

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Nikki Hiltz

JVN Hey, hey curious people, I'm Jonathan Van Ness, and welcome back to Getting Curious. Bum bum. We interrupt your irregular. Getting curious. Listening with an incredibly exciting episode. It's giving you NPR meets Olympics meets me. And Nicky Hiltz. oh. We just said that I gave it away - Nikki Hiltz as our guest this week Olympian runner. Let's just get all fun with it and do it all out of order. Let's do Nikki's bio really quick. So Nicky Hiltz is a non-binary, professional track and field athlete, and is the first openly non-binary runner to win a USA Track and Field Championship title. The middle distance specialist is an Olympian, six time national champion, world indoor silver medalist, Pan American Games gold medalist and American record holder in the mile. Nikki is also a vocal advocate for equal rights, particularly passionate about making the sport of running more inclusive and fundraising for services that support the young Lgbtqia+ community. In 2020, they founded the pride five K, a race which supports LGBTQia plus nonprofits. Holds. His annual event has raised over \$162,000, and they are currently planning the fifth iteration of the event in 2024. Today, we're asking how can we be better track and field events? Okay. Also, you guys back to our, regularly scheduled, scheduled intro. So basically, as minding my own business a few weeks ago and I, I'm been so excited for the Olympics. As you guys know, I'm obsessed. And so really excited when Nike holds his team reached out about me cutting their hair and talking to them about this, like, on this, like, cool documentary that they're doing. And I was like, and they were like, Will you do it? And then I was like, does a bear shit in the woods? And I jumped at the chance. And so I recently got to cut Nicky's hair last week, two days before they left for the Olympics. And it was, one of the most amazing experience of my life. I literally got to cut their hair, styled it up, gave them a great haircut, and I learned about track and field and what their experience, being an athlete has been like, what their advocacy has been like. But also, I just got to kind of like get 21 plus questions on like how like how does track and field even work? Like, what's a meat like, what's the what's like the, strategy for the 1500 and for like distance running. And it was just beyond. I also got to meet Emma, who I love, their gorgeous partner, who's also a steeplechase athlete, which I also got to learn about the steeplechase. This episode is extra special because when I got this opportunity to do Nicky's haircut for the documentary, I was like, what if I do like a full NPR like live episode of Getting Curious, where I'm like, doing something while I record the episode. So I'm literally giving Nikki a haircut as I'm interviewing them, for this episode of Getting Curious. So it's really kind of fun, cool and different for us. I'm really excited about the concept. If you remember, from years ago, we once did this with the cast of Queer Eye, live on set from, I think, our Austin season back in 2021. So you really have to go back into the archive. But I'm excited to try something new. I hope you guys are excited too. But if it sounds a little different, it sometimes, that's why. But stay with us. Because this is a really fun, engaging episode that is like, we do cover tough, some we cover inclusion in and some things that are, you know, a little bit, but they're heady if you're not trans, are non-binary. But there's just so much fun in good times in this, in this episode. So please take a listen. Thanks for for getting it this far. We love you so much and let's us into this episode of Getting Curious.

NIKKI HILTZ Hello one heading over to me. Oh yeah.

JVN Oh my gosh, I feel like I've known you for years.

NIKKI HILTZ I've been mulling over so long into our. Oh. That's good. So gorgeous.

JVN Gorgeous. Look at us in New York State.

NIKKI HILTZ Oh my gosh over here. Oh my gosh. Hug one more time I was the I can't do you I'm so excited for that ticket I was take a seat okay.

JVN You're literally toppling an Olympian. Yeah. Can you stand it now?

NIKKI HILTZ I can't believe it.

JVN And you're going to win. You, like, literally leave for Paris?

NIKKI HILTZ Wednesday in, like, two days. Yeah. So this is like a very fresh cut. You know.

JVN It literally just gave me chills in my thighs, like, oh, my God, I'm freaking out and going, can I touch your head? Yes. Okay, great. As long as I have to touch you generally. Okay.

NIKKI HILTZ So.

JVN Oh, my God, your hair is also Olympic quality. Look at, not to, like namedrop another, Olympian so early.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, yeah.

JVN No one like my. You're hearing my hero. Yeah. The the first time I got to her hair, I was like, your hair is also. Olympic qualifying. Like, I know like a lot of Olympians like that. Not all Olympians are, like endowed with such gray hair. But like in my experience in real life, they are really.

NIKKI HILTZ Good.

JVN Okay, so you are just giving me like, gorgeous texture. Like, do you like, you know, like, do you even know your hair looks so good?

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN It just like we can just, like, take this part.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN Then just, like, clean up your little tiny baby neck.

NIKKI HILTZ Perfect.

JVN I really doesn't need anything, right? You don't need any. You like? Do you? Like, do you have any feelings about your hair? Do you ever like, hey, like, have you been rocking this hair for a long time? Were you always, like, a short haired person?

NIKKI HILTZ No longer hair used, done long hair, chopped it all off in 2018 and 2018. In short, ever since there's a.

JVN Good midterm election.

NIKKI HILTZ Year. Yes. You know, it was it really was.

JVN So before that you had like longer hair and then was that part of like a gender affirming identity shift?

NIKKI HILTZ It was. Yeah.

JVN So basically were just like mining your business before 2018 and then in. But you're like an athlete or giving runner. You're like, yes. Yeah. I am sorry. I just have to, like, pinch myself one more time.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. But then it's.

JVN Like, I want to change. I want to cut this hair off. Yeah. And then did was that like, what was the chronology of that haircut and then like, realizing that you were non-binary?

NIKKI HILTZ Oh my gosh. Well, I used to always wear my hair in a bun like, and never even, like, sleeping. Like it was.

JVN Like, matters. But just my grandma had this annoying thing where she, like, had to, like, under like visualize. Like where you are in the apartment when she would, like, call you, you know? Yeah. Was it a top banner? A low banner was at an all over the.

NIKKI HILTZ Place, like, no, like me. But yeah, I remember hearing every now and then. Really? Yeah. And then, it was like my roommates at the time were like, let's like, chop your bun off, like. So, we literally just cut it off, and then it was kind of a mess. So then I had to go to, like, a hairdresser to fix it. But yeah, ever since I was like, oh, I actually like this, like, feels good and better and like, yeah, it's been short ever since. I kind of grew it out last year, had a little mullet moment, but.

JVN I love them all. Yeah, but then what happened? You were like, I can't do it anymore.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, I didn't really I couldn't really maintain it. Where I live, it's like.

JVN Where do you live again?

NIKKI HILTZ At Flagstaff.

JVN Arizona. Oh my gosh.

NIKKI HILTZ I think I know.

JVN People who have a bowling alley there.

NIKKI HILTZ Oh my gosh. Yeah.

JVN But whatever. Random story. And also the first time I ever went to Flagstaff, I didn't realize that it is like winter there. Like, because I had lived in living in Tucson and it was like December. And so I just thought it was like hot.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN And I brought, like, shorts and a t shirt. And then it was like, whoa! There was like snow on the ground. And all I had was plops and stuff. I just, like, don't even know that. It's like a forest, a place.

NIKKI HILTZ They're totally.

JVN Okay, so. But do you live in you so do you, like, train it like any you.

NIKKI HILTZ You do you. Yeah. My coach is the new coach.

JVN The are way is around you. Like we love the coach.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah yeah. Great coach.

JVN Yeah. You know we go back I'm like okay. Wow. Coaching Olympics, coaching an Olympian. These are like so many. This is so many things.

NIKKI HILTZ So many things.

JVN Okay, I really I just need to switch positions for one second. Just cause I'm curious because I don't feel like, you know, if you really don't need a haircut, but I want to see what's going. Yeah, I'm getting curious.

