

## *Martin MacDonald – Episode 238*

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DANNY LENNON:

Martin welcome back to the podcast. I don't know what guest appearance this is now maybe 4-5 not too sure at this point, but been quite a while since your last one so I think many people would be happy to hear your voice again.

MARTIN MACDONALD:

Thanks very much for having me Danny. I always enjoy these chats.

DANNY LENNON:

Probably a good place to start just so I am clear on some of the lines of questioning. I am interested about your undergraduate degree and then also your Masters degree basically and of your university education. Can you just clarify exactly what those were on and where you studied?

MARTIN MACDONALD:

I did my B.Sc in Sports and Exercise Science and that was at Loughborough University and I did that for 3 years, and then I went straight on to do my M.Sc also at Loughborough in Sports and Exercise Nutrition. So, very sports specific, and then after that – so in fact whilst I was doing my Masters – I did it part-time because I was also lecturing at the same time basically to pay for my Masters because back then you couldn't get any sort of funding or anything, so I was lecturing. I love teaching, so at the same time I did a night class

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in – they call it Dtlls. It's PG Dtlls – Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector which is basically the industry standard for lecturing higher education so I did that over 2 years as well. That basically just qualified me as a lecturer and teacher, and it's funny looking back now I thought it was absolute rubbish, but looking back now I'm like I had actually took some good stuff away from that in terms of differentiated learning and just different stuff that I'd now use. Not necessarily in my – or previously my practice but as a bit of an educator now using some of that stuff it's really cool, and then after that I don't know if it was a 1 or 2 year gap but when I started working with a lot more weight loss clients obviously all of the clinical stuff that comes along I ended up doing a bit of consultancy of Bupa – were they a health insurance company or something. They wanted me to do all sorts of stuff, which is really high level. The story behind it is I actually worked one-on-one with the wife of someone who is basically like the strategic operations manager or something for Bupa and he then came to me and said, "Look we want to do all of these things." And I was like, "Oh, man. I don't think this guy realizes that I am not very well qualified." So, then that actually pushed me towards doing a Post Graduate in Clinical Nutrition which I think most people are kind of aware I use this title Clinical Performance Nutritionist, which is funny because someone said to me, "What do you need to call yourself Clinical Performance Nutritionist?" And I was in just one of those moods where I give short answers so I just said, "Oh, it's just a made up name." I think he was just like, "Hah, hah, hah." Like you're such a joker, and I was like, "No, it is. I just made it up." Because I said, "You can call yourself anything." Like nutritionist isn't protected title but I said, "You need to also not look like a mug when someone goes, "Why do you call yourself that." If you go, "I've got no qualifications I just made it up and I am actually bit of a charlatan." If you want to be that person fine go ahead, but I said, "You know I've got my Post

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Graduate and that's why I made up that name." And I think a few people have copied it actually since, and then I did also like my gym instructor, my certified strength and conditioning specialist qualifications but yeah that's kind of me in a nutshell.

DANNY LENNON:

So, I want to kind of fill in a few more gaps here. So, you said that you had gone on from there to be a CEO and did your Masters, and at a certain point later you ended up kind of working with Bupa and doing some other things. From the point of where you were at your Masters from there did you go directly into consultancy and coaching straight off? What was the kind of timeframe in-between finishing in university and coaching or did coaching precede finishing up your studies and kind of what ages and timeframes are we talking about with that stuff?

MARTIN MACDONALD:

I don't know if you saw this I got tagged a few times. Alan Aragon tagged me in this on Instagram, but people who were doing these things five things you don't know about me, did you see that?

DANNY LENNON:

I did not.

MARTIN MACDONALD:

And I never took part I just ignored it. I thought if I just don't mention it it'll go away and it did. Loud brought it back up, but this is one thing that I thought about because I couldn't think of five things that people didn't really know about me because I just say everything on Instagram. But I did think of a few things. I think I was up to four recently. Now this is going to ruin it, but never mind I maybe still use it. But early part of my career has actually extended right until the present day a little bit in that – and I'll tell you why this is relevant to your question in a minute, but until you know right to this day realistically I still have a basically minimum wage job that I still do for enjoyment. I've whittled it down I only do 4.5 hours a week. At 4.5 hours a week 32 weeks a year, right? So, it does make me laugh when people go, "Oh, chasing the money Martin." I'm like, "You have no idea I still

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clean up people for minimum wage, because I enjoy the job.” But anyway it’s by the by. So, the beginning of my career 21 I finished my degree. Straight onto – I didn’t really have any life – 21 I started my Masters that’s 21 to 23 and it’s so funny even before I actually graduated for my Masters because I had such a love for nutrition and I spoke about it to everyone and I’d been self studying for so long, and I’ve competed in bodybuilding which obviously people think that makes you knowledgeable you know, “Oh, you’ve got abs you must know about nutrition.” So, I would have people talking to me in the gym, and so a twice world champion from Australia came to Loughborough where I was and needed a nutritionist and basically asked people locally who is the best nutritionist and there was like the English Institute of Sport and all this you know a central hub for sports and nutrition, and she was referred to me. And it was so funny there’s like super high profile athlete and I hadn’t even got my Masters, but I started working with her and that was amazing. So, on the one hand I’m working with a twice world champion and again I am not even sure if I had graduated, but I went and did a voluntary talk for British Weightlifting. Just one of my friends who is older than me feathering on in the industry she did the physiology and stuff for them, and she just got me an audience with the Performance Director and I said, “I’ll come and do this talk for you.” She said, “Ah, we’re doing this come along we need some downtime for the athletes. You can do a talk.” And I did this talk and as I left she said, “I’ll make sure you send me an invoice,” and I was like, “What?” And I talk about this whenever I do the business stuff within MNU, but I was like, “Invoice. I don’t know how much you charge for this stuff. I’ve never charged before.” And so I spoke to someone he said if she doesn’t feel like she has been slapped in the face you’ve not charged enough that was his advice to me. And this guy, I won’t say who said that, but he is hugely, hugely respected with the world of Performance Strength and Conditioning. He is super,

