

Improve is No Joke Episode 10 – Kevin Tipton

Pete: I'm really excited today, because an old high school friend of mine, Kevin Tipton, has agreed to be part of my podcast. Kevin doesn't live in the United States. He is a professor at the University of Sterling in Scotland. So, first and foremost Kevin, thank you for taking the time. I greatly appreciate you spending some time with me today on my podcast. And you know, it's been 30 years since we've talked or seen each other, but man it's great to reconnect. So, thank you.

Kevin: Oh it's my pleasure, Pete. And let me just say that I think we go back farther than high school. I reckon we were 8 or 9 years old at Manathorpe Elementary, so it's been dang near 50 years we've known each other—if we can admit that.

Pete: I believe you're right. And if you remember, I posted this one picture of us at graduation. It's still one of my favorite pictures from high school.

Kevin: I agree, that is a fantastic photo.

Pete: Kevin had this uniqueness about him. Back in the day, he had a full set of hair. Actually he had this long hair, and as I'm looking at him on Skype, I would say it's kind of left.

Kevin: Left is kind. So, back in the day, I used to be known for my long hair. And now I'm known for my non-hair.

Pete: It's great talking with you. And the reason why I asked Kevin, and I'm really happy that he would be part of this, is that when he saw that my book was out, one, he was surprised that I could write a book—which most of my friends felt the same way—and two, that it didn't have any crayons in it. So, it really perked his interest. He asked if I had it in audiobook form, and at the time I didn't, so I sent him a copy of my book. And being a professor, I'll have him tell you more about what he does, he probably read it within an hour or two. But he had some really nice things to say about it, and so I invited him to be part of his podcast so he can share with you some of the things that he's been able to glean from my book and put in his day-to-day life. So Kevin, give everybody a little bit of your background.

Kevin: We were not only in high school together but at the University of Kentucky. And I studied zoology there and went on to do a master's degree and a PhD. And the interesting thing, I think, is the idea that the master's was in Marine biology, down in Florida. And while I was working as a marine biologist, despite the fact that I had all that hair, and I worked on a boat and scuba diving, but I knew something was missing. And so, I started realizing I wanted to understand the human physiology in response to exercise and training. I decided to get a PhD in human nutrition and physiology and exercise physiology. And then, you know, I got lucky with a really good postdoc position in Galveston, Texas with one of the leading researchers in the world in protein nutrition and protein metabolism. And so, I was involved in some of the seminal studies in studying human muscle protein metabolism in response to exercise and nutrition. And as we were talking earlier, it's better to be lucky than good. And I think that my career is a perfect example of that, and that I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time and got into this laboratory that has given me the platform to be able to go on and be, you know, what I would consider successful. And at least I'm happy with what I've done and what's happened. So, that's my focus. My research is mostly on muscle metabolism with exercise and nutrition in a particular protein. Nutrition is what I'm probably most known for, but we also do studies related to diabetes and other health-related aspects. My title is officially—in the UK they love to give these fancy titles—and so my title is Professor of Sport Health and Exercise Sciences.

Pete: You were an athlete growing up, from what I remember. I do remember that you played soccer at the University of Kentucky and at Lafayette as well if my memory is correct. But I remember you being always in great shape and playing soccer, and I believe you did a stint in rugby as well.

Kevin: I played rugby for 25 years and with all the beatings that that took, I think you're generous to call me an athlete. I was someone who did sports, but you know, I always had to work harder than everybody else. And that actually is the origin of my desire to study physiology and nutrition, because I was trying to find out for myself how I could train better and eat better, to try to compete with people who were better athletes than I was.

Pete: As you say that, I'm sitting here thinking, wouldn't that be great if that mentality was even adopted in the business world? As an athlete will spend the time to understand nutrition and take better care of themselves, that same philosophy really should hold true with business, with corporate America. Because spending as many years as I did in corporate America, we don't eat well. We don't take care of ourselves very well. And this thought just popped into my head as I was listening to you. Your thoughts on that?

