

Talking Sport & Tech

Born Barikor, CEO & Founder, Our Parks

Episode Transcript



- Alex Zurita: Hey everyone. Welcome to this episode of The Talking Sport and Tech Podcast brought to you by me, Alex Zurita, and my co-host...
- Milly Pelmore: Me, Milly Pelmore. We have a great guest for you today, and I'm really excited. This is a sneak peek of what is in store.
- Born Barikor: There are things that... Sport can unlock potential, but also there are barriers to systems in the way that we approach how we get people into those sports. And there's so many other triggers that we have to do. And for me, Our Parks is one of those triggers. Just to give everyone the opportunity, no matter where you live or how much money you have, access to high quality exercise.
- Milly Pelmore: So let's get into today's episode.
- Alex Zurita: So what a brilliant guest we have for you. Here, we have a sport industry entrepreneur, a battle rapper, DJ, and radio producer, grime MC, sportsman, pharmaceutical science graduate, and a former community development officer. Born and bred in east London, from Tower Hamlets and so he says music and sport where his passion and passport to achieving his educational aspiration and ultimately, brought him up to be the leader of Our Parks. None other than, Mr. Born Barikor.
- Milly Pelmore: So Born, it's great to have you on the podcast today. We want to kick off by asking you if you could be a professional sports person in any sport, what would it be?
- Born Barikor: Yeah. And thanks for having me on the show. When we look at sport, I was quite close to being an elite athlete. So initially I said, I would like to be an elite athlete if I could do it and this time not get injured. But I've recently started taking up CrossFit. And if CrossFit existed, when I was a kid or when I was growing up, I would definitely want to be a CrossFitter. Because I like to push myself to the edge. And the sessions I've been doing, of late, it's really that environment and everyone's trying to be the best they could be for themselves. So yeah, I think it would be CrossFit would be my choice.
- Milly Pelmore: CrossFit feels like a really nice community where, like you said, you can be any different kind of level and still take part in the same workout of the day, I think it's called. It doesn't matter if you are top end or just new you can all take part and be part of that same community. Does that really come across?
- Born Barikor: Exactly that. With athletics, you get your time or your jump or your distance, whatever it is. And you're measured against that. Whereas with CrossFit, you're almost measured against yourself and you want to lift a bit heavier or go a bit harder on that [inaudible 00:02:31]. And yeah, for me, it would be my choice, if I could go back and retrain, let's say.

Milly Pelmore: So what was it when you were a kid? Was it athletics that you were hoping to do? Is that what you did when you were younger?

Born Barikor: Yeah. At first it was a big part of growing up, really. Because on the council of the estate, we had the opportunity to run around the estate. So what moms and dads would say, you can't leave the estate. And it was about, it felt like it was a mile, but it only about 200 meters worth of running around the estate. And when the Olympics was on, all the kids used to just want to go out. So you'd watch the races and the first one you would do... All you need is a pair of trainers or sometimes not, you do it bare feet. And we'd go and emulate our favorite runners. We had Michael Johnson at the time. So everyone would run in that style. And I think for us, it really got to the point where we ran so much and it kept us at physically active. When I got to secondary school, I had a good baseline of speed and agility and power from doing our long jumps and jumping over fences and whatnot. So athletics really rang true to me growing up and a lot of what I did and why I'm here today is because of that route of being coached through athletics and having a, let's say, a goal, a distraction to be able to achieve stuff in your life.

Milly Pelmore: Yeah. Great. And we'll talk more of the route into what you're doing now in a bit, but I'd like to know you've got your own kids now and throughout lockdown, you found ways of keeping active with them at home.

Born Barikor: Yeah. Joy of having kids is just every day I wake up beaming even when it's six o'clock in the morning when they wake up almost every day. No matter what you do, they're up very early. But for me, it was, with my kids they are physically active. I never pushed them into a sport. We just play. So it comes from getting your physical literacy from running, jumping, catching, throwing and just playing silly games with them. Over lockdown, we did a thing called superhero fitness, and that was to encourage anyone at home to take part in 10 minutes worth of exercise and using your superhero as almost the trigger to get the kids to take part as well. So as a superhero, we have our superheroes and we know our superheroes are probably our role models. And what we said was your role models also do fitness.

