

Episode 58

# FS Thrive x Exos: Preparing for Draft Day with Brent Callaway

Ginevra Czech (00:03):

Welcome to FS Thrive, a podcast by FS Investments. I'm Ginevra Czech, the Director of Client Value Add Programs. On today's episode, we're going to be talking about the NFL draft. And no, we are definitely not talking about our predictions for who's going where or in what order. Instead, we're going to talk about how these athletes prepared to get where they are today, not just physically, but emotionally and mentally. They're interviewing for the biggest job of their life. So how are they building that sustainable high performance? How are they training? What else are coaches measuring and evaluating outside of those combine scores? What does teamwork and building team culture have to do with the equation and what can we learn from those elite athletes? So, the good news is we have just the right person to lead us through the conversation. I'm joined today by Brent Callaway, who's the Vice President of Performance at Exos, which is an incredible organization and leader in human performance.

Ginevra Czech (00:59):

We actually partner with EXOS here at our home office. They work not only with corporate partners like us and the military, but more specifically training elite athletes. And since 1999, EXOS has actually trained over a thousand athletes for the NFL, including eight number one overall picks, and four of the last year's top 10. So, for this year's combine, I think Brent, you can correct me, 98 of the 319 invitees were preparing with Exos. That's right. And not only preparing just with Exos, but Brent himself specifically who runs the Exos NFL Combine Prep program, Brent has over 15 years of experience coaching these elite athletes and also does the NFL, MLB, NBA off-season programs and the NBA pre-draft program among a lot of other things as well. So, Brent, in your words, can you tell us a little bit about what Exos does and what your role is within the organization?

Brent Callaway (01:54):

Yeah, you bet. First off, thank you guys for having me on. This is an awesome opportunity and I really appreciate it. EXOS is a company that gets people ready for the moments that matter most, right? And that's something that we really take to heart. So regardless of if it's an athlete, which is the space that I am in, or if it's an employee or if it's a parent or recreational athlete, our goal is to make sure that they are prepared for anything that they encounter in their daily lives. So, we really look at human performance in all facets, whether that's me having to prepare somebody to put their hand on the ground and run a 40-yard dash in front of the world for money, uh, and an opportunity, or if it's getting somebody ready to pick their kids up from school and take them out and throw a ball with them or, or things of that sort. And the last piece of that is getting ready for big board meetings and being able to be accountable to others and lead successfully. So, there are elements of that in there as well.

Ginevra Czech (02:50):

Awesome. And so how did you get here? What's your personal experience with high performance and how'd you end up at Exos?

Brent Callaway (02:57):

Great question. So, I'm the son of a coach. Uh, my father was a, a high school football coach in the state of Texas for 30 years. So, I was a locker room kid, right? I was the one who grew up in

the locker room at 7, 8, 9, and 10 years old. In the summer, my job was to hang up the laundry bags in the locker room and be the ball boy. So, in that moment, you learn about sporting culture, and I had an unbelievable father who was great at holding others accountable and an amazing communicator and leader. So, I ended up being a collegiate athlete in the track and field space, went to the University of North Carolina, and then from there knew I wanted to coach because I was kind of in the bloodline and ended up going the private performance route. And at that time, human performance was really just in the team setting.

Brent Callaway (03:44):

So, it was collegiate athletics and professional athletics. And if those athletes wanted to improve themselves, they had to go through their own organizations. So right at the 1999, 2000, 2001 mark is when the private performance spectrum started to pop a little bit. And Mark Verstegen, who is our founder, was on the cusp of that in, in creating this space. And so, I got actually on board with another company that had a lot of crossover of personnel with the company that Mark was operating. And then I came into the fold there and, and started coaching directly after and, and ended up working in the space in 2003 and have been there ever since.

Ginevra Czech (04:25):

Very cool. And so now you are in charge of running the Combine training program, which admittedly I did a little bit of research just to, to understand more about the process. So, you've got combine day, which athletes train for, I know you guys have an eight-week training program, and then there's this period of time, it looks like it's about maybe a month or two months in between combine day and draft day. So, I'd be interested if you could walk me through, I'm an athlete and I'm preparing for the combine. What's that process look like, especially as it relates to being an athlete within the EXOS program?

Brent Callaway (04:58):

Yeah, yeah, sure. It, it's intensive to say the least. So, this is really one of their first opportunities to only focus on themselves and their level of high performance and getting ready for an amazing opportunity and an insane amount of pressure on them. Also, level set on the fact that there's no team anymore, right? There's no team, there's no helmet, there's no pads, there's no uniform. It's them having to go out and be an individual sport athlete in order to get those opportunities. So, there's a lot of pressure. And to go back to your question, we're going to work about 45 hours a week with those athletes. So, they will start off early in the morning, and we have breakfast that is prescribed to them by our dietician who has put them through an amazing evaluation process that happens on day one. They come in and get a radiological exam so we can understand how much muscular content they have, how much fat content they have, how much their skeleton weighs.