Kevin: I couldn't agree more. The better you eat—and if you stay fit—you're gonna have more energy. You're gonna feel better about yourself. You're gonna be able to do your job better. So, if it were me, if I were a CEO, I would make all my employees, or not make them but provide the opportunity for them to exercise and be physically active and give them time. I would even say, "OK. Here, you got an hour a day that you're getting paid that I want you to go be physically active. Whether that's lifting weights or walking or running or on a bike, whatever you want to do." I think that would increase productivity. And I think there are some models that have tried that and it works. And also I would make sure that there was proper nutrition available, but also education available to say, "Here's what we would provide for you." And I think that would increase productivity in any corporation, if they would be farsighted enough to try that. It would cost money, of course, but I think it would come back.

Pete: I think that there are some companies that have done that, some of the newer companies, the disruptive type of companies, like Amazon, Google, Airbnb. Those type of have taken a real focus on wellness.

Kevin: The successful ones, right?

Peter: Go figure. The successful new ones versus, maybe some of the older bluebloods that have been around for many years, but I think it's something that, you know, that we tend to forget. Whether we're teaching, whether we're flying around the country consulting, whether we're going to work in a skyscraper, I think that with fast food and getting lazy, that by just making some changes, and the way we exercise does have an effect on productivity, does have an effect on our overall health. And I just know how I've been able to deal with it. It goes back to my book. Two words: "yes, and." Managing my health and stuff, I could not do it, I could just forget about it. But there's so much more out there, that me adopting this approach organically over the last 25 years, I've just found myself more driven to do more. Nothing's an obstacle anymore. Everything, every challenge becomes an opportunity versus something that's bad.

Kevin: Yeah, I agree. And speaking of travel, as we were saying you travel a lot, and I travel a fair bit. And yeah, it gets in the way of your exercise routine. But that's only limited if you let it. For example, most airports, you don't have to take the escalator. You can actually walk up the stairs. And the only interesting thing is, when I walk up the stairs next to all the people on the escalator, I actually go faster. So, if you're talking about, "I'm in a hurry," then the stairs are actually better anyway. And you don't have to get on those moving sidewalks, or if you do, you can walk on them. So, there are all sorts of ways. And I haven't seen them in Europe so much, but I understand that in the USA, airports are starting to put gyms in there. So, if you have a long enough lay over, you can go. So, that being said, there's a lot of evidence now that you can do a very effective workout in 10 to 15 minutes, if you do it properly. And you know, I can bore you with the details, but you don't need to have a huge layover. You can just go to the gym and do a quick, what people call HIIT, High-Intensity Interval Training session and be very effective. There are ways to do it if you really want to. And you say, "Yes, I'm traveling, *and* I'm gonna do these workouts, because I can."

Peter: When you talk about airports, I fly Delta, I fly through Atlanta a lot. And usually, I have a decent layover—like an hour—so if I can land in terminal F and take off in A, I've got my work out because I'll walk it. I don't take the moving side walk unless I'm running late.

Kevin: The problem with Atlanta is, a lot of those terminals, they've only got escalators. They don't have stairs coming up from there.

Peter: Yeah they don't have the stairs but they do, I don't take the tram I'll just walk. And at times, it can be a 30, 35-minute walk.

Kevin: Well, there you go. That's something and even on the escalator, you can walk up the escalators instead of standing there. Anything you do physically active is gonna be better than not doing it. So, even when you're traveling again, like you say in your book, it's "Yes, and." Yes, I'm traveling. It's gonna be a pain in the butt, but yes I can take the stairs.

Peter: Have you been able to apply that concept in your teaching?

Kevin: Well it's funny, because I don't want to take away from what you're saying, but I found when I was reading your book that I do some of these things that I didn't really know I was doing it.

Peter: Perfect.