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super big time, but it was such a funny piece of first advice. And for anyone listening I think I charged £150 for the 1 hour 90 minute talk. Anyway, so I was doing that, but at the same time I was delivering school workshops on sports science, so very basic introductions to sports science. I was also working as a gym instructor just like a fitness suite gym, and – what else was I doing, I was obviously lecturing – part-time lecturing at the time. I think at one time I had five, six, seven different jobs contracts PAYE things, just and yet – but I started Mac-Nutrition my consultancy in 2008, so that was me I went self employed straightaway but I had all of these other, not strings to my bow, but basically ways to make money because to make ends meet. So, yeah I was doing all of this and yeah I should also say – I don't think I answered your question fully earlier, but I did my post graduate in Clinical Nutrition at Roehampton University which is in London, so yeah that's how things were going. So, I was doing a bit of everything. I was doing a bit of teaching, a bit of consultancy work so I picked up – oh yeah after that she then said to me, “Oh, we have 20 days work with British Weightlifting a year would you like the consultancy position,” and then that's how the story started and it's one of those. I feel extremely lucky and it went down really well with the athletes and yeah I ended up getting this consultancy position, which then obviously took me through however many Olympic Games I worked with them, three Olympic Games was it kind of three World Championships you know that was one of my most enjoyable elite sport contracts that I ever did you know it's an amazing sports work in Olympic weightlifting.

DANNY LENNON:

Super interesting, but again I am very intrigued by kind of this early stages of working through I suppose this path that you've carved to initially start Mac-Nutrition, and then getting some of this work that you just mentioned there. Was the plan all along always nutrition primarily, because I know you said you were

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doing like some personal training or coaching and you'd done some different – you obviously had your Exercise Science degree you had gone and done like Fitness Instructor degree or like a course. Was the plan always that was just something to help supplement, and then you were always going to go into nutrition or was there are period where you were kind of unsure and you were kind of feeling out what areas you might like to work in and you hadn't kind of fully committed to the nutrition side of the things?

MARTIN MACDONALD:

Yeah. Good question and I say good question because it reminds me of the fact that nutrition wasn't always – I didn't see it as a career for a long, long time. I was super, super interested in it and my parents didn't even want me to do sports science they thought it was a dead end degree or a dead end career, which I suppose in a way I am a little bit the same I feel like Sports Science degrees really don't set you up for much, but we won't go there maybe or we can. So, I was doing my Masters and I hadn't committed to nutrition, so I was like shall I do exercise physiology which is big at Loughborough or shall I do nutrition, and I was like, "Well, I don't really know, but because I loved the gym and training I thought I am going to be something to do with training," and that's why I did my CSES, but there was not kind of S&C at the time. S&C Masters didn't really exist, and so I spoke to lots of people and said, "You know if you're going to employ me as an S&C coach but with a good knowledge of nutrition would you prefer me to have a Nutrition Masters or Exercise Physiology because it's a bit more in the middle?" And a real pinnacle point for me was someone just said to me we all go to – these are people like who are working high, high level in sports kind of top level sports scientists, S&C coaches, no nutritionists but in UK Athletics and the Indian Football Team S&C coach, British Triathlon all these kind of people who were my kind of confidants at the time through various reasons, and it was training on Powerbase at Loughborough University

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actually I got to meet lots of these people and social circles and they said, “You know what, we all ask you nutrition questions and we work with performance nutritionists at the top level and we trust you more and you’re 21, 23 whatever. If you did nutrition and you became a nutritionist you could be the best,” and to be honest I can still remember a guy called Pete saying that to me in Powerbase and I just was like, “Yeah. I want to be the best.” And you know it’s just my personality a little bit of like I being the center of attention, I do like being praised, and so yeah it was just that moment of yeah I could be the best, I want to be the best. And that kind of took me towards that path of right nutritionists the thing, and then I started doing it more and realized, you know what I do – I think I’ve got a major passion for nutrition, but then the S&C the training stuff is still there. The end of the story is I realized that there was no way if I wanted to be the best I could know all of the S&C stuff, all of the physiology stuff I was interested in, all of the nutrition as well. So, I kind of made the difficult decision of you know what I’m going to stop doing that quite early on, and it did pain me a little bit and it pains me even to this day to have to say to people when they ask me on live Q&As, Martin I’ve got this exercise question. I’m like I am not the best person to ask. And yeah I just made the decision right I am going – if I’ve not read every single nutrition study that’s ever been published what’s the point in spreading myself thin and doing all of the S&C stuff as well. So, yeah I just decided right it’s nutrition, and it was going to be Mac-Nutrition. And yeah of course, I helped people with very, very basic stuff when I was working with them and even that to this day when we do nutrition stuff we’ll give people basic advice because we can, but we don’t try and do any kind of advanced programming because we’re not the best at it.

DANNY LENNON:

Cool, yeah. So, there’s one thing I’m trying to kind of piece into this, and it’s kind of getting into some of your motivations or influencers that kind of led you

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down that route of I suppose first pursuing exercise science, and so one that you've already mentioned which is clearly obvious is your interest in bodybuilding and obviously that gets you interested in it and I think as many people who end up going down the route in college of doing exercise science or nutrition or anything in those related fields comes from their own interest in some sort of sport, and so for you you've mentioned bodybuilding was a big interest. But just knowing you and the kind of the passion that you have within nutrition I think certainly what I've found and I am sure you've probably seen this in many people, but when was studying that there are lots of people who might have an interest in nutrition or an interest in sport. But they might not always have either an interest in science or they don't actually ever get to the point of being what I would think is a scientific thinker, right? So, the world is full of people who've done a degree in like nutrition or sports science who still don't operate i.e. what I would think is a scientific principles. So, for you for that being such a huge part of what you talk about and what you're passionate about, and the sheer amount of research that you have read over the years not is it to me thinking there's some interest there in bodybuilding which got you interested in this in the first place, but there's obviously some sort of underlying passion for science itself. So, I'm just wondering was that there from an early age that kind of preceded your studies or did that only kind of kick-in once you got into university, got exposed to what peer reviewed research was, started looking at research, saw how that got played, and that kind of brought on this passion for science or was that something that had been there a bit earlier?