Brent Callaway (05:54):

We really get lots of data from that which we use in programming our coaching. And then our dieticians can sit down and start to program their meals and the micronutrients and macronutrients that they need to have in order to achieve their goals. Some athletes come in and, and really good physical condition, they've just played a long season. Um, some athletes need to gain a little bit of weight in order to fit into the normal scope for that position inside of the NFL. And some need to go the opposite direction, right? Some of them had great holiday seasons and may come in 15 or 20 pounds overweight and listen, that, that sounds like a daunting task. But when you're 300 pounds and, and have a super high metabolism, you can lose 25 to 30 pounds in eight weeks. And it's an amazing transformation to see them go through.

Brent Callaway (06:42):

But they come in for breakfast. And then after breakfast we, we have our first training session of the day, which is on field movement. So, they go through their speed training process there. That's not only linear, but we work on multi-directional work too. And then in the middle of the day, they basically have a football practice for about an hour. Um, so they're position coaches, if they're a wide receiver, they'll be meeting with a wide receiver coach and catching passes and running routes and things of that sort. Same thing for all of the other respective positions. And then after that they would have lunch again prescribed by our dietician. And then they have their, their strength session. So, they enter our weight room setting, they have about an hour-long strength conditioning workout that they would go through that's specific to the goals that they have.

Brent Callaway (07:25):

And then after that, their time is dedicated to recovery. So, we have post-workout supplementation to make sure that they get the right amount of carbohydrates and protein to recover their body from the training session. And they have dinner. Sometimes they'll have physical therapy sessions, body work sessions inside of the day built in there as well. Massages are built in. And so, there's not much downtime in there for the athletes. And we run that schedule Monday through Saturday. Um, so it's quite intensive. Saturday is about a half day for those athletes, so they're done by about noon. And then after that we don't have to do much else with them because they want to go to the couch and sit down and watch a little bit of Netflix and relax. And so that's a big part of it is it's been their time for the next day and a half to recover hard because we've already trained hard. Now they have to recover hard. And that's a new concept for a lot of people, especially 21- and 22-year-old athletes. So that's what the week looks like. And then obviously we have to budget that work accordingly so that we can have them in very good physical condition whenever they board a plane and head to Indianapolis to be able to display those skills for all 32 teams and all the personnel that are there to watch them.

Ginevra Czech (08:39):

All right. That's awesome. I think I'm ready. I think I am committed to the work that's needed to prepare. So, I don't know if you guys do any training for the Women's Football League but sign me up. We got it. But um, all jokes aside, you know, what I'm hearing is it's pretty interesting. It sounds like there's a lot of different components that you guys are including and how you're preparing these athletes. There's obviously training them for that specific position and making sure they're getting ready for the measurable fitness requirements that people are looking at in the combine, those data points. But there's also a nutrition component and there's definitely that recovery component. I was an athlete growing up, I played a lot of sports growing up and in college I played lacrosse specifically. And I think there is a lot of crossover between how we prepare as athletes.

Ginevra Czech (09:25):

And to your point, I think it is, it's changing and how we approach high performance. And I think it's also changing and taking these lessons, looking at what athletes are doing and applying that to everyday life. I think for people who are listening in understanding that, and this is something I've been focusing a lot on, understanding that you're not just trying to do your job really well. Yes, if you just study the scope of your day-to-day, you'll be really good at that, but you're neglecting all those other parts of your life. So that's obviously going to empty the tank in other places. So, focusing on how are you fueling yourself focusing on not just your position specific, but call it cross training, call it whatever you want, but working some of those other muscles and then making sure you're giving yourself time to recover. So, I think it's really interesting for me, you know, I had a question around that interdisciplinary approach and why you guys think it's so important, and if you have any ideas on how that might apply to people out outside of the NFL combine.

Brent Callaway (10:27):

Yeah. So, when we're talking about outside of the NFL combine, are we talking about athletes or are we talking about recreational adults or which space do you want to go in right there?

Ginevra Czech (10:36):

I mean, I think it's, I think it's interesting. I read this term called the corporate athlete. There you go. But I mean, I think that there's application for both corporate, corporate athletes or corporate employees, but also just individuals. So, I think the individual probably has broader application if you have thoughts on that space.