Born Barikor: They also train. They're not as strong and as fast as they would be outside of them being on the screens. And that's what we played in with the little kids. And then over lockdown, we developed this superhero fitness series where every day we did a 10 minute workout. Once a day, we would do... They would rotate and we would do moves like how to do a Spiderman crawl, how to do a superhero jump and all that kind of stuff. But really they were having a 10 minute workout, but we disguised it with fun moves that their superheroes do. And when we look back to that time, I realized something about my kids. Whereas if I said to them, go and play football, play basketball, they weren't really at that level to push them to do that. But if I threw a ball at them in terms of shooting the basketball hoop, or we played a game where it was football or dodgeball, they would be playing that game for hours.

Born Barikor: And now I'm seeing them develop some really, really baseline, core motor skills and physical activity in their daily life. And they're now playing basketball for teams and running in athletics. And everyone says, oh, well, did you coach them from little? I said, no, all we did is played with them. And one thing I do know is that the inactivity across the nation, some of it is because, as parents, you don't really have the confidence to play with your kids. Luckily I could do it behind closed doors. And I had the confidence that I could play football or I could play basketball. But if you take someone, a parent who's inactive and you say, actually, I'm going to put you in a park and you're going to play with your kids in front of everyone. And maybe at school, you didn't like to play football or basketball or run. You automatically don't want to play in front of an audience, whether it's the park or whether it's other parents. So there's something we're trying to do at Our Parks, and that's trying to give you an opportunity to do stuff at home. So at home, low impact, no equipment, all that kind of stuff that allows you to get that physical confidence to go out and do it in public, or do it in a setting where people can see you do it.

Alex Zurita: Yeah. I just want to say, I suppose, thank you, because you helped me keep my kids active during that first lockdown. So three o'clock break, superhero fitness was the thing. And to be honest, it also ended up being a break for me. I remember being, that 10, 15 minutes with a bit of time put aside where it was like, actually, do you know what, eyes off a screen, take a break from work, enjoyed a bit of family time, do a bit of jumping around within reason in a flat. So our downstairs neighbors wouldn't complain too much and they absolutely loved it.

Alex Zurita: They used to get ready, go and get outfits, imitate that superhero that they wanted to be for those 10, 15 minutes. It was really important I suppose as a family time but also with just that break and then the added benefit that actually we were just moving around. We were just playing. We were just having fun. And it picked up some habits that then continued thereafter. One of my daughters does gymnastics at school now and she loves it because she just wants to be jumping around and doing stuff. So yeah, I thank you on behalf of my family and the nation for helping us keep kids active in there.

Born Barikor: Thank you.

Alex Zurita: You touch in that a little bit about what are emerging some strong values and morals around the value of sport or physical activity and actually how it's embedded within your kids and you're portraying it to your kids. Do you see that early learning, your early [inaudible 00:08:13], you say you're born in bred in east London, Tower Hamlet council estate, how much of that is in Our Parks as a theme, as something that is provided to tens of thousand, hundreds of thousands of people across London and the UK.

Born Barikor: Yeah. It's all around my upbringing. Whereas my brothers and I, we didn't get to go to sports clubs because my mom was working and we had to just play and make our own clubs on the estate. There's many kids that can't afford to access

the provision that you feel is just normal for some of the middle class families or upper working class families. So for me, the community that got me fit and active and I learned all my skills were the guys on the estate. And we would just watch things on TV. Someone would save up or we'd be lucky, we'd have one ball on the estate. And everyone would treat that ball with the utmost respect because if that got lost or punctured, that's it. You don't have another ball until we save up and get another one.

Born Barikor: And then from that we realized actually if say, it was Jason who had the ball at home, and we knew he wasn't going to be able to come out the next day for whatever reason, we would find a way to get the ball to whoever's going to be out playing. And that was my first real exposure to how it's so important to have friends and people that just want to play. So we weren't doing it to be in a football team. We just knew that if we were going to break up our day. So back to your point where if you are, especially in the summer holidays, if you have nothing to do and you don't do any physical activity, as a kid, it's one of the worst things you could do staying in a very small flat as well. So we, literally the whole summer, we would just play football, play basketball.