NIKKI HILTZ Oh, it's.

JVN A hardcore ADHD moment, but what's a kick mean? You know, like when that commentator is like, you know, like, oh, they have a really strong kick. Yeah. What is that? Is that, like, how much your feet.

NIKKI HILTZ Hit your running or your bank?

JVN Or is it like past your legs. What's the kick mean?

NIKKI HILTZ It's like the acceleration at the end of a race. So it's it's not even like you would think. You know, it's a great question because it doesn't really correlate the words, but.

JVN Yeah. So the kick is literally just your closing. Yes.

NIKKI HILTZ Your closing speed. Yeah.

JVN Is the is the and that's probably more for like middle and long distance right, than like sprints because it's kind of like doing the whole thing.

NIKKI HILTZ You're going all out the whole time. Yeah.

JVN And sprints are everything up to is 200 sprint or 100 the only sprint.

NIKKI HILTZ No, I would say one two and 400.

JVN Or 400 is also a sprint.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah it is. And then a at eight and 15 or middle distance which.

JVN Is you do 15 and.

NIKKI HILTZ Mile. Yeah I do 15. And then sometimes yeah the mile but.

JVN Then is a mile. An Olympic track and field is at its own thing.

NIKKI HILTZ It's its own thing. So Miles, if you're doing it's 1500 meters of the 1500 a mile, if you're doing it in meters is 1609 meters. So they wouldn't do two events that are that similar. But some like meets instead of hosting a 1500, will host a mile instead because it's like a universal or not even it's a US thing that.

JVN Because I think I first discovered you, because you beat all these people's ass and I'm like, yes, that is the first time because like, the headline was like this runner like beat all these other runners. And then I was like, I'm stressed. And so that was when I first discovered so. But Olympic speaking, it's the 1500.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. It's the metric mile now. Yeah.

JVN Have you like, if I were to look up, you're like wiki. And it was like, you know, I like tells people like it's like, you know, competitive career. Yeah. That happens to you on my explore page and other people like come on my explore page and like I have to go to the wiki to be like, what? So yeah. Was there ever a time when you were like, this is so annoying. I mean, I can't help it. So like Kristi Yamaguchi, like, she was like a pairs queen and, like, just singles queen, you know? Yeah, yeah. So were you ever, like, flirting with the 800? Were you ever going to, like, a 400 phase? Were you ever going through, like, a 5000 phase or. Yeah, like I am just like that 1500 person. Yeah. And that's what my truth is.

NIKKI HILTZ I so basically every a lot of tracking people I think you have your main event and then you have one event that you sometimes also do. And so if you're a 1500, you're either 15 five K or you're like 815 and I'm 815. So I.

JVN Am 15. Yeah, I love that.

NIKKI HILTZ But I'm not good enough for me at the Olympics. So that makes sense.

JVN But maybe someday. Or does that like like the 800.

NIKKI HILTZ I think the 15th. Like is there more prestigious event in my opinion. Yeah. But see when it go down to the eight. But now I'm biased but that one 800. No I think most iconic. Yeah the 800 is like it's it's.

JVN It's an 800 that one person just like I fucking like that. They kind of like that was was it was. So were you there. You talk about that. But it was just.

NIKKI HILTZ Like, no, it was really scary. In fact, it was.

JVN I feel like I would shit my pants if I saw that IRL.

NIKKI HILTZ No, I was not in the stadium, but we were watching like on TV right outside of it, and it was before my events even started. And it was so sad because she's the reigning Olympic champion. So like, you know, she everyone was like hoping for her to make it and then obviously get gold in Paris. And so but just like that happens in the our trials is so cutthroat. You have to be top three on the day or you're not going, okay. And she just fell.

JVN Yes. Now are the victim of my ADHD. And I'm looking at your face again in your haircut again. So now that I was just thinking about, like, I think it could be hot to make this front piece, like a little bit shorter. Yeah. Like, have this part be talking to this part a little bit more. Yeah, it's a little bit. Yeah. And I actually think out trials out. It's like it just it get like it gets like heavy you know it's like flap flap I want it to be like it like brisk.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN What if this, like, haircut single handedly like, causes you to, like, break a world record?

NIKKI HILTZ Probably. Oh my gosh.

JVN It's so crazy. It would be a part of it. It's very okay, because I just feel like I. The first time I ever saw you, I just, like, immediately fell in love. And I smash the follow button and I just but it's like been kind of a long time.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN Like, if you like. I followed you for like, years.

NIKKI HILTZ I think I was like a year ago because I ran basically, I set the American.

JVN That feels outrageous that it wasn't that soon ago. I'm ashamed of myself.

NIKKI HILTZ No, you're right, because it was a year ago when I set the American record in the mile.

JVN It was.

NIKKI HILTZ It was like last July. Yeah.

JVN All right. So animated. It was a little bit more than a year.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, yeah.

JVN Just wait. No, it is still July. Yeah, man.

NIKKI HILTZ It's I really don't.

JVN You're so okay. Yeah. There's a little more that we did. Yeah.

NIKKI HILTZ Okay. Cool.

JVN So you're the literal like American record holder. And then and then and so then the 15. Are you all like second fastest? Okay. So then.

NIKKI HILTZ But I could get the America I heard, like in Paris. You could. Right? Yeah.

JVN Oh, yeah. And then keep those legs uncrossed. Uncrossed? Because I need those hips very even for this Olympic haircut. I've never done.

NIKKI HILTZ A fucking haircut for the Olympics. So exciting.

JVN I can do this at the university. Not this. Okay. Okay. Let's just go and see what's happening. Oh, my God, this really is, like, so auspicious. I can't stand being in your first Olympics. Doesn't this feel kind of like it's giving? Like you weren't your whole life to get to this point?

NIKKI HILTZ No, it's pretty emotional. Yeah, it is. Right. Yeah.

JVN Who's all going with you?

NIKKI HILTZ My partner Emma. I know my parents are coming, and my sister and her fiance are coming.

JVN I know, where will they stay? In relationship to the Olympic Village. And will you be staying on those cardboard beds?

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, I'll be staying in the village and then they're in, like some Airbnb is kind of nearby the village, but it's kind of like not the best area.

JVN But Tom Daley just said I saw on his Instagram that the beds in kind of comfy.

NIKKI HILTZ Okay. Yeah. The beds. Like I feel like people are like, oh, pleasantly surprised. So I'm just going to go in with an open mind. I don't think a lot of.

JVN Well, not a lot, but I didn't link a couple episodes of my part on, sleep and like the sleep that is like major. And then also I was just interviewing the sports psychologist who not to name drop me, like, literally, we're just a mobile. So like for years he's major. I love that. And he also works for track and field people, but specifically pole vaulters, which I was like. Interesting little micro pole vaulting was which, like, who knew? No offense, you know.

NIKKI HILTZ But it's like, yeah, no, it's not. It's like.

JVN I just meant to say, like, who.

NIKKI HILTZ Knew? Yeah.

JVN Like, do a track and field person, like, I should have, like, obviously been knowing about how cool pole vaulting was. I mean, I already knew how clear about what. But he was just talking about, like, how, you know, before something like this, he just had to be he calls it, like, the plan. And then you just gotta, like, stick to your fucking plan. And then if you get, like, a diversion on the plan, honey, you just. I'm paraphrasing here. You just got to get, like, back on your back on track. Yes. And then, like. And then he has this, like, this, like, energy pipeline thing where it's like, like if this is your, like, if my arm is like the pipeline, right? Yeah. And then like the end of it is like your cut. It's like Nikki's cut. And in this case we need like Nikki's got to be like all about like the Olympic performance, you know, and there's like, all these, like, holes in the pipeline that can be like energy to bleeders that can, like, prevent it from, like. So it's like like I'm not an athlete, but mine was like, you know, comments like like, you know, being in social comments too much like then I become too much like, you know, people pleaser and then like the energy of like really going to like my aunt, like the things that I want to focus on and gets like depleted from, like, totally. So he's all about like helping to identify the energy stocks and then like incorporating that into your plan. So all that good energy is just like going right into the energy pipeline of Nikki.