Brent Callaway (10:51):

So a hundred percent, and that's a fantastic question and a great conversation to get into because we live in a world now and as a, as an executive in our company, deter the line, between some parts of my year, I'm going to be on my feet eight hours a day instructing and coaching, and then other parts of the year I'm sitting at a desk on conference calls and Zoom calls and on the telephone and sending emails for eight to 10 hours a day. So, I can tell you that my body has to adjust to both, you know, and that's something that even meetings, right? So, if we have to go into a situation where we have maybe three days of straight meetings, there is training that has to go into that in order to be able to focus your mind to be deliberate and intentional during those times and not lose focus.

Brent Callaway (11:38):

So, uh, there's a definite adjustment period for me in both of those times. And I think that the corporate athlete is, is a real term, and it's something that people need to give a lot of respect to. And they need to constantly challenge themselves and focus themselves on how can I optimize my own performance so that my brain functions better, I can make decisions quicker, I can communicate more honestly and direct, and to be able to sit down and pencil out the things that, that, that person might need in order to accomplish those tasks. If we really want to stifle ourselves, then let's be dehydrated, undernourished and under slept. And if we do that, then it'll be very hard to articulate conversations the way that you want to or be able to process as fast as you want to. And we're finding a lot of things like with sleep and how to optimize sleep and falling to sleep specifically with corporate athletes and, and those who live in the corporate space because you know, these days our brains are just constantly on fire, right?

Brent Callaway (12:47):

And it's very hard to disconnect. And I'm sitting here talking to you guys and my phone is to the right by a foot and it's lit up four times while we're on a conversation, right? So, it's very hard to, to shut those things off and that's going to happen all night while you're trying to go to sleep. So, being able to do things like getting some evening outside time, right, where you get fresh air and you, your body can start to relate to the fact that the sun is going down, right? And some of these things may sound very esoteric in nature, but it's how we function as human. And so, being able to unwind in that manner and then setting your room up very intentional for sleep and for recovery, right? We want things to be cold, dark, and quiet. So, setting your thermostat between 67 and 72 degrees, if that works for you, and covering up with lots of blankets and removing pets from your room so that the collar jingle in the middle of the night doesn't awaken you and start to pull you out of either your rim cycle or slow wave sleep and you don't get that three what if, go ahead.

Ginevra Czech (13:52):

I would say, what if we can just take their collar off so we leave the pets, but take the collar off?

Brent Callaway (13:55):

That's right. That's right. Then they, then they wake you up with moving around on the bed and everything else. I understand. I got a seven-pound dog, and so my wife is going to fight to have that dog in the room on a regular basis. My only negotiating point was, let's not go with a 40-pound dog, let's go with a seven-pound dog. How about that? Right. So, I look really tough when I'm walking that dog around a neighborhood too, but, uh, so yeah, you know, you, you're in, you're as intentional with your own health and wellness as you are with your work, right? I don't think we walk into our day as entrepreneurs or executives and think to ourselves, I'm just going to go willy-nilly about what I have to do for the rest of the day. We're organized in that manner. We're intentional in that manner.

Brent Callaway (14:34):

And taking care of yourself and fueling yourself in that same way. Nutrition is important. How are you yourself for optimum brain performance? And how are you hydrating for that? Are you taking mental breaks during the day? Are you able to get outside? Another one of the things that helps us reset our circadian rhythm is outside time in the morning as well. So, if you kind of think back to maybe when you were young or if you knew people who went camping a lot, you wake up early and you go to bed early, right? Because your body starts to very quickly acclimate to the light that you have around you and being in those spaces. So that's a natural thing for us, but the artificial light that we have is, can hinder our mental performance. Apologies you never, I probably went a hundred different directions with that, but those are the things that, that we really talk about outside of the physical means and physical spectrum of being a corporate athlete.

Ginevra Czech (15:28):

Yeah. And that was going to be my next question is I think all of this is super important and I've been taking notes, hydration, trying to get outside in the morning and at night to get your body to, to sort of recognize that we're not existing in a vacuum, we're part of a broader ecosystem, making sure you're getting enough sleep in recovery. I'm curious, is this part of anything that you're doing as these athletes are training for the combine? I know that in some of our earlier conversations we talked about the difference between training for these very specific high intensity type of events versus building. I think what we're talking about is really building that more foundational, sustainable, long-term performance. So, I'm just curious how that's, you know, some of that stuff we were talking about applies to training these high performing athletes and where it fits into their, their overall preparation. Yeah,

Brent Callaway (16:20):

You bet. So, as I mentioned before, we preach our athletes that we can only train as hard as we can recover, right? So, if, if you think about it in, in, in the space that that we're in here, you're always looking for your best return on investment, right? So, if I am going to invest my time physically, well, I'm going to be able to get two x or three x if I'm recovering hard as well and intentional with my recovery. So sometimes there's soft tissue elements that I have to implement, so the massages or foam rolling or things like that to make sure that my tissue quality as well. So, we would call that mechanical stress that we're trying to alleviate there, but at the same time, we have to alleviate emotional stress as well. And so how are we doing that and how are we alleviating neural stress as well, talking to the athletes and educating them and realizing that we're talking to 21- and 22-year-old college kids, and that we're trying to lay a foundation for success for them for a long period of time.