**MARTIN MACDONALD:**

Man. Just as you are talking I can just think of like all of these – I think about 10 things that I could or want to say about this is, this is almost like – I feel like I'm on the couch like digging into my deeper meaning in life. So, right back at the beginning I can remember



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maybe pre-teenage years I was obsessed with muscles and I say this to people, I do not know why it's – you know why does anyone end up liking a particular color. I have no idea why I ended up this way. I have always been a bit obsessed by human anatomy, muscles, the human form and my older brother who is – I don't know, maybe 15 years older than me, I don't know that's bad isn't it. He is a fair bit older and he was a lifeguard and I used to want to be a lifeguard because he was lifeguard and kind of idealized him a little bit. And now I sort of look at pictures of him and I was like does he even lift, but when I was 9 I was like he has got big muscles you know let me see your biceps. I was obsessed by – he was stronger than me, he was faster than me, and then at – I think it was 12 I basically begged my parents to let me get my first weight sets. The York dumbbell from Argos catalog, I think it was £29.99 at that time, 32 kilos of weight. I don't know if anyone can remember these, but they are the gold ones that had cement in them. Anyway, so that's like 12 years old I was obsessed with weights, and so I was doing all these sit-ups, and you know lifting these weights terribly of course, and then at 14, 15, 16 I saved up pocket money to buy Arnold Schwarzenegger's Encyclopedia to Bodybuilding. So, this is kind of – it's just me, I don't know why but I've just got a thing for muscles, and physiology and anatomy. And then, it kind of goes on from there – you know I actually really, really went to university in the first place was I had a sports studies teacher at – and I think I should really give him a shout out, my grammar school I went to John Hampden Grammar School, I'm going to give loads of context because I want someone to actually know him in this day-and-age and actually tell him that he had influenced me massively. So, his name is Mr. Edwards – I think his name is Sid – Sid Edwards, John Hampden Grammar School, he lectured me and he was so cool, so funny, but he clearly just loved being a teacher but also he had studied at Loughborough done sports science, he is a rugby player I think and I just kind of idealized

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him a little bit. Little bit the way I had idealized my brother. He convinced my parents to go to university to study it and he said, “You know it’s a good career,” and you know what my parents were convinced by. He said, “Lots of people who do sports science then go onto do graduate schemes in things like accountancy and recruitment and make lots of money.” My parents were like, “Yeah, you can do that.” That’s the only thing that sold them on it you know a good financially secure career. Anyway I did that, but I’ll be honest I was nothing to do with science or being evidence based. I think there’s a certain part of me, I’ve always – I think it’s fair to say, been a good person. I always wanted to do right by other people, and I think I’m quite caring person at heart, and as much as probably lots of people on the internet are like, “What you’re just this horrible troll person,” but you know my deep down desire in really everything is to affect other people positively and I think sometimes my passion that comes through people think I’m just being nasty but at least the way I frame it in my head is I am doing something for the greater good, whether or not I am right. I am only human, but I get very angry when I see people giving out misinformation or what I believe to be lacking integrity or maybe choosing success or money over doing the right thing which maybe slow or less profitable. So, then when I went to Uni I was not evidence based. I started to learn what referencing was, what research was. Obviously, Loughborough is a very strong research university, but it wasn’t until – so I competed in natural bodybuilding so I was on all of the natural bodybuilding forums which is full of crap and rubbish information. But some good stuff at least I was able to try nutrition on myself, see the –oh, you know what I’ve read this that eating fat makes you fat, but then I had more fat and less carbs because that was the thing and I lost body fat. So, started this kind of personal journey of questioning, but it wasn’t until my Masters that my personal tutor was Professor Ron Maughan who I am sure I’ve spoken about somewhere else maybe with you Danny on a previous podcast, but

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he had a huge, huge impact on me because I loved nutrition at this stage. I really had this massive passion and he was a world leader and he was also as brilliant lecturer, he was funny. It was kind of love-hate relationship. I idealized him as well. I loved him I thought he was the coolest man, he was so big time. He had all these cool stories of how he'd been offered money to do studies that were not legit and how he had turned them down, and how he had called out certain athletes who were using performance enhancing drugs. And he was like – he literally, he watched the Olympics this guy fails a drug test and he called the police in that country and said, “Hello, this person has just failed for this drug test.” And I believe it's a controlled substance in your study and I don't know somehow he has not been arrested rather than just taken out of the competition like he was Justice Ikola for – I was like, “Yes like you're so hardcore.” He just in stuff with him I saw – again lots of people have heard me talk about Houser M.D., he was so intelligent and I really value intelligence. I value the intelligence that I've been blessed with that I've been brought up to work hard and you know respect that kind of stuff. So, he was super, super intelligent. I remember sitting in a Ph.D. – it was basically all the Ph.D. students from different universities come around and they kind of present different data, lecturers, researchers, and I was there and this person flicked up this slide for literally, I'm not lying, about 4 seconds. Just when this is our data from blood glucose readings click that was it. Anyway this lecture goes on for maybe half-an-hour and it was all about cognition and – I can't fully remember, but a lot of it was to do with cognition and performance, and it was basically a marrying up of this physiology professor and a psychology professor. And at the end of the presentation he puts up his hand and goes, “Can you just go back to Slide-13,” and it was this thing and he goes, “So, you've said that you've found this you know significant finding in this data etc, but I just noticed subject 6 is actually in a hypoglycemic state, so how