Kevin: In teaching, no question. And I think I mentioned to you that I blame all those sessions we used to do sitting around listening to Cheech and Chong records. So, maybe that's how both of us came around to this kind of thing. I used to get in trouble because when I was teaching early on, and I would tell jokes, and I would stop a lecture to tell a story about whatever. And in this case, it was older women who were teaching in nutrition, and they'd say that you shouldn't be doing that. You should be serious in front of your students. But the students loved it. And consequently, I've learned some sort psychological, physiological even reasons why that works. But I found myself reading your book and going, "Hey, this is fantastic, you know? This is the kind of thing that I kind of stumbled across. And now Pete is explaining why it was working." And I didn't really know that. I just thought I was gonna do what I do because I don't care what the old ladies say. But what happens is, students tend to have a 10 to 15-minute attention span. And what I found was, if I stopped to tell a story or tell a joke, that brought them back to me. And then they enjoyed the lecture more than if you just go, "Da da da da da." And so, it was exactly the types of things you're saying, bringing things that mix it up. And that doesn't have to be always so focused on whatever topic, whether its business or accounting or nutrition. And yeah, I really enjoyed reading your book because it did that, and I've already passed it along to some of my colleagues. So, sorry for not getting you more sales by making them buy it, but I'm hoping they'll get something out of it as well.

Peter: I greatly appreciate you passing it along. If you need some more copies, I'd be happy to send you more copies out there. When people read my book, and I talk to audiences and stuff, we hear the word improve and we're thinking Drew Carey, every thing's made up and the points don't count. And it's not serious. But once I'm able to get past that and really show everybody that they improvise every single day, and by improvising every single day we were unconsciously doing it, but if we can consciously think about what we're doing, I think we can have a greater impact on the students or whoever were coming in contact with.

Kevin: Yeah, and that's what reading your book has done for me, for sure. And especially, my role now, as I'm the leader of the Health and Exercise Sciences research group here, and once I took that on almost 6 years ago, now the job that I do, the things I have to do, has changed quite a bit. I spent a lot of time with junior colleagues trying to help them and guide them, and so much of it is trying to have that "yes, and" attitude that you described. And now that I've read your book, I think I'm better at it because now, instead of just stumbling across it every now and then, I'm consciously thinking about how I am gonna deal with this in the way that Pete has as described for me. I didn't mean to imply earlier that, yes I thought of this too, and you're just lucky you wrote the book first. I was trying to say that I identified with it a lot, but it's also really, as you say, reading the book has allowed me to recognize what I was doing and then doing it more consistently and reinforcing it better. So, I think that was that huge thing that it's helped me with.

Peter: I appreciate the kind words. It's always nice to get kind words, but sometimes when you get them from old friends it even means that much more.

Kevin: Well, that chapter on your sister helped a lot.

Peter: I guess the other question is, I know that you have a dog. What kind of dog do you have?

Kevin: He's a border terrier.

Peter: And how old is he?

Kevin: He's nine, nine and a half.

Peter: And have you found that the "yes, and" approach works with him as well?

Kevin: I hadn't really thought about that. Yeah, I guess he's a buddy. He's not really a subordinate or anything. He's my roommate, and we go hiking together every day, you know? So, he's kind of bored right now though.

Peter: When I think of dogs, and this is just, I'm really improve-ing right here, when I think of dogs, that's the ultimate "yes, and" because, "Hey, I want to go do something. What are we doing?" And, "Let's do this now," or "Let's go do this," or "It's time for a walk."

Kevin: Yeah, he's always ready for whatever. What I think is funny is, I'll grab my car keys, and he just starts getting all excited, you know? I'm, "OK. We're gonna go to the vet, and I'm gonna have your balls cut off. I'm gonna have you put down." And he's like, "OK, let's get going. I don't know where we're going, but we're going in the car so it must be good."

Peter: Oh, that's funny. That's great. And that's very much a dog's attitude. You do that every time you get in the car? Tell your dog that you're gonna go get him neutered?

Kevin: It is funny, cause when we do get somewhere, like the vet, he likes the front office of the vet. He doesn't like the back part, but the front office, they give him a little treat so he's happy. But the pack part of course, they poke him or prod him or give him shots. So, he's never happy. But when you're getting in the car, going to the vet is a good thing because probably 75-80% of his car trips mean we're going walking or something. But yeah, I agree. Now that you've described it, I can see how that is a "yes, and." He's a "yes, and" creature for sure.