Brent Callaway (17:23):

And that the things that we are planning on a day-to-day basis, I mentioned this a few times, but they have to be intentional. And so, setting out what does a perfect day look like for you, being able to talk to them about that and hold them accountable to those things. Because in

the nature of what we're going into when we're preparing for a 40 yard dash and the entirety of the NFL combine is that hundreds of a second matter, and any of us right now can go pick up a stopwatch and press it as fast as we can, and we're probably going to be able to start it and stop it in about a 10th and a half of a second. Right? And 15 hundreds of a second is a massive differentiator when you're trying to get drafted really high. The difference between a 4 40 and a 4 55, uh, is a big separator for an NFL defensive back, right?

Brent Callaway (18:11):

You could go third in the draft or you could go fifth round, right? And there's a substantial amount of millions of dollars that are different with that. So, for us to be able to really lock in with those athletes and be very specific, hyper-specific with the test that we're about to go through to train them specifically for that is, is a different regimented program than sustainable success for an athlete who's getting ready to go into their pre-season actually. Right? So, preparing for competition versus preparing in the off-season are two totally different things. So, lots of sustainability strategies for those athletes that are preparing for, for the pre-season and the upcoming season as far as preserving the body kind of reacclimating the body from the season. We get a lot of athletes who the season ends and two weeks later they show up in our facilities getting ready for next year.

Brent Callaway (19:03):

And so, if we launch into very heavy, very aggressive training, uh, at a phase where they're not ready to do that, then we end up in a situation where we could be increasing their likelihood of injuries. So, we have to periodize and program for them elements of downtime and recovery time and reconditioning time, and then there's an on ramp to them reporting to their team so that they can be ready to, to jump back into training camp as well. So, lot more sustainability strategies inside of an off-season program than there would be when preparing for the NFL.

Ginevra Czech (19:41):

Yeah, and I think that makes sense. So if we think about that in the world that we're in, whether it's our financial advisors or anyone really in the corporate or the business space, the way we're preparing for big performances, whether that's preparing for promotion, preparing for some sort of big presentation, that's probably going to be different than the way I'm just preparing to show up and come to work every single day. If I have a presentation, I'm probably not focusing on every skill I have in my toolbox. I'm probably focusing more specifically on what I need for that actual presentation and being a little bit more specific and hyper-focused. So, there's tons of parallels and application there. So, I am curious, you've obviously coached a lot of different athletes through the combine and through your career. What makes a successful player and what can be some of the obstacles on the other side? What are some of the obstacles for success? I'm curious in, in your opinion, what makes the good ones good and the not good ones not good,

Brent Callaway (20:44):

Right? Right. Boy, what a that that question, there's a lot of meat inside of there that we can start to chip away on, right? So, number one, I think that a player has to be put in the right position. And I don't mean specifically just a, I'm not a safety, I'm a cornerback or I'm not, I'm a linebacker, I'm an outside rusher or something of that sort. But if, for instance, one of my athletes was Patrick Mahomes back in during his draft years. And when you look at Patrick Mahomes, you obviously see a quarterback who is going to play quarterback in the NFL, but you also see a player who is full of creativity, right? So that's one of his strengths as a player. And at that time when I was learning about Patrick, Patrick was a quarterback at Texas Tech University who had a big arm in, won seven games his last year there.

Brent Callaway (21:38):

So, if anybody said, is this guy going to be a multiple time MVP? I don't know what my answer would've been in that situation. I think that you're looking for the Tom Brady type a personality quarterback, and when you see Patrick, that's not necessarily what you got at that time. You got somebody who was visionary, creative in his nature, more of a type B personality, very social. And then when you put him in an offense like Andy Reid has, and you put him behind a quarterback that he can learn from like Alex Smith, then you can start to see how he could be brought along through mentorship to be really successful. And for them to be able to look at him and say, okay, let's use his personality traits and his skillset to benefit us and let's program and play and design our playbook around him in that way.