NIKKI HILTZ I like that, yeah. Getting up I know I need that.

JVN No no no we're not doing that. I will not let my inner like, helicopter parent come out on me right now, two days before you leave to the Olympics. I won't do it. I'm not, I refuse. I added a little bit because you already like that. We're just, like, full enjoying. And no matter what happens, we are just like, oh yeah. But the point of that story was not to bring up Michelle Kwan again, but she got all this shit in the press in 98. She, like, didn't stay in the Olympic Village. And Tara Lipinski did, you know, because like, Michelle Kwan like, had the nerve to, like, set boundaries for like herself to perform, you know, best and like Derek. Yeah, but do what you need to do, you know. So what? So if you need to go home at 8:00, you go home at 8:00. If there's, like a party or something, you want to go to Henning. That's like, that's all you want to do. But you know what I'm saying? We're looking at how cute you are. Can you stand it? I want to break the fourth wall.

JVN Call me Ari Shapiro. Are you loving this haircut with Nikki Hiltz? Yeah. Me too. We're going to take a quick break, but we'll be right back. So going into this Olympic year, were you like identifying anything that was like making you feel distracted or like not focus? Like what was your plan for preparing?

NIKKI HILTZ No, it's kind of exactly what you said, like the comments section and things like that. I was like, this is like, even though I've heard it all before, it's just like at a certain point I'm like, okay, this does start affecting you. So like, I'm just how can I like, monitor this or like just stay off of like social media, especially during like, yeah, high performance moments like the trials or, you know, heading into the Olympics and like so I feel like this year I really just prioritize my mental health and like started seeing it sports like for the first you did. Yeah. This year it's been about like seven months. So how's it been going? Good. Yeah. And it's just a lot of like, exactly what you were just talking about. Like, energy is energy and your body doesn't know, like, I don't know like it. It treats it all the same. So it's like, well, I want to put all my energy into, like, running the best 5000 I possibly can. Like, why am I wasting it here? You know what I mean? So just like.

JVN That's so interesting like that. The body doesn't know the difference.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, exactly. Yeah. I don't know. I've also been meditating a lot. You have? My mom is like, I don't know. She's, like, very big into meditation. It's always been trying me to do it, like, get me to do it. And I was like, okay, I'm not going to be like worse off if I meditate, like, might as well just like try. So I like have this app that like I just do every day.

JVN Or which.

NIKKI HILTZ One it's called 10% happier.

JVN So yeah. Oh my god I've heard of this one.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, it's really cool. And yeah, I just do a daily one. And.

JVN How long is it?

NIKKI HILTZ I just do a five minute one every day in.

JVN My therapist always does that. Like the science shows that you all doing, like, two minutes. Like the two minutes versus, like 30 minutes. It's like kind of similar. Yeah. Like you can go longer, but I it's like for someone who's easily overwhelmed, like, yeah, you don't have to do it that long.

NIKKI HILTZ No. Exactly.

JVN Which is so cool. Do you find like a certain time of day works better for you?

NIKKI HILTZ Ideally I do it like midday, but I usually forget and then just do it before bed. But it's still like. I feel like it gets me like, you know, calm and relaxed and. Yeah. And then I feel like I've been journaling, I don't know, just like doing I think at this level, like everyone on the

Olympic start line is like, we're all fit and we all have like, great coaches and we've all done the training. You know, it's not no one's doing anything like that. No one else is doing. You know, it's not like gymnastics where like someone else is like head and shoulders, like doing things. People can't do it. You know, we're all pretty similar in our peers. You know, our personal bests are like the same. So it's like, what's going to set you apart is like, I think your mental, you know, and like, how so true. Believe you can do it and you know, your energy and all this stuff we were just talking about seems.

JVN To be the fucking chills for like the fourth time. That is so true though. Yeah. So I love that you got a sports psych. That's so good. Yeah. And you did it with, like, plenty of time. So that's really good.

NIKKI HILTZ Yes.

JVN As well. What? How? I mean, I, I live in Texas, which is kind of random. Yeah. I went there for, like, Queer Eye in 2020, and then my husband and I were just like, this, nature's pretty. And then we stayed. But even in these last four years, like. And I've been a pretty public figure for six years, I guess, like, since 2018, like, you know, queer, I kind of took my career to like a different level. And the level of scrutiny attacks, like vitriol is definitely worse and more pervasive. I feel like just something happened in 2023 where I feel like it really did. Like the pendulum started to swing to this really intense conservative side. Yeah. That I just would imagine that. How have you noticed that or people like, really quick to be like ignorant with you on social and like because people don't even like I have this family friend who's like, not. They're there a person?

NIKKI HILTZ Okay. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

JVN But this one time, my my other family friend. Okay, fine. It's my mom's friend. Okay, fine. It's my mom's fucking friend. Okay? My mom's a good person, but it's it's a lot, okay? It's like complicated. Okay. I've written chapters in my book about this shit, but one of her close friends just is a little bit Fox news watching. Very. You know, and so I remember she said to me in the pool with, like, they were in town for my birthday. And she said to me she was like, well, what do you think about all of these, like trans men wanting to play women's sports? And I was like, if you're going to ask these questions like, I think it's fine to ask these questions at least like understand the terminology that we're using. It's like not trans men that are trying. It's like, yeah, like what you're referring to is like trans women playing women's sports and like, you know, they're they're like, let's like, you know, talk about it. And so then I was like, let's talk about like fairness in sport more generally and like why all these other things are considered okay. But then like when it comes to gender, it's like, yeah, not. And I've come to a place where I'm like. Every time I see it like I like. I'll go so far as like, make a video about it and like, oh my God, I just like, I can't be the one again who like, but it's like, yeah. How do you feel? Like, are you like, do you want to get out there and like make a video of every time you see something or just like, I got to focus because it's like the energy suck.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. I feel like it's I always want to be someone that, like, uses my platform or privilege to, like, stand up for, like, you know, those who aren't even in the room yet when it comes to sports. And so I do get asked a good amount about, yeah, like trans woman

competing and, something that I feel like I struggle with is I never want my identity to be, like, weaponized against people in my community. And a lot of times people will be like, oh, well, Nikki's like a female competing against females. Like, I don't have an issue with that. I'm like, perfect. That should be the standard for all trans people. When I'm like, no, like, I think trans women should be able to compete in the women's category as well. Like just because I'm, you know what I mean? Like someone who's competing in the sex I was assigned at birth like that doesn't mean I speak for all trans people. I want that for the trans woman in this sport. Like. And then a ton of times I get, like, a lot of people think that I'm a trans woman. Like, they'll be like, look at that. I was wondering about. And it just shows like how much trans women get, like, you know, I'm not ever I'm never offended that like, people think that I'm a trans woman or, you know, is assigned male birth, like, whatever it is like, but I'm like. I don't know. So. But it is like, I think more than anything, I just see how terrible it is for like that part of our community and like, it just makes me really sad. And I do want to be a voice for that. But like, I don't have that identity, but like, I do want to support them, you know what I mean?