Peter: I know. My two dogs, I have a chocolate lab and a black lab, and they are very much "yes, and." "Yes, and it's time to eat. Yes, and it's time to walk, and where have you been all day." They're always very happy. Kevin, any last words before we wrap this up

Kevin: Nothing substantial. I mean, I appreciate the opportunity to be on the podcast, and you know I enjoyed reading the book. And despite my biases and the bottle of bourbon that I hope to get in the mail for saying good things...

Peter: You only want one? That's perfect. That's easy enough. I thought you were gonna hit me up for more.

Kevin: It really was. I enjoyed it, and I was proud of you because, like you said, we've know each other a long time. And it's great to see your old friends doing well, and also doing well in an unexpected way. Like you say, who would have expected you to write a book, you know? That's awesome. It's fantastic, and I was happy to see, and even happier to read it. And go, "Hey, this isn't just a bunch of crap. This is good stuff."

Peter: Now you're up to two bottles. Keep going my friend. Keep going. So, I have to believe that some part of my audience is gonna listen to this, especially the conversation on nutrition, and maybe will want to reach out to you. Can you give us how somebody could reach you? The email address or something?

Kevin: Probably the easiest way to get a hold of me is, I'm active on Twitter. So, if you want to follow nutrition and exercise kind of stuff on Twitter, it's @Stirproftip. And also, you can get my email and all my publications and everything else from the university website. So, if you just Google Kevin Tipton, Sterling or University of Sterling, you should come right to my website and it should be no problem finding me. If you want to see what kind of research we're doing, and you know, it's got my email address and everything else on there.

Peter: Outstanding. So, if you want to know more about nutrition, he's the man. I do remember growing up, and when I found out that you were a doctoral student and a PhD, I went, "I kind of always thought that." I always did. I believed that's right. Your dad taught at the University of Kentucky, so it didn't shock me at all that this would be your profession. Because my friend, you were always one of the brightest in the room. I look back at our times growing up, and I do miss those times. I do miss the Richard Pryor, Cheech and Chong, listening to the stuff. But you always had this thing about you, that I knew you were going to be extremely successful. And thank you for proving me right. So, we're even now on the bottles, right?

Kevin: Exactly. Well you know, it's funny you should say my dad, because I've got to mention that I won some excellence in teaching awards this year. And I'm very proud of that, of course. It was an honor and a thrill to get those awards, but I dedicated and blame my father for it, because of the way I saw him teaching—from when we first moved to Lexington, and he was at University of Kentucky. And I modeled myself as a teacher on the way that I saw him treating both his undergraduate and graduate students. And I can't say enough good things

about Leonard, as far as a mentor and a teacher. And so, I don't think I would ever feel comfortable not working at the University. It just has always been part of my life. And so, I've been lucky enough to be able to do what I think is a rewarding job. And it's challenging of course but rewarding, and it's due to my father as to, you know, how I was able to make that happen.

Peter: Yeah, just listening to your voice and tone, and tying it back to everything you just said, you're very lucky that you were able to find your passion early on and be able to leverage that passion into what you are today. Congratulations on the teaching awards. I have seen a picture of your mom and dad, and they look great. And I know that you will send this to them. Are they still in Lexington?

Kevin: No, they're in Gainesville, Florida.

Peter: I'll have to stop next time I'm near Fort Myers and say hello. Well, once again, thank you very much. I can't tell you how much I appreciate you doing this and being on here and having some really nice things to say about my book. And I look forward to our next conversation because I would like to follow up in about a year with this podcast to see the difference a year's made. But on the other hand, I want to follow up a lot sooner and stay closer in touch with you, on an unofficial friendship basis versus the podcast basis.

Kevin: Why don't we do both? Why don't we do the next interview on top of the mountain behind my house here so you can visit Scotland? We'll take that bottle of bourbon up to the top of the mountain and podcast from up there.

Peter: That is a definite. So, if we put a date out there, let's see if we can make that date. Perfect my friend. Thank you, so very much and great talking with you.

Kevin: My pleasure.