Brent Callaway (22:28):

I see it happen the opposite direction a lot. You draft a player because he may be the best player on the board, and then a team will put him in a situation that doesn't benefit him because it's not his style or it's not his personality to play how they want him to play. And so, from a successful perspective, I think an athlete has to be put in the right situation and mentored accordingly to be successful. Now, we could go down now and go to the ownership of the athlete, and yes, they have to be disciplined and they have to have an insane skillset. And sometimes that's a sliding scale, right? So, I can have an average skillset, but be hyper disciplined and have a very successful career. I can also be the opposite of that, right? I can have, I can have an average discipline level, but an insane and very highly accomplished skillset and talent level and be very accomplished there too.

Brent Callaway (23:22):

What you don't find is somebody who's average and low in one of those categories be in the NFL for a very long period of time. So, you have to be exceptional at one or the other, or you have to have a really strong balance of both and be able to play that. And you know, what you end up seeing is like strategically, the longer a player is in the NFL, their physical actually starts to decline a little bit, but their knowledge of the game increases so they know how to put themselves in the right situation and make decisions a lot more appropriately. And boy is that not a parallel to us and in our working lives, right? When you have those experiences, you can make much more agile decisions and course correct a lot faster than when you're just starting out.

Ginevra Czech (24:09):

So, it's so funny you say that because I run our value-add programs here at FS partnering with our different financial advisors and their home office contacts, and we partner with EXOS to talk about some of this sustainable high performance and some of these topics that we're going through today. But another one of our value-add partners focuses specifically on identifying your motivators and being able to understand why you behave the way you do based on what you're motivated by. So much of those conversations focus on are you in the right position, are you in a job that you're comfortable in that's using your strengths? Another part of it, a lot of times we look at different team dynamics. So how are, how is a team put together? So, a lot of times you'll see someone, to your point, maybe like a Patrick Mahomes who's a little bit more collaborative, a little bit more creative, they probably work really well with someone who has a lot of direction and can be really decisive to be able to give the direction and then allow them to, to maybe come up with more of the creativity side of it.

Ginevra Czech (25:09):

I will say choosing Patrick Mahomes for a podcast for a firm based in Philadelphia was like a little bit of a sensitive subject, but we'll let it slide <laugh>. Got it. Uh, because I, I think it's a great example. The other thing I always talk a lot about is what makes people successful? And I always say effort and attitude, you need skill, but if you don't have effort and attitude, then your skill's not really doing much. You know, when we're thinking about what we're doing in our day-to-day, and it goes back again to me to a lot of that motivation. So that's actually I think a little

bit of a good segue for some of the other things that I was thinking about, which is when you're looking at these athletes, we've already said they need skill, they need effort, they need attitude, they need discipline. What's the coach's role in all of this? Oh

Brent Callaway (25:55):

Man. Organization is a big part of it, right? Being able to, to organize the day in the work, you can almost take that to like a president level inside of the corporate entity, making sure that their structure is, is something that, that I'm challenged with on a regular basis. And then making sure that all of the integrated pieces of the puzzle, uh, are put together for that athlete. And we work with you, you threw out some numbers there a second ago and 98 athletes across our programs. And we have three facilities that, that we're delivering this program through. And so specifically I have about 50 every year. And with that being the case, the fact that we have to recognize that the 50 athletes that are in our training groups that are going to be a part of that every day for, for eight weeks, and longer than that, they're all individual customers for us, right?

Brent Callaway (26:47):

So, this isn't a university where they're more or less obligated, or I'm not an employer of them, like a team would be in the NFL, but I am providing a service to them that they're paying a pretty penny for. So, we have to have high elements of hospitality in there and understand that every group is a group of one. And that's a message that we try to pitch. Instead of thinking of it as I, I have 50 athletes that I'm trying to take care of, I have one 50 times and I have to make sure that each athlete is receiving the results, the care, the coordination of staff members in ensuring that they get all of the attention that they need so that they can then go and next year they can preach to their teammates, say, I went to EXOS and I really feel like these people took care of me.

Brent Callaway (27:36):

Um, and you know what another great parallel into the business world is making sure that every client feels like their problems are being solved and that their money is well invested with, with you specifically, so that those things can grow and that they can be better, and they can trust you. And it's easy when you are, look, I am a six-foot tall, 200-pound Caucasian male who's 43 years old, right? My clients are not that demographic. They are not that size and shape. Um, so sometimes it's really easy to, to look at a 275-pound man who's 7% body fat and can run a 4, 5 40 and not feel like the alpha in the group. But when you do that, you are effectively not the leader anymore. So, understanding that you hold a lot of the keys to their success. Uh, and so you have to be in control of the situation at all times in a very professional way, right?