JVN I got to interview pastors, the many on the podcast earlier this year, and because that's like, I mean, when people say, like, you know, it's just so easy and it's like this and that's where it's like, I mean, intersex people exist and I mean, and like even the intersex people who I know in my life, like a lot of them, didn't even find out that they were intersex until well into their 20s, well into their 30s, like tons of other things. So it's like 2% we know is like, what's on the birth certificate.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN But the reality is, is probably even higher than 2%, which is like literally like more redheads, like, yeah. You know, so it's like this is like and then when people like, oh, this isn't a big issue with like, you know, people thought, I always think this 2% was a huge issue when it was a well tax.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN You know, like two out of every hundred \$0.02 for every dollar. Like that's a shitload of people. Yeah. At the end of the day, you know, I mean, there's like 330 million people in this country that's like. Yeah, I think that's like millions of people.

NIKKI HILTZ That would be, I think like millions of people globally. Yes. You know. Yeah, yeah.

JVN What's 5% of 330 mostly Catholic.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN What is like 2% of 330 million? I bet it's millions.

NIKKI HILTZ It's like.

JVN Oh my gosh. Is it like 800,000 that that's delicious.

NIKKI HILTZ Oh shit. Oh that's a lot of people to worry about that you're so right though. But that's like over half a million people. Yeah. Yeah. Million. Oh look guys.

JVN They may be an Olympian, but I am also a mathematician as well because we are like after the be okay who run fast and calculate in 2021.

NIKKI HILTZ I feel like when I first came out, I was doing a lot.

JVN Of like, was that when you did first come out? Yeah. It's not binary.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. And so and it was a few months before those Olympic trials and I was just doing a lot of like educating because, you know, a lot of yeah, people were just like didn't know what that meant or like were thinking I was a trans man on testosterone or, you know, a trans woman, like, whatever. It was like, I just kind of like, really leaned into advocacy and like, educating a lot of people. And like, I think I did spend a lot of time on that. And then now I feel like something kind of switched my brain. And like last year where I was like, actually, the better I can do at my sport, like that's when I can, like have the platform to. Does that make sense?

JVN Yeah.

NIKKI HILTZ So I don't know. I kind of of like I'm going to focus on my race and doing the best I possibly can and then afterwards in the mix zone or like if I'm ever asked about it, I think that's what I'm going to take. So yeah, I love that. Take the opportunity to like, I don't know. Yeah, stand up for what's right or like share my story or whatever it is like.

JVN Because if you do, I mean, that's like at the end of the day, I mean, I feel like people do really resonate with, I mean, the people who when like, get a lot more platform and they get more airtime.

NIKKI HILTZ So yeah.

JVN That is such a that is I didn't even think of that. That's so.

NIKKI HILTZ True. And it's crazy like that has literally motivated me. Like at the end of a race before, like I'm like, like last year, remember at USA, it's like our national championship. There was someone like who came to the stadium, like with a trans flag, and it was just like, so cool because I feel like I remember that. Yeah, it's so sweet. And I it was like one of the last things I saw right before, you know, the gun went off and it was just like I've always said, like, if I can just help one person, maybe like, see themselves in me or like be some sort of representation, then, like, it'll all be worth it. And like, so it was just such a good reminder to see that right before race because I'm like, oh, no matter what happens, like if I'm first or last, like, I kind of already achieved my goal, you know what I mean? Like, and so then I the last 100m, it was like time to kick. You know, we already know what that means. Yeah. And I was like, I literally saw the trans flag, right. Like, you know, because it was at the finish line and I was like, oh yeah, I want to win this because I want to like, talk about that. And I want to like, you know, give this person like, we were bibs in track and field. So I wanted to give

them like the race bib I was wearing just to say thank you for like, yeah, just like freeing me up like that before the gun went off. And so yeah, it's like crazy like that. That has even motivated me to win a race. Does that make sense? Yes. If I win, I'm a literal fire. Yeah, I'm going to get asked the questions. And I want to talk about this because this is important to like, not just me, but everyone in our community. And yeah.

JVN It's me from the future. It's time for us to take a quick little break. But when we come back, we'll still be talking with Nikki. So don't. Go anywhere.

NIKKI HILTZ Hey. Hey, so.

JVN When it comes to gender identity, like, how do you identify what is what is your view on your non-binary ness?

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, I mean, I identify as non-binary and just somewhere like between man and woman, whatever that means. And like for.

JVN Me, so much.

NIKKI HILTZ Like wave, just like something beyond the two. And, I don't know. I mean, I know that you're friends with a bloke, and I think the way that they talk about it is always resonated with me of like, I think there are as many genders as there are people. Oh my gosh. Yeah, they always say that. And I like.

JVN The idea that there are as that there are as many genders as there are people in the world is. So I just think that it's such a beautiful way to say it. Yeah. I think it's so true. I think within our community there is this some I have like seen some pushback to the term like trans non-binary because then trans people will be like, well, if I'm trans and living as a trans person, well that's like not. But yeah, but if you're non-binary, you still transition from your sex assigned at birth into a space of being non-binary. And I think for me, it's like I've never felt like a man. But I also never felt like a woman. Like I've always just felt like somewhere kind of in-between. And sometimes like you're just much more identified, like towards one or the other. But I've always felt like I exist in this like space in between and outside of which is like for me, with pronouns like why is he she? And then because it's like, I almost feel like it's my way of like removing myself from that conversation. It's like I am everything and nothing and all of it at the same time. Yeah. So how about it? Exactly. But what do you what do you. Is that kind of how you understand it? Like, at least from, like, within the trans community?

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. And I think the having the trans in front of it for me, like when I first came, I was like, I'm trans, non-binary and like, I think it's for me because the definition of trans is someone who like someone whose gender doesn't align with the sex they were assigned at birth. And like, that's what we are. And so, I also feel like, I don't know, with all these articles coming out, like, you know, it's like Trans Runner makes the Olympics and it's like it could say non-binary runner makes the Olympics, right? But they want that shock value or they want. And I think that that's where that word can be like used against us and like or whatever it is like I don't know. And so but I do think it's important to have like, I actually wouldn't want it any other way. Like I want the conversations to be there. And

JVN I mean, when you, I think a lot of trans people, things like they're just sick of the conversation because they're like, what does this really affect? But like gender literally affects almost every area of someone's life, whether it's athletics, whether it's like government, whether it's like, I mean, research and medical, like I'm always interviewing people like different academics and like, well, men do this and women do that, like, like in terms of, like study, like like there's a culture like gender and gender expression has so much to do with everything. And it's so ingrained in ways that we don't even necessarily realize. And so but I think because it's so big and it's so powerful, like the binary is so big and powerful. Yeah, sometimes it's like. It's almost like you do need, like, people doing more of this work because people think that they don't need to do this work because it doesn't affect them. But it does.

NIKKI HILTZ It affects us all.

JVN Yeah. Yeah, it affects everyone but people.

NIKKI HILTZ Just when you think about gender identity versus sexuality, like I knew I knew my gender before I knew who I was attracted to, you know.

JVN Oh, that's interesting.

NIKKI HILTZ Because think about like even like I think I was like four years old when I was like, oh, I'm not like, I'm not like other girls, you know?

JVN And I have the same ex.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. Yeah. So I just like, knew forever that I was just, like different. And I didn't have literally the words or like language to articulate that probably until 2020. Like when I literally downloaded TikTok and I was like, oh, I just saw, like, yeah, I heard the term non-binary for the first time and like, saw creators or people like explaining it and like, even trans men, like I saw myself in that. And I was like, oh, like, this is what I am. And so yeah, but I think kind of to go back a little bit like, I feel like I was for when I knew, like, I don't know, if you look at pictures of me growing up like I had my hair short, I wore baseball caps, like I was playing out my gender. Even that, like.

JVN I could not take, like a pillowcase off my head with, like, I had to be in in front of it. And like, I got, like, disbarred from, like, being able to wear my cousin's dress up clothes or like, any cute, like, girl like dress up gowns, which were very cute. And I only had to do it in secret. But yes, that's so true. I just resonate with that. So yeah.

