training I'm living in North Carolina now. So I was training NASCAR drivers for several, but [00:52:00] the last five years that COVID had put a little stop to that, but I still train a couple PGA golfers and then a few other people. So I love, that's still my passion, fitness, health, wellness. I worked for also a company called Connex medical and rehab orthopedic rehab.

And then I I still, well, like Bonnie, we still do quite a bit of speaking. However COVID has put a big dent in that as well. So, but hopefully that'll start picking up again soon.

**Michael Nathanson:** I've decided to let you off the hook and actually except

**Bonnie Blair:** your what? Like, I guess, I guess to me, I look at that as a negative question and I think probably being such a positive person that I don't think of.

When I look back and think, is there something that I would have changed or done something different and I don't feel that way. Well, and

**Michael Nathanson:** I'm very satisfied with that answer. And I actually think the fact that you both struggled with that answer is a good answer in and of itself. I think that's terrific.

[00:53:00] Actually, I've asked that question over and most people come up with a mistake and I actually think there's some learning in the fact that you both have that attitude, which is that, yeah, I'm not really focused on my mistakes. And and I actually think there's a learning for us there as well.

So I'm just gonna take that and move on. But the the last three questions are our teaching moment. And again, I'm going to put you on the spot. You haven't heard these questions in advance. Here's the first one. What single habit technique or tip would you offer that has helped you be your most extraordinary self one tip.

**Dan Jensen:** Keep a journal.

**Bonnie Blair:** I think striving for the next personal best.

**Michael Nathanson:** Thank you. Do you have a personal mission?

**Dan Jensen:** Yeah. Right now it is, again, I think that kind of changes as your life changes, but for me it has just become, being the best dad and husband that I can be and doing the best for them.

[00:54:00] **Michael Nathanson:** Nice. That was a quick answer. And lastly, what's the best advice you've ever given to someone else or received from someone else? Best piece of advice.

**Bonnie Blair:** I think the 10,000... 9,000 from my brother is, pretty

**Michael Nathanson:** priceless.

**Dan Jensen:** It's funny. I w one time I was sitting in a coffee shop and a guy came up, he knew who I was and he came up and he asked me that very quick.

He goes, I'm really interested in just one thing. Just one piece of advice. You give me what, wait a minute. But what I said to him was is absolutely a cliché, but it's something I learned from my journey is that the journey is more important than the unresolved.

**Michael Nathanson:** Yeah, love that one. I love that. Yeah.

It's the human condition. We all seek out the quick answers and hence, the nature of my questions and I'm very much mindful that it's hard to get quick answers because usually the [00:55:00] answers are not quick. They are more complex and that's the real human condition. I'm curious to do when you when the two of you walk around in public, do people know you, do people come up to you and say, Oh my God, you're Bonnie Blair.

You're Dan Jansen.

**Bonnie Blair:** Depends. I tend to get people recognize my voice before they read

**Dan Jensen:** when we're together quite often, especially in Wisconsin. But it's certainly died down through the years. It used to be a lot. And then now it's occasionally and then sometimes airport, you get a lot of A lot of strange looks or, did we go to school together or those kinds of things, but

**Michael Nathanson:** Well, I remember you both really well, and I'm so delighted that you both took the opportunity to to, to speak with me. The two of you are truly Olympic heroes, but you're both extraordinary beyond what you did in the Olympics. And I'm just so grateful to have the honor of speaking to both of you at the same time.

Any parting words for each of you.

[00:56:00] **Dan Jensen:** Thank you. I appreciate you having us. I'm sure you and I, Michael, see each other again at some point. It's always great to get together with Bonnie and we'll probably talk tomorrow, so,

**Bonnie Blair:** right. Yeah. Thanks a bunch, my goal and all my best to you and your battle and to think that was another way that we were connected that I didn't know is thanks for sharing because maybe sometimes you don't like to share that kind of stuff, but it's important for me and I'd like to keep track of how you do in the future.

So please keep me posted.

**Michael Nathanson:** Thank you. I appreciate that. I used to keep it confidential. I used to have fear that it would diminish me in people's minds and now I don't, and I actually feel like I have an obligation to be forthright about it and talk about it. And ladies and gentlemen, that is the extraordinary Bonnie Blair and Dan Jansen.

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