Brent Callaway (28:31):

I'm not trying to control the athlete; I'm trying to control the situation and give them the advantages that they need and the strategies that they need and make them successful. But you know, when you have something written down like be the alpha, which I have written down right underneath me right now, that there's a mindset to that and understanding that just like a father needs to have that type of mindset with his children, that I need to guide them to safety and I need to be the protector and all of those things and teach them how to be effective humans as they become older. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you have to do the same thing with athletes, right? And there are a lot of things about being a good parent that carry over to being a good coach too. So, the role of the coach to kind of bring that back to being full circle organization structure, motivation is a big piece of it. Making sure that we stay on task, and we stay guided accordingly. And that the end goal is reached. We start out on a path, and we follow that path, and we don't veer off.

Ginevra Czech (29:29):



Yeah. It's a perfect parallel because all of our financial advisors have clients and every client has a unique situation, a unique background, unique goals. And if you're not having a conversation with those clients and treating them as an individual, it's probably going to impact your relationship with those clients. Possibly you're going to lose those clients, you're not going to get the referral. So, everything that you're talking about totally applies. Do you do discovery conversations? How do you evaluate those, those athletes on the intake? Yeah,

Brent Callaway (29:58):

We actually do. So, we have an amazing pipeline because we've been able to be in business for a long time, and I've done this for 15 years. And so, you have great agents that you build relationships with, that you work with, and collegiate strength and conditioning staffs and medical departments and things like that from taking care of previous players that that help. But the, our greatest referral network is player to player, right? So, we have to get on the phone with those athletes, um, uh, the perspective athletes and explain to them what we do and how we do it, and then understand what their goals are specifically. And it's not always an easy thing to get a 21 or a 22-year-old who is in a very ego-driven sport to admit their weaknesses and what they need to work on. So, we have to sort that out a little bit.

Brent Callaway (30:47):

Um, and then, uh, as we talk through those pieces and we make notes and we share that information, the first day that those athletes come into us, we're going to put them through a full day of evaluation. So, it's about eight hours' worth of trying to understand where that client is in their physical readiness and physical life so that we can go back and start to track where we can make the biggest gains and where we can have the most improvement for some of those athletes. Again, it might be weight loss, we might start moving heavier in that category and trying to move that needle for some that there might be a gigantic speed deficit that we're trying to overcome. So, then we have to coordinate all of the pieces effectively in order to accomplish that goal for them. Some things could be mobility related; some things can actually be injury rehabilitation. So, what we need to, to be able to focus on that and understand and that that discovery timeframe is very important for us to get a, an earlier start on, on all of those elements.

Ginevra Czech (31:49):

Yeah. One of the things that I'm hearing, and there's focusing a lot on things that are controllable or changeable, and when we think about humans in general, there's a lot of things in our life that are out of our control. It could be weather; it could be traffic for more specific to our industry. It could be things that are happening in the financial markets that we can't control. So how do you think about preparing athletes to navigate the difference between things that they can control and things that they can't control?

Brent Callaway (32:21):

Yeah, it's Gene. It's like you, you sat in the front row of some of our team meetings when we're talking to players, and you took notes and you're asking me those questions through the evaluation period. I'll give you a little background here. The player's season has already been played, right? And scouts will always say the tape is the tape. We've got the tape; we've seen all that stuff. Um, so if we're looking at that, their work that has been displayed on film and on the field is already canned, right? It's bottled up and it's sent out. So, there's nothing that we can do to control what's been put on, on film now, right? That's already, that's done. What we can do is control the elements of the physical evaluation process, my testing numbers, how I answer questions when I'm being interviewed, my medical assessment, right?

Brent Callaway (33:12):

And so, we talk a lot about understanding the fact that we have to focus on those controllable items and then give all of our attention to those controllable items. And if we can't control it, then we have to roll with it, right? Because I can't control when I'm at the NFL combine on day two and I've just finished six hours' worth of medical exams as part of the interview process for these teams. And I'm going to grab my dinner and I just, I'm just looking for 30 minutes alone. And as I grab my dinner and I sit down, the defensive coordinator for the Baltimore Ravens comes down and sits down next to me and wants to start asking me questions, you know, about what style of defense I prefer to play in and other things. I can't control that. But in that moment, I can control my answers and my reactions and, and how I process that.

Brent Callaway (34:01):

And so, there are lots of elements like that that we have to be able to roll with and understanding that, um, every day that you wake up, there's going to be some challenges that we don't know we can prepare you for, right? But you have to understand that that's part of the process. And so, we have to roll with those. And I think of an amazing way for someone to, to be able to, to be in the right mindset is to have done all of the homework that you could do and be as prepared as possible, right? So, it's very similar to getting ready for a game, right? If I have been prepared for that game and I've sat down and I've watched all the film on my opponent and my coaches told me this is what they're going to do here, and this is what they're going to do in that situation.