NIKKI HILTZ So I came out in like 2016 about my sexuality, because I was just, you know, dating a woman. So I was like, I don't know, I wanted to. Like our relationship. Just like, you know, all my friends were sharing their straight relationship. And so, yeah, I was like, I'm pretty public about it. And like, I feel like the response I got was just so much encouragement. And it was like it was really beautiful. I mean, like and it really allowed me to be like, I was so scared to come out, you know? But it was like, oh, actually, like, I'm fine and I'm loved and supported and seen and like, so then like what, five years later in 2021, I was kind of like, you know, realize this, I don't I started asking people in my life to use they, them

pronouns for me, but then I realized, like, okay, I'm kind of like in my sport, if I want to get affirmed, I kind of have to publicly come out. Like in order for people to know, to use lay them pronouns. And so I was like, well, I think it could be really similar to 2016, right? Like, I'll come out and then I'll feel like so amazing. And then I'll like I was like, oh my God, the trials are coming up. Like, this is actually going to be amazing. Like this weight is going to be lifted. And then I came out and I was like, oh, there's like people weren't ready for this. Like there was just a lot of like, did you feel ready? Josh yeah, totally.

JVN Just like with like foxy news sorts of things or more like just like in the comments.

NIKKI HILTZ Oh, I think just more on the comments and like, I don't know, there was no one else out. Like I was the first in my sports. There was no like blueprint for it. Or like people would just like, like in my coming out post, I wrote like kind of literally just trying to explain how I felt like I was like, sometimes I wake up like just a guy being a dude. Sometimes I wake up like a powerful queen, you know, like giving some sort of context. And that's good language. Yeah. And then people just like, attach to that, and they were like, well, why do you only race the woman? And then like, that's convenient. Then on race day you feel like a woman, like just like, okay. Like, just being like just little things like that. And then, people would just not. I think it takes a certain amount of time to get used to using the name they them pronouns. And like, I have so much empathy and grace for that because I even took me a while to, like, not misgender myself, you know? But like, I just feel like that was hard because I came out as like, hey, can you guys, like, use them to refer to me? And then people were like, really struggling to do so. So it was like, oh, this actually like hurts more now that I've asked. Yeah. I mean, so yeah, I was just like not expecting, I guess, to feel that like misunderstood. And that's just like not a fun thing. I think that's my least favorite feeling in the world. Yeah. You know.

JVN How has it felt since then?

NIKKI HILTZ Oh my gosh. I mean, the amount of, like, work that I've done on myself. And then not only that, like people in the track and field world, like doing the work to like, make space for me has been like night and day. Like it's just so I just I'm so much more confident because now it's like now the new norm is like, get it right, you know, and like NBC, for example, the, you know, Olympics.

JVN They do such a good job.

NIKKI HILTZ Right? Such a good job. And like now that's the like standard for all broadcasters is like yeah I mean that's their job is to like know how to pronounce people's names, know how to pronounce like where they came from or like. And then, yeah, if some know people's pronouns, that's like it's such a basic thing that they're like, it's just really cool to see that growth of like, no, we get it right. And it's not weird, you know? And so it just things like that, like, I don't know, I'm really I'm good friends with like one of our biggest, like, media outlets. So this man, I guess just like my friends who run in, it's actually become, like, pretty big and like, they're like, I don't know, the leading media brand for track and field. And they like, they always get my pronouns right and they always, like, kind of go out of their way to use really inclusive language. And talking about, oh, I love that. Yeah. The 1500 and like, yeah. So just is kind of like the people that have power have really like risen and been like,

we're going to make space for Nike because like this is important and it's the right thing to do. And that just means a lot to me. And then it allows me to just I'm, I like I hate confrontation, I'm like very much like it's really hard for me to correct people, like when they get my pronouns right, and it's just like an awkward or windy day or. Yeah, exactly. And so it was like right after the semifinal, you know, I just won one of my heat, and I was just like feeling really confident about the final. And I was like, I really think I'm gonna make the Olympic team, you know, like, yeah, I was just like, And I'm in the mix zone, and everyone's like, asking me questions. And then someone like mis genders me. And it was just a reporter, like, you know, accidentally, whatever. And I was like, oh, it's actually Bay. And then I just like, continued, like answering the question. And it was the first time I've ever like. Did someone and it was like it just meant I was like when I was doing it, I was like, oh my God, I can't believe I'm doing this or now. And then afterwards, you know, I'm leaving the mix down and the the guy comes up and he's like, hey, like, thanks for correcting me. Like, I'm so sorry. I just like, totally forgot.

JVN I was curious about how he took it.

NIKKI HILTZ So it's so well and I, I feel like I was so afraid that if I were to do it, I'd be like, hate it. Or like it's just an awkward thing to do. And so now it's like, oh, maybe I can do it more. And like, I don't know. So I do feel like confident now to like, not only take up space but like correct people and be like, this is like, okay, you know.

JVN Yes. What about your uniform? Do you like it? This here is a Q.

NIKKI HILTZ The USA one. Yeah. It kind of looks purple.

JVN Oh how fun.

NIKKI HILTZ That's right.

JVN Three of us, right? Yes.

NIKKI HILTZ It's true because it's it's really subtle like influencer. It's like red white and blue stripe are kind of far away. It's like purple because they're just little blended together. But I think it's I think it's cool.

JVN You're giving me a hashtag influencer. Nick. You with these purple bucking uniform?

NIKKI HILTZ Non-binary, you know? Yes.

JVN Come on. I'm I, I hope I didn't see this up for the Olympics. They're going to be so mad. There are these fucking non-binary Olympic uniforms. There's nothing secret anymore. Can't leave these queers alone for two seconds without them taking the red in the blue and making fucking purple that fucking color wheel. Damn it. Tell me if I'm right, okay? It's the heat. And then you make out of the heats. It's the semifinal. Yeah. And then at the semifinals. The final.

NIKKI HILTZ Exactly.

JVN And there's no 1500 relay.

NIKKI HILTZ No.

JVN But wouldn't it be fun if there was like, four, 1500 runners of America and you guys got to do a relay?

NIKKI HILTZ It'd be so fun.

JVN Why don't we do a 1500 meter relay?

NIKKI HILTZ They do it like the World Relays or like the Penn Relays sometimes, but yeah, not internationally, I think I would love it. There's this thing called a distance medley relay, where the first leg is a 1200, the second legs of 400, the third legs and eight, and then the last legs a mile. And they do that indoors all the time. But no, I would love a distance relay.

JVN What's the difference between indoor running and outdoor running?

NIKKI HILTZ It's inside and it's on a 200 meter bank track. And then outdoors is a foreign to track. So it's a shorter track.

JVN Oh it is, yeah.

NIKKI HILTZ But they still do.

JVN 100m on it.

NIKKI HILTZ No, they do a 60.

JVN Oh that's why I like Christian Coleman's like so bad in that.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. yeah. Oh and it's a bank.

JVN So it's like on, like.

NIKKI HILTZ The 60 is flat, but but every like every turn is banked.

JVN Yeah. Where is it? The Olympics. It's just like a big flat.

NIKKI HILTZ Big flat outdoor track. Yeah. Oh. Yeah. And indoor.

JVN One.

NIKKI HILTZ You that it's a the winter track. So it's running like, you know, January through March right. No season and then outdoor season. It's like April through August. Yeah.

JVN Yes. Okay. So then let's just talk a little bit about like track and field like 101 for like people who need to understand it better I guess. So it normal is okay actually.

NIKKI HILTZ Great guys.

JVN Okay. So like track and field typically happens on like the second half of the Olympics. But did you mean how it la it's going to be the first happens I mean going to be the second half.

NIKKI HILTZ I did not know.