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can you not say this is down to blood glucose.” And I was literally like, “You freak how have you picked up on that one data point,” and the physiology professor literally just starts laughing and goes, “Yeah. You’re right. I can’t believe we missed that.” This is like someone’s research they’ve worked on for maybe a year. They’ve written all up and they didn’t notice and he did, and the professor of psychology – this lady, she just got really uppity and arsey, and do you know what actually just on this point that is a real instance of what I would like to emulate. I physiology professor he just laughed and was like, “Do you know what I am wrong,” and this guy is pointed out and he just laughed and you could see he was like, “Hmm, cool that’s science that’s how these things go,” and it was such a respectful thing. When people see me calling stuff out they are like, “Oh, you’re horrible,” and it’s like, “No, just take on the chin I am helping you it’s an opportunity to learn.” Whereas this psychology professor just was really – you know you’ve been called out and you’ve got it wrong stop fighting it and just accept it. But anyway so that was a pinnacle thing for me of being in a same room as him, and every week we had a 1 or 2 hour seminar where he would just sit with us. We had online lectures. Everyone would complain about these online lectures, “Oh, I am paying all thousands of pounds for these lectures and you’re not even teaching it.” I am just watching it at home, and he would say, “Why do you want me to just repeat this information to you. Read it yourself, and then let’s have a chat about real-life.” So, then he would just sit us down and just go, “Right, questions.” For 2 hours I think it was and nobody would say anything, and it was basically an entire year of my Masters, sat in this room, no one would say anything because he would ruin you. He would literally ask a question all, ask a leading question or wait for you to ask something. You would ask something and he would go, “Why do you think that?” Or “Is it?” or put it back on you and literally put you on the sport and it was horrible. But no one else would talk but I wanted

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to learn and I was interested, so he would just make me look silly over, and over, and over again to the point where I would just you know he'd ask me a question and I would go – I'd start laughing and just go, "Well, I know this is what the answer to that is, but presume you're going to tell me why that's wrong." But it was such an amazing learning opportunity of critical thinking, of being put on the spot, having to actually back up everything you knew, and not just being able to make generalized statements or using the word surely you know which I give out to people about. I think for me that was a real point of critical thinking, of having to really, really know your subject immensely well, and you know the 'whys' of everything, and so again he was probably another person that hugely impacted me in terms of what I wanted to emulate in terms of – he knew everything or seemingly to me he knew everything and I respected that. So, I wanted to emulate it, and so probably led to me going away and just reading, and reading, and reading, and reading but then wanting to help people and that I didn't want to go into research. I started working with people, and then the internet comes along and Facebook comes along, and I am also someone who doesn't really like being wrong, and so if there was a debate going on or a discussion going on I would go and read, and read, and read, and read until I knew everything, until I would win. And I've kind of spoken before, sometimes that came from the wrong place of I just wanted to win an argument, but then as time progressed on it was a case of, no there are these people giving out false information, you know the kind of the keto crowd at the minute, and the calorie deniers and all these people who are – because I was in practice. I was working with people, who were breaking down and crying, and they'd been so disempowered, they had so many life issues that were caused by misinformation that I then had this heart to help these people. So, then I'm online talking to someone who are like, "You're like quite emotionally invested here." And I'm like, "Yeah, because you're

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there writing your books, selling miss...” Yeah they’re maybe not working with real people and I know how damaging your information is and I’ve my clients who are hating their lives because of people like you and that’s why I am emotionally invested. So, yeah all of that ties in I suppose to – yeah the person who likes science who ended up knowing a fair bit about science and research, and – you know it’s not even to say that I didn’t graduate from my Masters and even post graduate still, now knowing everything still saying things that were incorrect because I didn’t know everything, and I’ve said to people and I feel like I’m allowed to be proud of the fact that I am someone who celebrates the fact that I was wrong, and I’ve learnt, and I’ve been teachable and there are still people 10-20 years older than me who are stuck in their ways, who won’t admit or even they have changed or even they’re copying me now in their online personas or their articles and they’re certainly yeah but they’ll never turn around and go, “Do you know what I am sorry I was wrong. I didn’t know what I was talking about.” Or this stupid thing where people I know the research has changed. No it hasn’t. It hasn’t changed that much that you know we’ve learnt a few things over the last 1 or 2 decades, but the research hasn’t changed so much that suddenly calories now matter.

DANNY LENNON:

Obviously, you’ve mentioned Ron Maughan and how influential he was, and I think it’s so important that these for someone to kind of find the right person. Because like we’ve kind of discussed just simply – especially like if someone just goes and does a degree in science that doesn’t necessarily mean when they’re done they are a scientific thinker or are going to be evidence based. Particularly, like you say for people who do that with a view of oh once I do a degree or once I do this course that will teach me everything I need to know, and then I’ll be this expert. As opposed to the people who view with a different idea of this is something I’m in for a long haul and this is a great way to get me up to a certain level that then gives me

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these tools to continue to learn in long-term. I think there are just different ways of viewing it and we probably don't realize often that to be a – especially with this kind of growth of evidence based movement and people trying to be more critical in their thinking that doesn't mean everyone needs to go on and do something like degree in science, because that doesn't necessarily guarantee you anything and you can have people who don't do that and are probably more balanced and critical in their thinking. So, I think it's finding the right people, which is obviously a challenge. I do want to kind of move to kind of more a bit along your timeline, so we've kind of gone through these kind of influential stages early on, and how that kind of brought you into the field and some of those influences during your time, studying, and then you said it was 2008 when Mac-Nutrition Consultancy started, right? So, it's 2008 and you were obviously doing some other work, you got involved with British Weightlifting, so maybe fill in from say 2008 and over the next number of years then what were kind of some of the typical consultancy work you were doing before there was ever like MNU or any of that type of stuff, recent to early stages maybe just touch on typically what the consultancy looked like at that time, and then also maybe if there's any high points from the elite sports side of things. Maybe some of the athletes and teams you've worked with, for example?