Brent Callaway (34:47):

And I get in that game, and I start to see those things, right? They start coming to life in front of me and I start seeing that I can have success with a game plan that we've established. Um, then I can roll with some of the, the one-off situations that pop up that I might not have been ready for. Okay. They called an audible in this situation. So, I have to be able to, to adapt to that, and now I can step off to the side and do those things. But the game plan and understanding the game plan and having a game plan is, is paramount.

Ginevra Czech (35:19):

I had a boss once and his favorite expression was winging it is for amateurs. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And so now it's kind of a funny little inside joke between my husband and I actually love that. But I mean, I think the lesson there obviously is you have to have a game plan. And I'm actually not to make fun of my husband, but he's a golfer and he recently has been complaining I play so much golf, I don't know how, I'm not better. He's has very high expectations of himself, he's very athletic, and he got this book that's 30 days of golf and every day it leads you through a specific part of the golf game, gives you little drills that you're supposed to practice. So same thing, like building on that specific preparation, making it repeatable. But it got me thinking that so often in life we're like, oh, I do this all the time, why am I not better?

Ginevra Czech (36:11):

Well, he's only playing 18 holes of golf. Yeah, he goes to the driving range every now and then, but he's not necessarily practicing the same way that someone preparing for the NFL combine or someone who's actually playing in the NFL is doing mostly practice and then playing games. And it was kind of a light bulb moment for me that in our personal lives, in our careers, if we want to play the game really well, we probably have to do a little bit more practice. And then that way we, we've practiced, we have the game plan, we're prepared when the game comes ready for it, whatever it is. Whether it is the presentation or showing up for your family, making a good Thanksgiving dinner mm-hmm. <affirmative>, whatever it might be. So, I had another question. You touched on it a little bit. We've got the physical component, but now it sounds like there's defensive coordinators interrupting athletes in the middle of their lunch. I'm curious,

how do you coach to that? How do you prepare those athletes for those types of conversations? For the things that aren't their physical capabilities on the field. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> or what's in their film? No, you're

Brent Callaway (37:17):

Right. Some of the things that we do are to mockup those situations a little bit. And it's not to the point that I'm going to walk in and sit down during a lunch period with our athletes and start quizzing them on things. But we do have former NFL personnel, former GMs, former scouts, and things of that sort come in and talk to our athletes about how are the first three days of the NFL Combine going to come to life. And a lot of people only know about the NFL combine from what they see on tv, and that's usually just the physical testing piece. But they go through three days of rigorous interviews and medical examinations and drug tests and cognitive assessments and all of those things before they get to the physical testing piece. So, when you're talking about that, I mean, it would be like if we had the hundred-meter dash in the Olympics and we kept everybody up late at night, and then we woke them up super early in the morning with some other stressful things.

Brent Callaway (38:12):

And then we're like, okay, now let's see how fast you can go Rob. And that's a very different process that you have to prepare for a little bit. So, we have those personnel that come in and talk to the athletes about what those interviews are like, what's the goal of those interviews and what are some of the tactics that NFL personnel are using in order to try to get honest answers and understand who people really are. And I think sometimes there's a bad rap that can go both ways. I think players can look at NFL personnel and say this, this evaluation process is unfair to me because of the situations that you're putting me in. And at the same time, league minimum in the NFL is about \$750,000 a year. That's a lot of money, right? So, these executives want to understand the types of employees that they might be bringing on to their team, and they want to know everything about them that they can, when they're making those decisions.

Brent Callaway (39:03):

It's a lot to spend 25 million on one person, and it's a lot to spend \$750,000 on one person. So, when I can level set that to the athletes and let them understand what the goal is from an NFL personnel evaluation perspective, then they start to understand, okay, they're not just trying to trick me all the time. They're not just trying to get me to say the wrong thing. They're trying to get to know me. So, the more that I can convey who I really am, the better off everyone's going to be. So, it's more or less just trying to understand the, the goal from both sides, and then the player has the ability to navigate those situations more appropriately.

Ginevra Czech (39:45):

And in your opinion, I mean obviously I imagine different teams have different cultures and how important that is that as whether it's the NFL team coaches are evaluating players. I don't know how much players have any type of decision over where they end up, but I'm just curious if that is a, an intangible component, making sure that there's a culture fit with athletes and teams. Yeah,

Brent Callaway (40:11):

I think you'll see that a lot more when players are looking at signing second and third contracts, right? And free agency starts popping up and then they have the ability pending their skillset is good enough to go out and select a team that they want to sign with, or they can decide, which we see all the times. A player may take a pay cut to stay where he is because he is really happy and understands that he's in a good situation. But it's very important for the success of the team and the athletes that there's a fit there. When the draft happens, it's a draft for a reason. A player doesn't always have the ability to, to say, I don't want to play for you, I would prefer to

play for somebody else. We've seen that play out a few times, and it seems like it doesn't play out in the public very well.