Born Barikor: And then when Wimbledon came on, and this is a true story as well, we wanted to play tennis. So we knew there was a tennis court and everyone bribed their mom. Mom, it's only across the road. We won't get hit and all that stuff by cars. And in those days there wasn't as many cars. But the parents said, okay, as long as you all go together, you can go to the tennis courts. We didn't have any bats or any balls. And we went over and the courts were locked. And I remember us, we dreamt about it the night before we've been watching Wimbledon on the BBC. And it was like, yeah, we're going get there and we're going to play and we're going to serve. And we climbed over the fence. There was some balls left in there. We climbed over the fence. And I remember the caretaker came and had a bit of a go at us. Saying, what are you doing there?

Born Barikor: You can't be in here. It's only for the members. Da, da, da. I remember us saying, but they never used it. And we really want to learn how to play tennis. And I can't remember the chap's name, but he said, come back tomorrow and I'll get you some rackets and I'll get you some tennis balls. And we came back and the court was opened and that was our first opportunity to play tennis. And we were all rubbish. The first thing we tried to do was a mega serve. I remember doing a forehand and hitting myself in the head of the racket, but we spent the whole summer learning. And every summer we would play tennis and now I can play tennis quite good. And when everyone says, oh, did you take lessons? I say, no, we just was bored. And we wanted to do something as a community.

Born Barikor: I know we'll touch on it later. There are things that... Sport can unlock potential, but also there are barriers to systems in the way that we approach how we get, let's say people into those sports. And there are so many different variants of upbringings and access, which we assume people can just do the stuff that we want them to do. So we build it, they come. We put a new program, it will

entice them. In some cases that is not the case. There's so many other triggers that we have to do. And for me, Our Parks is one of those triggers. Just to give everyone the opportunity, no matter where you live or how much money you have, access to high quality exercise.

Alex Zurita: There's a lot in there around inclusivity, accessibility, early experiences or physical activity. I suppose, probably unconsciously or subconsciously has led to maybe what Our Parks is about. What would you say are now, since 2013, '14, Our Parks has been going, started in London, now across the country. What would you think are the biggest challenges and achievements that you feel you've had so far? And I suppose I would like you to look at it from two point of views, as Our Parks, as an entity, but also you as a leader of Our Parks, an early founder of what is now eight years on, hundreds of thousands of Parkers that take activity in those free, inclusive, very community orientating activities.

Born Barikor: Yeah. When you look at the journey of Our Parks, the journey starts from me being in the system. So being in the system. And the thing about systems, how systems work, they are meant to be the most efficient. You build a system that's so efficient to keep churning out the product or the service that you want to deliver. And the moment you're in a system, you say, actually, I want to change it a bit. And a system starts to behave like a system and gets rid of the virus. So when we look at where I was, I was working for an organization who had community say, statements out there, saying they do stuff for the community, but they were still trying to do it against a system that wasn't working for that community.

Born Barikor: And every time I would go and say, can we do this? Can we do that? They would go, no doesn't work because we have to do these steps. And the problem with that is, that manager or middle manager, they want to get higher and higher. So the scariest thing they can hear is let's move fast and break things. Because they were like, oh my God, I don't want to do that because I know if I had just stay doing the system stuff, I'd be at this pay grade in five years time. So all they're going to do is keep pushing you away. So I decided actually, do you know what, if we're going to move, it's going to have to be a leap of faith for me to go and do something that I can control. So I left and we set up Our Parks. And the base of Our Parks was if we could make exercise free and affordable and use data to show councils and funders, if this population of people get more physically active and meet the community, we save X amount of money in the future.

Born Barikor: When you try and explain that to anyone, because at the time no one was doing stuff like that. It's hard to explain or even to get a bank loan for an idea that they don't understand. So you go in there with a business plan, a dry cleaners and they say, oh yeah, I understand the dry cleaners. You sell this much and da, da, da. And I understand your model, how you're going to pay the coaches? And what are you going to pay the coaches? And how's it going to be free? And how are you going to continue to get money? So it was a hard challenge to sell. And you have this idea in your head and you have a thing called innovation accounting, which allows you to account for your innovation. And you have to

have a way to say, actually I am making progress. And so if you haven't read The Lean Startup, it's kind of based on lean startup principles where you build, measure, learn, and you go through that feedback loop.