MARTIN MACDONALD:

Yeah. So, goodness right, so 2008 – I'll tell you one thing that we'll start here, because it's huge I suppose in terms of me becoming viable in having a consultancy I suppose, was I ended up working with a you know we'll call her a celebrity. She was on EastEnders what's that called a soap, on TV, you know I didn't know who she was, but again her dad was super famous and she was quite famous. And I worked with her to help her lose weight, and that was – again when I talk about being lucky, I feel like that was such a lucky thing for me and she said my name on the right stuff on GM TV like morning shows like

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millions of viewers I imagine across the world, and at that time I had a 1 page website, I had my personal mobile number at the top as well I had my name and face, and my phone basically didn't stop ringing for 3 months. And that for me again – that's when I mentioned earlier about working with a weight loss stuff then had loads of people with clinical issues that's when I thought I need to some more academic studying, get some qualifications, and I've got all of these people coming to me with this stuff and I don't really understand, I don't know what's her – because I had just done performance nutrition, right? I wasn't that glued up on – I could go on Google if I wanted, but I wanted someone to teach me about PCOS, I wanted someone to teach me about blood lipids and these kind of things. So, that's where a lot of that led from, so I had that side of it and so I worked with this celebrity and that got me lots of other private clients, and then I started working lots of private clients. I was working with British Weightlifting, I actually – how did this one come about? Someone asked me to do a presentation on something or other, and I had to drive it was £180 I can still remember, it was £180 and they wanted me to deliver a 1 hour lecture in Norwich. Now, from where I live that's maybe 4 to 5 hours drive, so I drove for 4 hours got there early, delivered for 1 hour, you know hung around answered questions, and drove back. So, essentially it was kind of ended up being maybe a 13-14 hour day, but I was like, "Oh, my goodness I've made it. This is amazing I just got paid £150 for a talk," and again they got in contact with me and said, "We're so impressed by your presentation and what you did," and this was for England Swimming, it was, and they said, "We'd like you to become the lead nutritionist for the England Swimming Talent Development Program," and so I had that contract again for the next maybe 4 years or maybe more actually, and I ended up writing all sorts of stuff, and basically everyone below the Olympic Swimming squad – you know the British Swimming I was influencing and writing and delivering all of the



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nutrition stuff. And at some point moved over Derby University and started writing there nutrition stuff and that's when I ended up getting my contract with Derby County Football Club, which I held for 5 years which ended up being – you know some of the stories I've got from there in terms of behavior change, changing culture and you know people think oh yeah elite athletes oh performance nutrition. I probably spend 3 years literally telling people what alcoholic drink to choose, you know oh should I have you know 20 pints or 20 vodka cokes or vodka oranges and I'm like oh how about vodka diet coke, oh Martin I've dropped a few millimeters of my skin folds you're genius type of thing. For 3 years – probably no I mean not completely but 2 to 3 years it was I'm going to write some factsheets, I'm going to change some culture, I'm going to do some presentations but I was not impacting performance. But over 5 years – I think it was in my third year there, it was the first time I had players coming up to me and saying, “Can I have a meeting with you?” And it was just like this feeling of like – I don't know what the word is, of coming home. Oh, my goodness these people actually want my knowledge now. It just felt amazing, and ended up being able to have a real impact. But again now I sort of have this like fantasy of being this kind of performance nutrition consultant where I sort of go into clubs and say, “This is what you need to do, and if you don't do this you will fail. What you need to do is put a 5 year strategy in place and you need to not stop skipping between one nutritionist here and there, and there needs to be a culture change, and it needs to be top-to-bottom, and you need to have consistency and the players need...” You know in football players are changing all the time, but you know my 5 years there were still a core set of players that again they would pass on from one generation to the next as it were in the academy. But that's why again kind of understand what performance nutrition really is, and then I had some private performance athletes like David Gillick was a – you know he is like a high profile Irish athlete.

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I worked with him, and again just at high levels going to world championships and all these kind of things. So, that's kind of what happened for a long time until – I suppose the next phase which I won't go into, but was getting more into the fitness industry and that came really through spending all of my spare time on forums and social media and Facebook and Twitter.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, lots of interesting stuff there that we could probably do individual podcasts. It's interesting when you particularly talk about the team sport and you have guys at literally an elite level and so many people think that probably what they are doing is so different to what they actually need to be counseled on. I've got to know Daniel Davey who is in Dublin. He is over at Leinster Rugby and he has talked a lot about how it was like you say a multiyear process to get some of like good quality basics of these guys eating properly just so that they know how to put a meal together, and understanding like how to eat enough like multiple years of building a culture, was the exact word, he often uses. So, it was interesting that you have that same experience, but just to kind of get to some of the good stuff that I wanted to talk about because like I say we could spend so much time just on what you have there. So, you have framed thousand A) All the stuff going on for multiple years within elite sport, the consultancy, all these other talks that you're doing. MNU was what, 2016, 2015?

MARTIN MACDONALD:

Yeah.

DANNY LENNON:

Okay, 2016. So, I think you've definitely said this to me personally. I am sure you've probably mentioned at some stage as well, but kind of just to get everything clear because I am interested in getting a bit more detailed on it. I suppose one of the things that you've mentioned had kind of being – I suppose that the birth of MNU or at least the initial idea came the previous year. I think the EPIC Fitness Summit at Birmingham; we can probably get to that in a moment. But previous to that you had mentioned how

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you had kind of being reaching this stage, and correct me if I am wrong on this, where you were, I don't know the right word, maybe becoming slightly disillusioned with some of the stuff in the fitness industry to some degree. Can you maybe talk a bit about that and maybe what was that internal dialog that you were going through your mind at that time when you were not feeling so great about fitness industry?

