

---

# **TALKING WITH CHAMPIONS**

---



---

TRISTAN K'NELL

---

**TALKING WITH  
CHAMPIONS**

---

INSPIRATIONAL  
INSIGHTS  
FROM ELITE  
CHAMPIONS

---



# Contents

	Dedication	7
	Introduction	9
1	JOHNATHAN THURSTON	12
2	SHANE HEAL	15
3	GARTH WOOD	19
4	MARK MATHEWS	23
5	JOE WILLIAMS	27
6	MATT TOOMUA	31
7	JOEL THOMPSON	35
8	CLYDE RATHBONE	39
9	PAT CASH	44
10	CAROLINE BUCHANAN	48
11	RICHIE 'VAS' VACULIK	52
12	NATHAN CHARLES	56
13	PAUL WHATUIRA	60
14	CORY PATERSON	64
15	RENI MAITUA	68
16	PAUL HARRAGON	72
17	ROBERT WHITTAKER	75
18	ANTHONY MUNDINE	78
19	GEORGE FOREMAN	82
20	KOSTYA TSZYU	86
21	LUC LONGLEY	89
22	BRYAN HABANA	92

23	LAIRD HAMILTON	96
24	MARIO ANDRETTI	99
25	EVANDER HOLYFIELD	103
26	PRESTON CAMPBELL	106
27	MARK OCCHILUPO	111
28	LAILA ALI	115
29	DORIAN YATES	119
30	LUKE EGAN	123
31	MICHAEL BEVAN	126
32	STEVE MONEGHETTI	131
33	BRETT KENNY	134
34	LAYNE BEACHLEY	137
35	MICHAEL KLIM	140
36	LARRY HOLMES	144
37	DIAMOND DALLAS PAGE	147
38	ROBBIE MADDISON	150
39	DAVID CAMPESE	154
40	ANDREW ETTINGSHAUSEN	157
41	BRADLEY CLYDE	161
42	BRAD HADDIN	164
43	MARK GEYER	167
44	CRAIG LOWNDES	171
45	PAUL SIRONEN	174
46	KIEREN PERKINS	178
47	MERV HUGHES	182
48	ALEX MCKINNON	186

49	DEAN MUMM	190
50	RYAN HIPWOOD	193
51	NATALIE COOK	197
52	JACQUI COOPER	200
53	LEROY LOGGINS	203
54	LUKE LEWIS	206
55	WAYNE SCHWASS	210
56	CLINT NEWTON	213
57	KURT GIDLEY	217
58	JAMIE LYON	221
59	CHAD TOWNSEND	225
60	JAMIE DWYER	229
61	WAYNE PEARCE	233
62	ERIC GROTHE	237
63	STIRLING MORTLOCK	241
64	BILL HARRIGAN	244
65	BEAU ROBINSON	248
66	MARK HUGHES	251
67	MONTY BETHAM	255
68	KEVIN CAMPION	259
69	RIC CHARLESWORTH	262
70	ANTHONY MINICHELLO	266
71	MATTHEW ELLIOTT	270
72	ELLYSE PERRY	274
73	DEAN WIDDERS	278
74	DAVID REYNOLDS	282
75	KEITH GALLOWAY	285

# Dedication

To Mum and Pap: Your love and support has seen  
me get through my toughest times and you inspire  
me to pursue my dreams





TRISTAN K'NELL

# Introduction

Just four years ago, I had no idea what a podcast was or what would unfold over the years to come.

I grew up loving sports and tried my hand at pretty much everything: you would find me regularly swinging my cricket bat and kicking the footy in my backyard or at a park nearby. Growing up I would listen to endless hours of sports on the radio and TV and used to admire all the cult heroes of the 1980s and 90s, who became legends in my eyes.

Sometimes the skills you create at different times of your life might be useful in pursuing another unthought-of dream down the track. After fifteen years building up my experience and reputation as a stockbroker, I was asked if I would be interested in doing some media work, performing some simple stock market reports on TV and radio. I only said yes at the time so I could show off to my family and friends but had no idea that the skills learnt then would be the groundings of key traits and skills I use today.