JVN I want to talk I love the river first okay. Yeah. They're never going to make that team. And so like not until you put more pressure on you when you're like fuck or I'm going to my first Olympics now you're like trying to go.

NIKKI HILTZ To a soccer, but.

JVN It's like an American, like how great and how fun. And the guys be like, it's.

NIKKI HILTZ Such a main character. He has like a home Olympian. Yes.

JVN Home alone, but home Olympics. But but yeah. So that's interesting. So. But how long does the track meet take like in the Olympics.

NIKKI HILTZ So it's like a ten day meet. So it's but not every event is every day. It's like because there's like we talked about the rounds of my events. They'll be rounds of every event, you know, except not for.

JVN The marathon.

NIKKI HILTZ Or not for the marathon hour.

JVN Ten K and does marathon even count? Is it like track and field or is that like its own thing?

NIKKI HILTZ Technically it's like under the track and field umbrella, but it's very summer. It's like it's on the very last day of the Olympics, I think, actually. And yeah, it's obviously not run on the track concern on the roads, but.

JVN Is there enough money in the world to make you become a marathon runner.

NIKKI HILTZ You know, like and do you want to know why?

JVN Because it's just like the worst fucking thing you could ever want to do to yourself.

NIKKI HILTZ No, because my senior superlative in high school, this girl wanted to win most athletic. And she worked for yearbook. So she made a separate category in order to, like, dilute the votes for me. And she made the category most likely to run a marathon. So

everyone voted for me for that instead of most athletics. And because of that, I will never run a marathon. I fucking.

JVN Hate her. Yeah, can I tell you that I also had a fucking senior superlative fucking meltdown? But you. No, it's true my freshman year because we did it and like in our ninth grade year, right? And I won more school spirit because I was a cheerleader. Right?

NIKKI HILTZ Right.

JVN This fucking girl, she wanted to win most musical.

NIKKI HILTZ Okay.

JVN Yeah. So she also worked to. The yearbook and she didn't win. So she made such a big stink about the girl who did win that her mom was like, well, my daughter plays nine instruments and the girl who one only plays two is to like we. This is fucking unfair. Like it's a right fucking vote. So then they're like, you know what? No senior superlatives or anybody. So after the photo shoot and after midnight in the photo shoot, we didn't even get to go in the fucking year. These cancel the whole thing because of Ashley Garlic's fucking mother. And I hope you're happy. Okay? I hope you're happy because that was 2001 and I'm still not over it. They robbed me of my school spirit with garlic.

NIKKI HILTZ That's terrible. How much power did that mom?

JVN Miss? Miss Garland. I hope that this makes the final documentary. I hope this makes the final because. Fuck her.

NIKKI HILTZ No, I literally was like, woman, I'm a Scorpio. So when someone does me dirty, I'm like, no, you never forgetting. So I was never on American soil.

JVN I was blowing at the wrong way. So gravity didn't blow us in our faces. It's all these tiny little hairs. I was so upset, just reliving that ninth grade trauma that I.

NIKKI HILTZ Wasn't really.

JVN Ready for it. Okay.

NIKKI HILTZ I'm sorry. I know.

JVN It's okay. It's okay, it's okay, it's okay, it's okay. So what's like the strategy for, like, the 1500? Like, is it about, like, kind of staying with the group until you see your moment or is it about or is it different every race?

NIKKI HILTZ It's kind of different every race. But it's the idea is that, you cross the line first, so you have to figure out how to do that based on who you're racing.

JVN And so every single person has like a different racing style who you're up against. So does your team have to do like oppo research?

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, I'm pretty much. But I know a lot of these athletes like I've.

JVN Been you've been raising these fucking people.

NIKKI HILTZ Exactly. And people are predictable. Like people are going to run to their strength. And so they're going to like at the Olympics, they're going to run what best suits them. And I know everyone's strategy because I know.

JVN Do you like your competitors or some of them?

NIKKI HILTZ Oh, I love that. Oh no no they're all.

JVN Wouldn't that be easier if they were just like, I.

NIKKI HILTZ Was like, fuck you of no. And specifically our event is like labeled as like.

JVN The nice person.

NIKKI HILTZ Event. Yeah. Oh, sure. Damn it. Hurry up. Julia, tell me the truth.

JVN Is there like, there has to be one on, like, the whole fucking international circuit? You're like, you fucking asshole. Like you fucking try to fucking trick my fucking heel. I got my eyes on you. I'm not going to fucking be in the lane next to you. Yeah? Who is your fucking rival?

NIKKI HILTZ Okay, okay. Okay. Okay.

JVN Yeah. Who is like the syllabus versus Nova? The syllabus here's just Nova.

NIKKI HILTZ Okay. In the. Honestly, this year at the Olympic, like the Olympic final, there will not be a single person that's like a bad like this year, this event so wholesome and like I can't there's actually not one. But there are some people who like what if there's an American who basically. So I have the I don't have the American mark in the 1500. I'm half a second away from it. And the person who does have the American record is like kind of controversial. And she's been banned for four years and she's coming back next year.

JVN Why? Because of, performance enhancing drugs. Yeah. Get the fuck.

NIKKI HILTZ Out. Yeah, but it was this whole thing where like.

JVN And she's transphobic on top of that.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. She's home. I think she's been heard to be home about like the bar. Yeah. Well so it's not, it's kind of.

JVN Yeah. That was my transphobic of homophobic probably.

NIKKI HILTZ Well it's, it sounds like the calls coming from inside the house.

JVN Like I said it when that.

NIKKI HILTZ Happened she realized, oh no.

JVN I get it. I don't because I was like, but I have never heard of this.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. My biggest rival on the yeah in the US is probably Leah Saint. She's very, very good. And we have it's so fun when we race because we're, we have very opposite racing styles. Like she likes to go to the front and push the pace. And I just like to sit back. And then in the last 100, like, take the win.

JVN Oh my God. Is that like you're that's like your signature thing. Oh my God, that's hot.

NIKKI HILTZ And so it's fun when we race because like, I just have to hold. Like, she's going to try to make it as fast as possible to run away from me, and I just have to hold on. But I really respect her as, like, a fighter, and she's extremely good. And. Yeah, I think, honestly, when you.

JVN So have you guys building up in the finals, well, the thing for you with her to be like, you just need to make sure you, like, keep your eyes on her, and she doesn't get too far away.

NIKKI HILTZ Exactly. Yeah, yeah. But she'll it'll benefit her because a lot of people have her similar style. So like, she'll have multiple at the trials. Basically she was the only one that likes it fast. So she kind of had to run up front by herself, which is hard to do. Like you want people to follow.

JVN And so does that give you like draft or.

NIKKI HILTZ Something like that? Yeah it.

JVN Does.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. It's hard to lead.

JVN Because that's literally a thing.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. And you break the wins you like, I don't know. I mean, some people like it though, because you're out of trouble, like, you don't you're not ever going to get caught up in a fall or anything like that. So.

JVN Because how are falls, like really, pervasive at the 1500? In the 1500.

NIKKI HILTZ I would say more so in the eight, but it definitely could happen in the 15 because there's a lot of tactics and moving around, going on. And I don't know if you like, I love the 1500. And if you know what's going on, like the last lap of 15. It's like the most exciting thing in the world to watch and you know.

JVN How long is that? 1500. Like, how long does it take?

NIKKI HILTZ A little under four minutes usually. Like for flat is like a big barrier that people try to, yeah, try to if you can.

JVN Tour is a big deal.

NIKKI HILTZ Yes, it's a big deal. Like you're a good 15 runner. And so yeah, it depends on if the race is like slow or fast, but usually around just over per minute.

JVN Tombstone. What's the world record for the 1503 49?

NIKKI HILTZ Wow.