MARTIN MACDONALD:

Yeah. So, to give a tiny bit of back story obviously at some point in all of this stuff I've been mentioning I started taking on staff and I think as well with regards to that it became – I've never been a planner anyone who knows me now. I even had someone say to me recently – oh in fact two people like, "You don't operate like normal human beings Martin," and I was like, "Huh, I feel like that's an insult." With regards to that I just – my whole career has just been, I love nutrition and I love what I do and I'll just do whatever. I'm never kind of chasing money, so it really didn't matter to me. I always made enough to just live my kind of very simple life. Then it became a case of, right I've got other people to look after now and it put a massive burden on me in terms of – again there are people out there graduating from Masters not being able to make careers. Anyone who is a personal trainer or nutritionist knows it's difficult, so suddenly I had made a career for myself but then where does – you then employ someone, where does their money come from. So, you know if you work yourself up to earning whatever 30,000, 40,000, 50,000 pounds a year you then employ someone and you know they take half of your wage or whatever you pay them. But then it was like oh my goodness this person's livelihood is in my hands. I need to work hard, I need to ensure staff – and it actually took a lot of the enjoyment away from me for a time, because I just felt so much pressure, and that on top of a few things that happened where I was trying to elicit change in the industry, I felt there was a lot of wrongdoing, and

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wrong going on. There was kind of a cascade of events of different people getting at me for different things, so I maybe having hostility online which maybe I personally encouraged which would be fine in and of itself if there was like online debates going on. But then there were also people kind of within my professional life, so people were seeing someone who was very well respected in kind of an elite sports nutrition called me, “Oh, he is just a Twitter expert.” And this is someone whose opinion kind of seemingly matters, and to that I was like, “Oh, that’s harsh,” and then another person in the kind of the academic world reported me for something I basically called out some misinformation that we were doing so they reported me. So, there are lots of little different things. Someone tried to sue me; I can’t remember who that was trying to sue me for again I did absolutely nothing wrong. I think I called their product doggy, because it was completely non-evidence based and you know like complete facade of a company, but they tried to sue me. So, literally all of this negative stuff that happened in maybe a 6 to 12 month period, and at the same time you know nutrition can be a very lonely place and I think a lot of people will probably – oh I know a lot of people resonate whenever I say this that you’re on your own. You are out there. You may be working alone, you’re working a coffee shop or at home and you know you’re self employed, and you maybe sometimes not seeing anyone face-to-face and people start craving it you know other companionship within work. So, there’s a certain element of that loneliness, but also the loneliness for me came like I didn’t feel like there was anyone else who gave enough of a crap about the industry, and no one had integrity. So, certain people I thought had integrity had maybe fallen from grace in the setting where I was like, “Oh, they’re sold out.” Nobody cares to help people. Nobody cares about doing the right thing even if it maybe damages them a bit and I felt like I was getting all of the damage, and therefore giving up all of the praise or financial reward or security, and you know

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there were a few contracts that I turned down. And I was quite critical of the dieticians at the time actually – oh that was another things, I was being very critical of dieticians because I just felt like dietetics is obviously placed on a pedestal with just the dieticians, and there were all these dieticians giving out bad information and very outdated information. And it's funny you fast forward now whatever this may be 4-5 years from where kind of this stuff started happening, and the same dieticians are now you know they've role reversed. They're now either following me on social media or doing my course or you know a supporter of me or they've completely disowned me, but I know for a fact they've changed their ways in these kind of stuff. But again there were like dieticians creating fake accounts on Twitter to troll me and I knew who they were, and you just think of like, oh my goodness I am here with my face, you know people were going you are unprofessional, you're this, you're that and I am like, "I know who this person is. I am not going to be horrible enough to say who it is," and even dietician friends gave me log-ins, I don't know if I should say this on air, but I am going to because I'm a maverick, they gave me log-ins for their private members group and I went in there and there were threads in there about me saying, "Go spam his website, go and do this and do that to him." And these are like registered professionals in a British Dietetics Association like adults. I know I'm like 20 you know late 20s, these are 30, 40, 50 year old men and women. So, I just felt like absolute crap like I am not doing it. I am just talking science, I am just saying that you are by telling people that you know don't eat any fat and avocados contain fat and fat makes you fat like that that was one thing I called out. Fat makes you fat. Fat contains lots of calories and avocados contain fats, and then I was like you realize this is extremely misleading and they're like, "Well, what's wrong about it?" And I was like, "Well." They were like, "Avocados do contain fat." And I was like, "Yeah, but the context you said within the same sentence that fat makes people fat, which isn't

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correct.’ But anyway, so all this stuff happened, and then I just felt like no one is doing right, no one is supporting me, people are getting at me and the way I got from that is I turned down a contract with a very, very big brand and this person is actually friends with me now. So, I can’t say too much, but I turned down a big brand because this brand was very, very fat phobic and their marketing messages. This is huge multi, multi, multi-million pound business and I turned down the contract and this person took it. And that just made me so bitter I’m like, “Oh, my goodness that person has no integrity.” Anyway, so there was some financial issue, you know business went through like a difficult patch because we were trying to do something or other, and all of these things – and it just got on top of me and I pretty much – I think it was January 2015, I pretty much almost closed shop, fired all my staff, you know severed their contracts whatever, sold my house and just left the country. And like it was horrible, it was dire, lots of tears and there were just a few little steps after this period that just like you said the EPIC Fitness Summit was something where I met some people and I did some presentations for Chris Burgess that lift the bar and there were just a few shinning lights of people that I was like, “Oh, my goodness. There are other people with integrity out there; there are other evidence based professionals out there I am not on my own. It’s not me against the world and there are people I can relate to and partner with and you know who can maybe take some of the burden of this thing that I’d taken upon myself to change the industry. And yeah the whole of 2015 was then just this slow process, and even just to give credit to like some of my staff like Sarah Duffield who obviously you met her right back at the beginning Danny if whatever that was 2000...

DANNY LENNON:

2013 I guess was it?

MARTIN MACDONALD:

Yeah, so she was helpful and everyone – it was just brilliant and I kind of realized, “Okay, I’m not on my

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own, and actually there's a need for people to partner up and do good and change the industry for better."