Born Barikor: So my first challenge was, one, getting money to do it. Two making the funders believe what we were doing would ultimately change the community that we are servicing. And then we had a barrage of challenges of standards, getting the right coaches, training them, the brand, building that community. If I'm honest, from where I came from, I kind of knew what community stood for and what an organization or a movement needs to look like in order for you to feel part of that movement. And that's everything from down, we call them Parkers. So it's been part of the brand. It's the way that the brand looks. We've got turn up, tone up. And people wear it not only to exercise, but they will wear it around [inaudible 00:16:10] Forest, around Hackney because they're proud of the brand that they identify with.

Born Barikor: There's a lot that goes behind the system with that. And I do see, we'll probably touch on it a bit later, there are lots of new ventures and organizations that think it's only about the service or the product. And unfortunately it's not because it's about the value. So the moment your customers value you, you super exceed service because at some point, service is going to dip. A coach might be late or you have to cancel it because of... And if you are always being judged your service, you don't build a community. But if you build a community based on values, you build a community that super exceeds it and they become evangelists. And wherever they go, they continue to talk about your product, your service because they value it so much. And I think us and you've got Park One that do it amazingly, you've got Good Gyms. So there's lots of organizations that are doing it. But if I say anything to anyone listening, when you see it happening, you can't just go and copy it and think it's going to happen. You have to understand the core principles that built that organization to where they are to this day.

Alex Zurita: And it's fascinating because you use community and movement in there, right? And community you could argue is probably an overly used term, potentially. And actually a lot of organizations or a lot of people might use it, we are really understanding what that means. And that true communities, they are people helping each other, chip in with one another and you also use the movement aspect of Our Parks. So that's some of your values, some of the core morals that you want to see in Our Park, how do you as a leader, transcend that into then ultimately who is that individual representing Our Parks as a brand for those participants, for those local residents, for those followers of the movement or part of that community?

Born Barikor: So communities are built when two people or more have mutual concern for another person's welfare. So if I don't have a concern for you and you don't have a concern for me, we can't have a community here. So the first thing is, people don't connect with logos. People connect with real people. And then when you look at who's going to be your brand? You. So who's going to be you

and your brand? Who is your brand, you? So I was the first brand. So I was there at the face of it. And then we started to get the coaches to be the who of the brand. So because we know, back to your principles of community, you're going to see that coach every weekend. If the coach cares about you when you turn up, they know your name, they say, how are you doing it? Oh, you got married. How was the wedding?

Born Barikor: It's those little things, which everyone really values. And when we first started, the first thing we thought we needed was well-qualified coaches. And we found out very quickly, it doesn't matter how many qualifications you have, if someone turns up and they have a bad experience, they won't come back. And we went down that experience economy. So the experience economy is, we need to understand the touch points of that Parker's journey. Whether it's from the email they get, from how they find the class to when they get in, the warm up they do. And most importantly, how they meet and greet us. And then you train your coaches to say, if you can get these five things, right, you'll always grow your sessions. But equally, you start to build the word community. Because I agree, it's overly used people just say, yeah, we're building a community because it sounds good.

Born Barikor: But actually, they're not really. Parkers or other people aren't going to skiing with each other. They aren't going to festivals with each other. And that's what we're doing. We're building communities that not only do stuff with Our Parks, they do stuff outside of the program because they met at Our Parks. So that's the first thing. So when we look at how do we go about doing it, you have to continually evolve. The moment you stand still and the moment say, okay, we've done this and it's going to work. What happens is, new things happen. Just take the pandemic, for instance. When it hit, we had to stop doing outdoor exercise classes. The first thing we did was we built a brand new system. We moved everything online. Then we a built a system with Sport England and London Sport called Couch for Fitness, which is... Now it's just huge.