Everything starts with humble beginnings and my experience was no different. The first podcast I recorded was in a small consultation room on the second level of a Fitness First gym in Sydney, where I worked as a personal trainer for a couple of years. At the time starting a podcast was no big deal – it was just exciting to say I had a podcast. A place to get a few things off my chest and have a conversation. At the beginning there was no intention on my side to turn it into an interview show, and we both only had limited skill sets.

Back then the only known skill I had was presenting and over time I would take the initiative to learn to become proficient in areas such as editing, producing, marketing and social media. Eventually, being able to pitch to really high profile guests became second nature.

One of the biggest questions always asked is, 'How do you get these famous people to come on the podcast?' which I'll explain is more possible than you think.

My first podcast was the Vision Board Podcast which started in December 2015, hosted alongside a colleague from the gym. If I go back to the first few episodes I can only shake my head and cringe, but wouldn't change it for the world. After a few weeks of talking rubbish between ourselves and testing our interview skills on a couple of low-profile guests, I was introduced to Jeff Fenech by a best mate who worked with his nephew.

That interview opened the door to start pitching other fighters from all over the world. People I just watched on TV and admired from afar. After around twenty episodes we decided to expand to include other genres from business, world sports, fitness and health; writers and politicians.

Using my background in finance, and with things learnt in my MBA degree, I was able to put together some great pitches and reach many of the guests either directly or through a representative. While there is no magic formula, the simple gesture of reaching out and taking a genuine interest in their past success and current pursuits is always a great start. Sometimes you just have to ask. And who doesn't mind talking about themselves in a positive light for an hour?

Never in my wildest dreams would I ever have thought that I could pitch legends of world sports, many who you will find in this book: George Foreman, Laila Ali, Larry Holmes, Mario Andretti, Johnathan Thurston, Pat Cash, Layne Beachley, Mark Occhilupo and Laird Hamilton; and my idols growing up – Andrew Ettingshausen, Bradley Clyde, Paul Harragon and Anthony Mundine.

The Vision Board Podcast would end in January 2018 and, after having no goals when I first commenced, I had a goal to create a podcast to showcase the stories of Australian and New Zealand athletes. The past and present champions of the sport, it would give them the opportunity to not only just talk about sport but their trials and tribulations that we can learn from to continue to grow in our lives. This is where Talking with TK was born.

There were some special moments along the way.

Episode one with Mark Hunt would provide the stepping stone

to becoming a better interviewer. I learned to showcase my interview style of not saying much but stepping out of the way to let the guest tell their story – but listening intently to delve deeper into the conversation. The biggest thing I've learnt in all this is that you can't learn if you're constantly talking. So my style is to ask a simple question and let them talk. From there, just by being curious and taking a real interest into their lives and achievements some amazing stories emerge.

Most podcasts last six to seven episodes on average so to hit episode fifty with Pat Cash was a significant milestone. I was a regular tennis player growing up so Pat was a major influence as I hit the courts for competition around Western Sydney.

If fifty was a huge, then one hundred was even bigger. I wanted an extra special guest and I was honoured by the great Alex McKinnon. Alex is a man who has seen more adversity than most of us combined but continues to strive for greatness. It was an emotional interview that really left me thinking of life, and lit a fire knowing that all these great stories could make a difference in the world.

After my chat with Alex I started thinking of how I could share all these amazing stories with more people. Because podcasting is such a new thing many people still don't know how to access and listen in, but pretty much everyone knows where to read and find books.

So the intention behind this book was to showcase the best parts of my chats with these amazing people and show the human side of their stories. I feel that by seeing the human side of their stories it can inspire you to either start or continue pursuing your dreams and feel a real connection to them. Just because you're not an athlete doesn't mean their lessons and stories are not applicable to you and your journey.