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, it's interesting when you kind of frame it like that of getting to a place of realizing there's a way to do this where I can still hold onto these ethics that I have, and I am not alone in thinking that it can be done this way or I don't have to sell out because now I think you probably get reported to quite a lot from people who either start following your stuff, particularly those who sign-up for MNU is that now they have this thing that they can hold onto that here is a way we can actually start helping our clients, helping people, and it's in a way that they know is ethical and is sensible and is not selling out to some degree. So, it's kind of interesting how that kind of thing has come a full circle, and it's interesting to hear how close you said you kind of worked to just like giving that or packing it in had now had been that close. So, I think the last couple of times you were on we talked about some of the development of MNU and what goes on in there, but one thing I don't think I've ever asked you, and then I am kind of especially now given how many people have gone through the course that I'd be interested to hear is has there been anything that you have heard reported back to you from students that something that MNU is helped them with that you hadn't initially expected?

MARTIN MACDONALD:

Yeah. There's so much that has happened because of MNU that I didn't expect, I mean, MNU itself I didn't expect. So, yeah I think of some specific things, but just on top of that as well there's been an element of – we created the pillars of MNU of Wisdom, Confidence, and Integrity and there was an element in each of those things. So, wisdom was a case of we're going to teach you not only knowledge, but also the practical way to use that knowledge and how pragmatically how to apply things, and give you true wisdom in terms of – you know yourself Danny, with our mentorship weekends that we ran in I suppose were the basis for MNU on a longer scale of running these weekends was

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teaching people to think critically, and teaching people to be able to synthesize new knowledge and you hit the nail on the head off, you don't do a course and think you've learnt everything. And the key thing for MNU was give them the ability to keep learning, and even instill that message into them; you must not stop learning at the end of MNU. You have not got to the end, you have just – you've learned the basics – not even the basics, but you've learned everything you need to start but your journey has only just began. Yeah, it's kind of that thing of we wanted to give people true wisdom, and then wisdom, confidence, and integrity. Integrity it's so nice that people have – you know I've had people messaging me graduates and even current students and just saying, "You know what one of the biggest things I took away from MNU and not to discredit the nutrition information that you taught, but I truly understand what integrity is." And I don't think I'm like some Martin Luther King or I don't know Winston Churchill one of these people, but to actually – you know it really like for me to my core like I find that one of the biggest confidence I could ever be given in terms of like I want to be a good person and to be able to inspire people on the level of integrity of like treating other people well that's been such a nice thing that people have kind of said. And I said, "How have I taught that, what have I done?" They said, "Just every lecture there are just these little insights and snippets on how to use a certain protocol, how to do that with integrity." And you know I probably couldn't tell you them but they must be happening. And then, the final one was confidence. There is the confidence of we've got confidence we can teach you all, but we want to instill confidence in you to do nutrition well, and to serve your clients well in what you do. And I think if you look anywhere on the internet, reviews of MNU, you go and ask any Facebook group of any worth you know what have you got from MNU? And the resounding thing is this thing of confidence and it's – I don't understand really how that is one of the biggest things that's happening, but I



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think it's because we teach people to look wise, and we teach people to synthesize their own knowledge, and we teach them how to learn more. So, they are supremely confident in if I don't know the answer I know how to get it. And yeah, the confidence aspect has just been crazy like on our first intake there was – I actually said this to him on his graduation I said, "Do you remember what you said in the first weeks homework thread, because I remembered it and it stuck with me for a whole year." And he was like, "No I don't what did I say?" And I said, "You said that you have a really bad stammer, stutter like you find difficult to speak to new people," and I said, "I've watched you this whole year do your little 1 minute video I saw you talking to people with confidence, I saw you get asked a question by the presenter at the conference and you answered," and then post graduation he posted a picture, didn't tag me nothing but I saw it. He was going a public speech on nutrition and one thing I understand about stammers and stutters is when you are confident, when you're talking to friends or you're confident about it you're not as – it doesn't hinder you as much, but when you're nervous or in a situation where you don't feel the control it really takes over you. So, he felt that knew his topic and his nutrition so well that he was able to take part in a public nutrition talk. So, there is that and I was like, all right I admit I kind of cried. I was like this flippin unreal. So, it's things like that I just never expected people to be saying like other things. People saying, "I value this qualification." Like we're talking an online industry qualification that I value this more than my M.Sc, I am more proud to hold this certificate than I am my M.Sc or my 3 year degree in nutrition. Everyone says it, "I did my 3 years of nutrition degree and in MNU I learned more in that year than I did all my degree." I never set out to replace degrees with MNU, never, that was never – degrees in my mind previously had their place, you do a degree because you want a B.Sc. I genuinely now if an 18 year old said to me I want to be a nutritionist, I

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want to help you lose weight and have a healthier life and be better at doing that. I want to work for myself; I want to do talks to help people, should I do a 3 year degree or MNU. I would be lying if I said, “Do the degree.” I genuinely, I fully 100% wholeheartedly believe MNU will put someone in a better place to work with people, to help them with their nutrition, and all different things, body composition, eating healthier than what I know exists within B.Sc. If they want to work in a hospital they need to do dietetics that’s a fact, but dietetics isn’t teaching people better than MNU to change their nutrition and do these kinds of things. Because we invest so heavily in the consultation skills now, the soft skills, all of this area, as well as the business stuff which is – I think that’s the other thing that I didn’t set up MNU out to make people necessarily – no I didn’t, business was never supposed to be an element, but that launch where we went from being in one country to you know 25 countries I think within 2 weeks, and now we’re in 47 I think, people start messaging me, “Oh, MNU is going to change my life. I am quitting my job in 12 months,” and that I’m like, “No, no, no don’t quit your job what you’re doing. You’re crazy.” You know I’m trying to encourage people you know just keep your job for a bit until we got you there, but I found this enormous pressure on me to like I need to help people to make a career out of this thing because I never got any help. I was rubbish, but I know loads more about business now. I know loads of people who also know about business, so I can signpost to and that’s why we created the Mentoring Lab, that’s why we have the expert business areas, that’s why I do all my mentoring videos on pricing services, pre-consultation forms, operations, processes all of this stuff because all of these people are you know they want to have a financially safe viable career afterwards.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, I certainly can vouch for seeing how many people report that kind of confidence, and I think