Born Barikor: It's one of our biggest programs. And it's probably the first place that you land when you come into Our Parks now. We just created a whole new system. But if we didn't do anything, if we just said, actually we're not going to do anything. Our community will be waiting for us when we get back. Unfortunately, they won't because even though they still value you, so we use that value term, you still need to have touch points with your community or with your users. Because if you're not doing touchpoint every week or at least once a month, everyone knows that family member that you spent all that time with when you was growing up and suddenly you drift apart because the touchpoint stopped. Doesn't mean you love them less or not, but they're not in your mind every day until you touch again and you start to build that relationship.

Born Barikor: That's what it is. It's continually having touch points, adding value on a daily or weekly basis to your users will allow you to understand what your users want. And it's not sell, sell, sell .a lot of organizations that try and build communities, the first time they get their email address or whatever they do to communicate

with them, it's always come do this, go and do that, go and do this, go and do that. Look what we do. Sometimes that's not what they want to hear. They just want to have some stuff where, oh, here are five recipes to keep you awake with power food or something like that. It could be anything. But we really wanted to get to the things, what they really want to hear weekly. And then I say 5% is that sale. So 95% of what we do is adding value to the Parkers. And there's a 5% where with our sponsors and whatnot where we have to sell something. I feel that's what we pride ourself on because I know if every time you met me and I was trying to sell you something, you would say I'm not going to meet him anymore. Every time he's trying to make me buy stuff from him.

Alex Zurita: Yeah, absolutely. And trivia, I suppose, any weddings within Parkers because it's like bingo.

Born Barikor: Yeah. I'm sure there's there's many. There's many.

Alex Zurita: But what you said, it totally makes sense. And I suppose it's consistent to what you said so far that it is about adding value. It's about placing that individual at the heart of what you're providing. Bearing in mind, trying to really understand who they are, what they need and providing that first. Because again, it's about bringing them into community, integrating them into a community, making them feel part of that movement. So the whole thing around almost give them value first and then the sale almost as a byproduct will come in. Yeah, totally makes sense. I would love to just dive in quickly on, you mentioned the pandemic and I suppose, if we think about it, 2013, 2014, Our Parks starts., you've got tens of thousand, hundreds of thousands of Parkers that are doing activity with Our Parks on a weekly basis.

Alex Zurita: You've got a workforce. And then the world gets flipped upside down. We go into what we thought was probably a few weeks of lockdown, reality it's months. We are still kind of within our home. We can only be active in and around our home. So that park, all of a sudden that community gets taken out of the equation. That behavior that they were adopting or had built over a period of time with Our Parks gets taken out of the equation. You've got a workforce to look after and ultimately, you've got a business to look after. So as a leader, where do you go there? What is your thought process at that moment in time? I know you mentioned slightly around things like how's your fitness, but where do you go from there?

Born Barikor: The moment we had the news already, we were thinking about, okay, we have all these people that we need to service. Everyone's going to be in the same predicament. Equally, we had almost everyone's attention as well. So there were pros and cons to it and it was, how fast can you move to keep everyone's attention because they're not going to be leaving the house. They're not going to work. But then you have from a business perspective, cash flow and all that kind of stuff, which you won't have because you can't do the service that you were doing before the pandemic hit. For us, we were very lucky. Sport England was, for us, if they didn't step in and give the funding that we received at that

time, we probably wouldn't be here now because it was a time where you needed to move fast and break things. But you didn't need to do long funding applications and all that kind of stuff.

Born Barikor: And then we had this roadmap. The night afterwards I was up and I built this ecosystem of this is what an online community can look like. And if I'm honest, it's probably the best thing we've ever done because now we have that online and offline [inaudible 00:25:25]. And they will exist forever for now because we realized that we started to reach Parkers who necessarily don't live near a park. So our original model was you have to live within a mile of the park or be able to get to the park and then you can exercise for free blah, blah, blah. Now you have to have an internet connection and you can exercise for free. And then we started to overlay that information of, oh, we've got all these people who are in, say, Dorset for instance, doing couch fitness or doing the online stuff. Let's put a class next to their postcode.