Brent Callaway (40:54):

Something that John Elway did was he came out and said, no, I'm not going to play for you guys. Let's go play baseball. And so, there was some, some strategies that were put in play there. And Eli Manning did a lot of the same thing. I don't want to go to San Diego, so don't draft me, but it doesn't happen very much. And you have to have an amazing resume to be able to tell a potential employer, I don't want to work for you. I would prefer to work for somebody else. So I think that the more a team, uh, and there are a lot of teams who are really good at this, and there are some teams that need to work on this a little bit, but the more that a team can really have a good solid professional culture and be intentional with their culture, and then bring in players who fit that culture, the more likely that they're going to be successful.

Ginevra Czech (41:42):

So, I wrote down a couple of key lessons learned based on the conversation that we've had in no specific order. Lesson number one is I have no idea who's getting drafted where and in which order, but I feel pretty confident if someone's trained with Exos, they're probably pretty good. So, I don't know if there's, if there's draft brackets, but put your EXOS athletes up high. I have that training for big performances is different than training for our everyday performances. So, as we're thinking about our big performances, be a little bit more specific, be a little bit more focused, and then it's important for that everyday performance, try and find ways to build that sustainability, to have that foundation. And I think we talk a lot with EXOS about those four pillars of movement, of nutrition, of recovery and mindfulness. So just finding ways to work that in, whether it's hydrating, getting outside sleeping, taking your pet collars off, <laugh>.

Ginevra Czech (42:41):

Another thing that, that Brent said that I think I really liked was treating your wellness like you would your job. Because we are one person. And yes, we have many different hats that we wear. We all know that if you neglect one part of your life, it's ultimately going to bleed over into the other parts of your life. So, I think that's a really good, good takeaway for everyone. I love putting the player in the right position. So, I think you ask yourself, are you in the right position where you are in your current career or even your current situation as an individual? But also, if you're a manager of other people, look at your team and try and make sure, are you having those players in the right position and, and managing strengths. And then I love the last one, if you can't control it, roll with it. So obviously we want to have a game plan, we want to make sure we've watched the film tape, we've done our competitive research, whatever it is that we need to do to prepare again for either those big performances or their more sustainable everyday performance. And then if we've done everything we can to prepare to have that game plan, just try have confidence in yourself and roll through with whatever, whatever happens. Brent, anything you'd add? Anything else, uh, you think I've missed in some of those key lessons learned? No, ma'am.

Brent Callaway (43:55):

You nailed it. You, you wrapped that up perfectly. In fact, I need your notes so that the next time I'm delivering a meeting to our group of athletes, I can go back and hit my gene, never notes real quick and, uh, make sure we check all those boxes.

Ginevra Czech (44:09):

The last point that I'll make is that with Exos, we obviously have access to, to Brent when he's available. So, we do our sustainable high-performance workshops where we can go in with different individuals or their offices and talk through those four pillars of sustainable high



performance, and then go through some of the things we were talking about, different strategies for identifying where are there gaps in your performance? Is there breath work that we can do? Are there things we can do to optimize our nutrition or our sleep? And then we do also partner with EXOS to offer the Game changer, which is that six-week virtual development chorus as well. I'm actually, I'm doing the EXOS game changer right now. Yes. And I think a lot of the things we talked about today are what the game changer goes through, not only educating you on it, but then giving you those practices to actually implement it mm-hmm.

Ginevra Czech (44:56):

<affirmative> in your day-to-day. Uh, and then there's the, the team and the community aspect, which has been really cool to get other people's perspectives from across the, the country and across industries. Awesome. All right. Well, Brent, thank you so much for joining. I think this was a lot of fun. It was awesome for me to be able to learn a little bit more about what you're doing with Exos, what EXOS is doing specifically with some of those elite athletes. And I think there were definitely some good takeaways for our listeners as they think about implementing sustainable high performance in their lives and preparing for those big moments that matter. Yeah, you bet. Thank you. And thank you for having me. FS Thrive was produced by Ginevra Czech with help from Aaron Sherman. It was edited and engineered by Aaron Sherman. Special thanks to show advisor Kim Pollock. If you enjoyed this episode, be sure to like and subscribe to the FS Fireside podcast wherever you stream. Thanks for listening.