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there are not only the things that you mentioned of what probably drives that. But I think when we think of how much nonsense is out there within nutrition now and how many people try and make things overly complex for the sake of it. I think it's incredibly freeing for someone to come in and for them to – once they start learning, some of the stuff that's within MNU and really understanding the actual fundamental stuff of nutrition that really makes a difference and to say, "Oh, I don't need to spend all this time thinking about these other little details that really don't make much of a difference and I can understand these kind of fundamentals." It gives people that confidence to say, "Look I don't need to be worrying about this nonsense that people tend to be talking about or overhyping." So, I think that's one part of it too. There is a lot in there and we're probably coming up close to time to start wrapping this up, because we could go for another few hours if I wanted to. One last thing to end this on that I'm kind of interested in, as everyone knows you have lots of free time, you're not really that busy. So, what do you typically do outside of work, nutrition writing stuff, is there anything maybe that people are unfamiliar that you have an interest in that you like doing that's something new for people that you're willing to share or not so much right now?

MARTIN MACDONALD:

Yeah. This is one of those things, right? I don't mean this like yourself deprecating, is that the word way, but I don't have much of a life outside of kind of – I work MNU – Mac-Nutrition and nutrition has really just become my life, and I suppose to some extent some people might think, oh that's sad, and I think in some ways maybe that has – it has limited maybe my friendships or relationships as well to some extent, this is going to be deep but I won't go too far into that. But it has taken its toll, and I think Chris Burgess actually did say recently when someone was calling me an overnight success or something like this and he was like, "People can tot up how much money you've

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made and look at all of the fame or praise that you get, but they don't see the kind of the tears, they don't see the toll it takes on your relationships and your family life and these kind of things." So, outside of nutrition – and this goes back literally till day-1, till I started really 2008 and before I've done nothing really more than nutrition. I've read about nutrition, I've helped people with nutrition. If I happen to get invited to a wedding I would talk about nutrition and not one of these annoying hippie nutritionist I would wait until asked, and then you know as well as I do once you tell people what you do it's like, "Oh, what do you think about this," and then the whole discussion comes in. Once people see that you are interested in talking about and people say, "Oh, don't you get bored talking about nutrition?" I'll say, "I literally to this day have never got bored whether I'm in a pub, whether I'm in a night out after an MNU graduation I just talk about nutrition all the time." So, I think to some extent one of the other things that I was going to say in my five things that people don't know about me, but you're stealing all of them Danny, is I did for many, many years volunteer at crèche because I love babies, and again don't 100% know why but when I was kind of 5 years old my mum would help in a crèche at church, in a Sunday school crèche and I would go along and just hold these babies. I just love babies I think they're amazing, I think they're one of the best things in the world, best creations, and so I don't volunteer anymore. But my children have pretty much become – any spare time really, which isn't a lot, I could probably do it a little bit more sleep at times as people always tell me on Instagram, but yeah the other thing I do outside other than a bit of a few bicycles here and there but everyone knows that is yeah just spending time with my children really, and for me that's a case of – more and more I'm trying to like build in at least some aspect of getting to make the most of their baby years, because my daughter Holly is now 3.5 and I realize I spend a lot of time with her fortunately but Arlo my little boy is 18 months. I missed probably the

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first year of his life because of MNU. People are like, “Oh, you’re so lucky MNU has been so good.” I say, “What I kind of missed the first year of my first son’s life,” but anyway – but yeah just thinking I don’t want to miss the next 18 months. So, yeah spending a lot of time with him and both of them as much as I can on top of work, but yeah other than that generally ask me about politics I don’t think I could tell who the Prime Minister is at the minute. I could have a guess, but I am not sure. I don’t know geography, I don’t know current affairs, I don’t know celebrities I just don’t know and people go, “Oh, you’re just a weirdo.” And I say, “Well, I don’t care, I don’t care about politics. I don’t even know if it’s true, but I know loads about nutrition if you want help with that.”

DANNY LENNON:

Right, yeah. As someone who doesn’t have kids I can’t even imagine how busy that’s going to make one little spare time you have, but I guess at least from the outside it kind of seems that catch 22 of on one hand you obviously want to spend time with them, on the other when things are going so well you know there is like this opportunity to be able to provide something for them like you mentioned right at the start of the episode as well, so it’s kind of an interesting contrast, but maybe a discussion for a different time. Martin I think we should probably wrap that up there. This has been extremely insightful. I’ve really enjoyed hearing about all of this stuff and these influences from you, and I am sure people have as well. So, before we go for those of people who are perhaps maybe not following you on Instagram right now or any of your other social media things or anything you want to make them aware of where can they track you down online and getting contact and all that type of stuff?

MARTIN MACDONALD:

At the moment, at this point in time Instagram stories is where I am putting up my absolute best content. I’m actually starting a YouTube channel where I’d be uploading those, so I’ll be doing that more but I’ve become one of these Instagram freaks who just walks around their daily life recording stuff. It’s really nice I

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get hundreds and probably a thousand messages a week now on Instagram in terms of questions and if people want to reach out to me there I do these live Q&As on Facebook, so just look up my @MartinNutrition, just type my name into Google I suppose. I want to encourage people to get there and I've also started an irregular but highly informative I believe newsletter, so I might give you the link if that's okay Danny just take down I call hashtag Mac Mail Newsletter, and it is infrequent but kind of have insightful stuff, new things about the industry as well as a bit of research here and there. Yeah, just general nutrition stuff and it's not over-the-top at all. I'd probably send one every other week at most currently, so it doesn't spam people's inbox, but follow me on Instagram @MartinNutrition and see what you think.

DANNY LENNON:

Perfect. So, as ever all of that stuff will be in the show notes. If you guys to go into click through to all of it and of course as you can probably presume I encourage that you do so, and let's make integrity great again as the phrase should not be. So, Martin I've really enjoyed this. Thank you so much for taking all this time to go and do it. I know how busy you are, so being serious I really do appreciate the time and yeah thanks for coming on and doing it.

MARTIN MACDONALD:

Yeah, thanks so much really enjoyed it.

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