JVN That's like ten whole seconds below four.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, yeah.

JVN When was that?

NIKKI HILTZ About two weeks ago. Oh, shit. It was. Yeah. Faith Kipyegon is like, she's Kenyan and she's the best 15 round in the world. And.

JVN So, she does she have like, the most pressure do you think for because people just seems like she's definitely going to be like she's like the favorite for gold.

NIKKI HILTZ She won the 2016 Olympics and 2021. So this will be if she wins again. It'll be the first time ever that, a woman in the 1500 has won three Olympics. Oh, she's the heavy favorite for sure.

JVN Okay, okay, so then what are people saying? Wait, is it like, is it triggering for the like, sports like to talk about like what people are saying like.

NIKKI HILTZ Know about.

JVN Like about like like what do you like, what are the pundits saying?

NIKKI HILTZ After the trials, it was very running. 355 it was like, whoa, an American could medal like that because we are in 355 and I.

JVN Oh my God, you ran fucking 355.

NIKKI HILTZ It was like then the conversation was like, Holy shit. Like we could actually get a medal. And specifically like me or Ellie or honestly, I'm only today, like all three of us. And so then. But then a week later, all these other people ran super fast. So it's still up in that, like, I don't know, I think I could get them at all if I, you know, play my cards right. And if I don't know, I have I'm feeling good.

JVN But do you just like, open up a can of beer bars and like go like fucking 48 accidentally and just, like, literally drop like seconds, like off your fucking time, just like, eat it hose.

NIKKI HILTZ Well that's it. Yeah. I think championship race is fucking.

JVN I think the reason.

NIKKI HILTZ Dust.

JVN Why not just my wording, not anyone else is. I know they're all really nice and stuff. I think for the sport psychology I would respond the best to like anger and rage, like veer. Yeah. Like, yeah, that's.

NIKKI HILTZ What I am. I kind of.

JVN Does. And I would imagine like training and track and field. It's like is is like six hours a day or like eight hours a day isn't like an isolating experience.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. It's not quite that many hours a day, but it's it's a lot. It's. And so, I have training partners, but not in my events specifically. And, yeah, it's just been like, I think a hard past six months because there's been so much pressure on the Olympics and then the trials and all that. But no, it's super isolating. And like, Flagstaff is a great town, but it's very it's up a high elevation. And so it's like it's really hard. Like running is really hard to run at 7000ft. And so then you're exhausted all the time. And so socializing, it's like I'm just too tired to go like socialize because I'm literally training for the Olympics, you know? And so then you can definitely be like very on your own a lot. Yeah. I mean.

JVN How do you reach out and like, get community time when you need to, like, be around people?

NIKKI HILTZ I feel like I really don't like it's just kind of me and I a lot of the time. And. Yeah, we're just kind of in it together. And, I mean, I do love traveling, and that is such a big part of my job. Like, you know, going, I feel like it's like when I go to meet. So that's when I socialize. And that's why I like, you know, honestly, my competitors are like become my friends because we're like they really understand the like kind of journey we're all on. That's healthy. Yeah.

JVN Until you beat I'm sorry I freaked out I mean too so like sprinters distance running is like yeah, well that's kind of just like some. So there's 100, 204 hundred and 815 hundred, 5010. No.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, yeah. You just throw out the hurdles. So there's the 100 hurdles, 400 hurdles and three K steeplechase okay.

JVN The steeplechase. I don't fucking understand steeple.

NIKKI HILTZ Oh am I so steeplechase you do. Is that how you guys met? Yeah.

JVN Through track and.

NIKKI HILTZ Field. Yeah. That's so cute now. Yeah.

JVN So what does the steeplechase do again?

NIKKI HILTZ So you run over barriers. So it's like a hurdle every.

JVN Into the into, like a.

NIKKI HILTZ Wall. And then there's a water jump once a lot. Yeah. So there's five and a water jump. So there's like six times you're hurdling.

JVN So how many. So there's 3000m steeplechase.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. Yeah. That's the only stable.

JVN Oh there's only 3000m.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. And then there's 400 hurdles and then 100 hurdles.

JVN And is there a 110 to.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. The men. It's one time the woman. It's one time.

JVN Okay. So steeplechase okay. So 3000 and it's. Six laps. And then once a lap, you're doing a water jump. What's the steeple?

NIKKI HILTZ All right. It's the. That's the name of the, like, hurdle you go over. It's like the sea. Yeah. It's honestly like, I don't know where the name comes from. Maybe it's, like, similar to horse racing or, like, I don't know, but it's it's definitely the most unique event. And, I like it because it's a distance event.

JVN And then there's pole vaulting, high jump, long jump, triple jump, discus hammer throw. No. Yeah. Discus. Hammer throw.

NIKKI HILTZ Javelin shot. Pivot. Shot putt. Okay, so there's four jumps four throws. And then. How they talk the line.

JVN Yes, is five of them. And then the decathlon is ten of them.

NIKKI HILTZ Have to tap on a six.

JVN Oh, you're so right about.

NIKKI HILTZ The caplan's time.

JVN Because it's not a.

NIKKI HILTZ Or is it seven.

JVN What's what's five. What's the.

NIKKI HILTZ Pentagon. Yeah.

JVN It's not a Pentagon but there is.

NIKKI HILTZ A tap indoors. Is that someone got one.

JVN Oh Nike I will literally learn so much about track and field from you today. One thing I learned from the sports psychologist that I thought was really important is just staying in touch with, like, who you are as a person outside of your sport and outside of your accomplishments, which is really important. Yeah. And I think, you know, one thing that I've already learned about you is that you're someone who is really about integrity, about like using what you have to do the best, what that would do to your ability, which is really brave and courageous because a lot of people don't. Right. You know, like a lot of people are very just like, how can I accomplish something for myself? And so I just want you to remember, like, the things that got you here, like, applied you as a track and field star and also as a person. Right. Like, you are so lovable and so, like worth celebration outside of your sport just as much as you are inside of it. So I don't want you to forget that and connect with your amazing, gorgeous fucking person. I'm just so honored that I got to meet. Is there anything about track and field or about your journey that we haven't talked about that we need to talk about? Like everything. I feel like there's nothing I can ever talk to you for like an hour that I. There's so many things I could talk to you about.

NIKKI HILTZ I don't know. I mean. Feels like we really went everywhere. We did. Right.

JVN Where do you. Well, actually, I have one more question I remembered. What would you be doing if you weren't a track and field Nunley?

NIKKI HILTZ I don't know. I mean, I think something in the like, I would always like, I love exercising and just, like, endurance sports specifically, I love, like, what.

JVN Is it about them?

NIKKI HILTZ I don't know, I just love, like, finding my comfort zone and then pushing past it and like, just proving over and over myself that, like, you can always get out a little bit more outside your comfort zone. So I think I would always be like an athlete, but like.

JVN Maybe I am a, maybe an artistic swimmer. Sure. Endurance.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN You got to hold your breath for so fucking long. That's what I thought so much. When you're training, though, like, just speaking of, like, making comfortable with, like, do your legs

not just, like, hurt like a motherfucker. Like, how do you like, how do you get comfortable with such physical discomfort? Or is it not that uncomfortable?

NIKKI HILTZ No. It's always pretty uncomfortable. But, like, you get used to it. The more you do anything, the better you are at it. And, I don't know, we always say this in training. Like, it doesn't get harder. You just get better. So, like, the paces I was running maybe five years ago are slower than they are now, but it was just as hard as the times like at the time, because I wasn't, like, as fit, if that makes sense.

JVN They're like, it's so. It's not like you're like, oh God, my hamstrings feel mean anything right now. Like there's definitely a burn.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, but like some it's like life. Like some days you feel good, some days you feel bad. So. Yeah. Like, right now I'm pretty fit. Like I'm. I ran the fastest time I ever have, so it's like, what.