Born Barikor: So we start overlaying it and we grow even more. But the pandemic was either a breaker or a maker for many organizations. And because we have the power of data from how we were set up, I always said, we're never going to have a clipboard in the park, we're always going to use data. We had the power to reach those individuals because we had those direct contacts with them. And that really saved us. So I always say data is king. But you can't collect data for the sake of collecting data. But when you collect data, really understand how that's going to help you steer your ship because a lot of people just say, yeah, I've got the data. Oh I'm collecting data. And they do nothing with it. And you can't do that now because of GDPR. But I would say, if you can look at... So strategy, where are you going to play? How are you going to win?

Born Barikor: We know where we're going to play and we know how we're going to win. And keep doing that, whatever you do. So we've moved them to so many different markets. We do school camps now. We do couch fitness. We're doing coaching qualifications. That all started from one park. Me in a park in the rain trying to get... I only wanted to get 30, 40 people active and now we're 250,000 people because we continue to... We don't stand still. And I feel standing still is, like we said, talking about physical activity and how kids get bored. The reason why kids get bored if you let them stand still. The moment they're not stand still and they're having fun and they're finding out how to use their bodies, they almost evolve from just a bit of fitness to gymnastics. And that's the same with a company. If you let it stand still, what would it do? It would just stay there. And if you give it the chance to evolve, it would evolve into so many other things.

Alex Zurita: I think you're being quite modest with the whole lucky. We were lucky. I suppose my take is probably that you've created that luck, you could argue. So what you've done up to pandemic, the amount of people you've engaged, your ability to tell a funder who you are engaging, why you're engaging, what it's important they keep engaging, you would argue that that was the lead to that luck moment. You probably just being probably, it feels slightly modest by saying that. Some would argue you created that luck.

Born Barikor: There are other partners involved in it as well. We have a working group with London Sport and Sport England. And I feel partnership working again is one of the key things to growth. We don't do it all by ourself. It's being able to work in a group with like-minded people that share the same values that you do. And one thing I learned very early on is I just don't do business with people I don't like anymore. Because if they don't have the same values, what will happen is, it'll end up not working. So we were very fortunate that our working group for the couch fitness stuff and all the stuff we've been doing over the pandemic was different minds around the table. So back to that diversity point, the more diverse the table is, the broader the thinking becomes and the more frequency and reach you can get with the ideas that you develop.

Born Barikor: And we were very fortunate that we all get it. And when it comes to working and making new ideas, I don't think I know it all. I'm really up for when I'm wrong saying well, that didn't work. But your idea was better than my idea. Let's go with that idea. And I think you need to surround yourself with people like that, that really don't have so much pride in making sure that, oh, it has to work or I'm going to make it work when it's not working and I'm not pivoting. So it is, we're very fortunate if I say that. We've managed to work with some amazing people that really value what we are trying to do and tying into what the nation needs. And I think for us, we're going to keep on working with people that have those values and trying to do more because partnership and growth is the way that we see reaching more people.

Milly Pelmore: So it's coming across quite strongly, the fact that the collaboration and sharing the same values with both your Parkers and also the partners that you work with is really important. You mentioned earlier that standing still is the worst thing that you can do. And you've been really successful branching out and going, here's what I'm going to do. I'm in control. Perhaps historically, you found yourself in a place where you were less in control and it wasn't quite the right environment. With Our Parks, you have worked with some brilliant partners that have shared those same values and have moved at speed. But what advice or have you come up against any challenges working within the sports sector and perhaps you want to move at speed, you want to take the risks, you want to break something and see what happens and traditionally, others haven't. How have you overcome that and worked through that?

Born Barikor: Yeah. You have lots of NGBs for instance, might have a certain way in how they need to deliver a sport or physical activity because they've invested lots of money in a program that they thought would work and sometimes doesn't work. For us, it's having the ability to say, okay, we understand what you need to do to tick the boxes, but the Parkers and showing the data, just showing they aren't gravitating to what we thought was going to happen. We did stuff with the RFU at the moment, it's rugby fit. So they approached us and they was doing community rugby and lots of stuff, but they weren't hitting the audience of Our Parks. And they sent us over a activation pack around what does the sessions look like? And what are the games they can play? We had a few coaches on the Zoom call and automatically the coaches said, well, that's not going to work with

us because I can tell you, Auntie Gloria's not going to get on the floor and roll around in the scrum. I can tell you that now.