Dreams generally start in humble places. It did for me and if you continue to learn and be inspired each day who knows what you can build over time.

Thank you sincerely for purchasing this book. I hope it gives you as much joy, inspiration and motivation as it did me.

Tristan K'Nell



# JOHNATHAN THURSTON

NRL LEGEND

(Episode 41 of the Vision Board Podcast)

Instagram – @jthurston06

‘That’s the power of sport: it can bring  
people together’

Johnathan Thurston is a modern-day legend of rugby league. In 2018 he announced his final season in the NRL, bringing to a close a career comprising of 323 first-grade games for the North Queensland Cowboys and Canterbury Bulldogs, where he scored over 2000 points in the process. JT captained the Cowboys to their first premiership in 2015 and was a member of the Bulldogs’ premiership team in 2004.

His representative record includes thirty-seven State of Origins for Queensland, thirty-eight Tests for Australia and six appearances for the Indigenous All Stars.

His list of accomplishments includes the 2011 Golden Boot, the Dally M Medal for player of the year in 2005, 2007, 2014 and 2015, four RLPA player of the year awards, 2015 Clive Churchill Medallist, 2017 Human Rights Medallist and finalist for the 2018 Australian of the Year.

JT is a gladiator in a game built for large men. As a youngster he was rejected by numerous NRL clubs, including by Wayne Bennett at the Brisbane Broncos. After growing up in Queensland, JT headed to the big smoke in Sydney and faced numerous challenges while attempting to become a professional player.

I have related to Johnathan, as all through my life I've been told I'm too small for this and that; his ability to break that trend provided motivation for me to push forward in any challenge I've faced.

Moments that stand out from his career include the selfless act when he gave his club captain Steve Price his 2004 premiership ring after defeating Canterbury when Price missed the grand final and JT was added to the interchange bench. He also missed a kick from the sideline in the final minute of the 2015 grand final which would have won the Cowboys the game in regulation time. While the miss was crucial, his ability to bounce back and kick the match-winning field goal stands out as a moment of resilience in the face of adversity.

### **HOW JT DEFINES SUCCESS**

'I just try to work hard every day, [I'm] trying to improve my game each day, every day is a chance for me and the team to get better. My teammates are what motivates me every day to do my preparation the best I can so when it comes to game day, I can look them in the eye and know that I have given my all and prepared the best for them.'

### **HOW HE LEARNT HIS TRADE**

'When I first moved to Sydney with the Bulldogs ... I watched a fair

bit of video on Darren Lockyer and Andrew Johns coming through. I think the style of play at the club allows me to pull off those plays. It's about having vision: I can see it unfolding before it happens with my vision ... I have the coaching staff to thank for that, they have put in the structures to play but they let me execute the plays but also allow me to play off the top of my head.'

### **WHAT JT WISHES HE DID BETTER**

'If I could have my time over again I would have looked after myself better in the early days, with the stretching, physio work and massage, I didn't get the professional side till my mid-twenties. I have my weekly routine and game-day routine that I have now and none of that is changing. For me it's about getting the right amount of sleep – most games are at night so getting my sleep right the night before ... sometimes a good sleep in the afternoon of the game as well.'

### **ADVICE FOR CHASING YOUR DREAMS**

'Whatever profession you're in, you need to keep working hard at it – nothing comes easy these days, you will get knocked down or you will get minuses put against you. But it's how you stand up and get back up that counts, so keep working hard at it.'

### **WHY HE GIVES BACK TO THE COMMUNITY**

'Being a rugby league player is a privilege. Growing up as kid I never thought of life like that, but I understand now the impact not only myself but certainly NRL players can have on children. North Queensland has been hammered with natural disasters and droughts, and to bring North Queensland's first maiden premiership up here it put smiles on the faces of people. That's the power of sport: it can bring people together but also when they are going through those difficult times ... it can put a smile on their faces.'

### **PEOPLE HE WOULD INVITE TO A DINNER PARTY**

Roger Federer, Tiger Woods, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Barack Obama