JVN Was that like when you finished? Like, are you aware of how fast you're going in the race?

NIKKI HILTZ Not in a championship race. So race like that, when it's all about being top three, make the Olympics like you're only focused on competing and like, you know, trying to win. If you can't win and try to be second, you know, like things like that. So I actually you can obviously glance at the clock and know your splits are. But like I tried to not do that because I was like, this is just about racing. Like time doesn't matter.

JVN When you look at the camera like in the beginning when you can like look at the can you see the jumbotron? And I'll be like that, bitches. Right fucking there like, fucking get off my fucking no.

NIKKI HILTZ It's super helpful. Yeah. To to know like okay I'm in third right now but I don't I have no idea who's behind me. I don't know how close they are. I definitely you can glance up on that and it's really helpful. Yeah.

JVN Have you been to worlds.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN You have right.

NIKKI HILTZ I've been to two world championships, but never know.

JVN What was that, 23.

NIKKI HILTZ And.

JVN 20. 1919. Yeah. Because in 20 was canceled. And then 21 was like.

NIKKI HILTZ Was the Olympics.

JVN So they did they like and then 22 they didn't do it then.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah. No they didn't. So they whatever the 2021 basically got all messed up because of Covid. It got pushed back. So the 2021 World Championships turned into the 2022 World Championships. So actually won the World Championships in 2022 when there wasn't ever supposed to be, but because. Oh yeah.

JVN So so okay. And then what what is your goal as your goal heading into Paris? Like is the goal like what is the goal?

NIKKI HILTZ Oh my gosh. I just want to do like. As best as I possibly can. And like, I think I try not to be like outcome oriented, you know?

JVN Good.

NIKKI HILTZ I'm either, like, I know I do the best when, like, it's just process focused in, like, being in the moment and, like, racing the bodies around me. But obviously I think a medal is, like, is fucking cool. Really cool. Yeah. So yeah, people will be in the final again. 12.

JVN Okay. And then also but I didn't I cut you off for that 15,000 time in the last two hours. So. But you try not to be outcome. But it's like a medal would be fierce.

NIKKI HILTZ But it's not going to be my it's sure I can say that it's my goal, but it's not going to be what I think about. And it's that makes sense in the video.

JVN Yeah, I don't think art because like, isn't it true? Like once you qualify for the Olympics, you're like an Olympian. Yeah. You're like, yeah. It's I mean like you don't have like ghost like like it, like whatever. It's very NBC gymnastics late 90s which doesn't prioritize like athletes mental health. I don't even care about like, you're fucking Olympian. You know what I'm saying?

NIKKI HILTZ Right, right.

JVN May the Olympics, which is like, yeah, that is like a goal and an outcome in and of itself.

NIKKI HILTZ Totally. And now I was actually just met with my coach the other week, and he was like, I in where I'm at in my career, I've essentially done everything else, like going into the trials I had done everything I was, I had won a national title. I've set American records. I have a I've a medal from World Indoor. So it was kind of like he was like, I could tell there was so much pressure on you because it was like, people are like, oh, I forgot, Nikki's not an Olympian, do you know what I mean? Because I've had like within the past few years, a lot of success. So it was like so much pressure because this is like the one box I hadn't ticked yet. And so, obviously. So I think that's why one of the first emotions I felt when I crossed the finish line, like, was just relieved because it was like, thank God. Like, you know, now I can like, breathe. Like I have an Olympian forever. No one can take that away. But yeah, it's it's definitely like like I've made two world championships before this. This is my will be my third

time competing on the world stage. But it's just the first time, like the rest of the world is watching, you know?

JVN You know what? My body and my therapist says that I need to listen to my body when I feel my body wanting to do something.

NIKKI HILTZ What do you want to do?

JVN I'm going to do a chant for you. Ready to go from cheerleading in high school? Ready? Okay. You don't have to do it. I'm just doing it for you. Ready? This is the one I want you to remember. When you're going to beat these people. Ready? Be eager. Yes, Evie. Be aggressive. Nikki. Be aggressive. Let's go. Nikki. I think that is what my internal psychology is saying.

NIKKI HILTZ Aggressive?

JVN Yeah, yeah. We're never going. You have. At least we are. No. Six. No. Seven on that for. No. We got to stay in striking distance. These fucking people. Okay.

NIKKI HILTZ Perfect.

JVN I feel it coming. Be aggressive. What's that one thing? I feel a calm and I feel calm I.

NIKKI HILTZ Don't yeah, yeah.

JVN Yeah I do I feel like coming.

NIKKI HILTZ That's okay.

JVN Really deal. I think you're going to fucking like slams fucking people.

NIKKI HILTZ I think I just my god yeah. No.

JVN But I do think it's my, my, my spidey senses from an uneducated person who's not even like, not an expert in telling an Olympian what I think.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN I think that you're going to I think it could be a world record. I think you might add a wow. Or at least an American.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JVN That's my.

NIKKI HILTZ Do you marry.

JVN The other person?

NIKKI HILTZ The American record is 354.99.

JVN This is just like. So when you're sites you just like 355. Yeah. This is like literally like within your literal. Yeah. Fucking non-binary eyes. Like it's like right there.

NIKKI HILTZ Yeah.

JVN I mean, look at this.

NIKKI HILTZ I mean, the best part too is I don't have, like, I'm, there's no how do I say this? Like, I'm, I'm definitely like being overlooked. I'm the underdog. There's no pressure. Yeah. No I think I mean though right. But I think that is like best case scenario as well. Like I've nothing to lose, you know what I mean?

JVN Because yeah. Yeah, yeah. No. But I still feel like it's like full slate fresh.

NIKKI HILTZ Like you play for sure.

JVN Okay. Like as much. Oh my God. So did we learn a thing? A yes, we did. I totally learn how to be a better track and field athlete. But I also just learned so much about track and field and how it works, which I thought was so fun. I love that I learned that like the indoor championships are on like that banked like the banked like slanted shorter track. And I also think it's really interesting how like a mile, the mile isn't an Olympic race, which I feel like it should be, like the mile is. See. And I wish that it was, also, cutting here while doing an episode of a podcast was definitely harder than I ever saw it. And also a big shout out to our production team, Chris and Nate for making this sound great. Now I'm curious about, now I'm curious about how's Paris going to bounce back after the Olympics. I'm also really excited for the Paralympics. I'm excited to see how that goes. And I'm so excited for all of those athletes. And also really curious about the steeplechase. Like, I really don't understand it. Still, I want to understand it more. I'm also curious about more fairness in sport with just like the Chinese doping scandal. Not that that has anything to do with this, but. Just curious about that Chinese swimming doping scandal, just thinking about Olympic things. And I'm also really excited for 2026 in Italy. And I also Salt Lake City just got 2034, I think for Salt Lake. Yeah, 2034 I think for Salt Lake is going back there. Michelle got her bronze. But anyway, and Nikki was just such an incredible guest, and I hope you, she's such incredible guest. I hope you love this episode. Okay. See you next time. Love you. Bye.

You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise in the episode description and follow us on Instagram @CuriousWithJVN You can catch us here every Wednesday and make sure to tune in every Monday for episodes of Pretty Curious which we love. It's our pod pass on all things beauty. Get into it. Still can't get enough and you want to get a little spicy with us. You can subscribe to Extra Curious on Apple podcasts for commercial free listening and our subscription only show, Ask JVN where we're talking sex relationships are really just whatever is on my mind. That week, our theme music is Freak by Quinn. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our editor and engineer is Nathaniel McClure. Getting Curious is

produced by me, Chris McClure and Julia Melfi with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie and Chad Hall.