Alex Zurita: [inaudible 00:31:51] Aunty Gloria.

Born Barikor: But they were like, okay, cool. And it was a tipping point, it was either they said, well this how we need deliver it. I said, oh how can we deliver it in a way where Gloria can take part? That hasn't always happened. We had times where people said, No, it has to be delivered like this or you don't get the funding. And you sometimes have to just be strong enough to say, well, I'm not going to try and jump into a box to try and deliver something which I know is going to have an impact on... Back to that user experience. So you can have really good NGBs, there are few who are really looking to adapt and reach big audiences. And I think it comes with the times as well. So now we're more aware of not one product fix all. And there are so many groups and individuals that could access this, whether it's sport or physical activity, but they just need a different touchpoint to make them be able to access it.

Milly Pelmore: Two things there have really struck me. One is data again and how you've used that to show where you can be most impactful. For the people that you are supporting through Our Parks and to work with the partners as well and show them where the impact can be. And the other one is the importance of co-creation and if it's Aunty Gloria we want to get active, we at London Sport say that we'll never do anything for Londoners without them. So we have to involve them in everything we do. You can't create something for someone and expect that they will come. I think you've mentioned that you don't like the build it and they'll come mentality. So I want to go down the co-creation route. If we want to work with Aunty Gloria, we have to involve her. How has that come through Our Parks? With COVID you set up this online platform and then you got feedback that was working really well. And you've decided to keep it going all the while involving those that you're trying to support.

Born Barikor: Yeah. We had a Facebook group for couch fitness and when we created couch fitness, we did it very quickly. We had the opportunity to reach our target in inactive Londoners at the time. You had pretty much everyone was doing online stuff so the market was so flooded. But what everyone was doing online was the burpees, the HITTs da da, da. And we almost went to a stage where we forgot about everyone else that can't do that. So it was flooded with so much content, so much product, but the lower end wasn't being catered for. So couch fitness was basically that lower end. We're catering for that lower end of the scale that people weren't accessing. Taking couch fitness or couch to 5K as a principle. So we knew that if you want to run, there was a very easy guide to get you there.

Born Barikor: But if you wanted to do exercise at home, there was not a step by step, here it is from day one guide. Then Our Parks created a program. We then, with our working group, put together our website really quickly. We shot 27 videos over a weekend, 27, half an hour videos so it was crazy. I do remember Danny, Christine and I just on the floor at the end of it. And then we got it out there. So

we had to get it out as quickly as possible. We then got the Facebook group set up and now it has about eight, seven to eight thousand, I'm not sure, users in there. And we just watched what they did. And the beauty about the day and time we live in, it's so easy to spy on your, I say spy very loosely, on your audience.

Born Barikor: You can just see what they're doing. See what they're talking about. And if you're not looking at and spying on your audience to understand how to improve your product, again, you're just standing still and you'll die. So we are looking there, we're spying on our audience and they're saying all the stuff they love, all the things they don't like, like getting up and down from the floor too much, blah, blah, blah. And all we did is, in a new season, we just went and did everything they said they liked, we did more of it and everything they said, they found difficult doing like screen casting the TV, we made it accessible. We put variations in. And it is back to that build, measure, learn feedback, loop and understanding from behavior. Because I believe people don't know what they want, but they know how to behave in a way in which they want to behave. So as long as you can find how they're behaving, you can give them what they want without them even knowing.

Alex Zurita: 27 half an hour videos in that weekend, that's outrageous.

Born Barikor: Oh man, that was... And we shot them back to front. So we did the hardest ones first. So when we was doing week one and we finished week one, we was like, yeah. But because that was the last one of the day. So it was like you're bit too hyped for week one. You need to just calm it down. But yeah, it was fun. We had a lot more time for season two.

Alex Zurita: And that's interesting, the bit around the use of tech. So where do you see Our Parks going with that? It was 100,000 Parkers accessing couch fitness and equivalent digital products. But it is almost just the same as the amount of Parkers that then turn up and tone up in their local park.

Born Barikor: Yeah. We want a million Parkers taking part weekly. That's across all products. So we want to be the biggest on demand and in park exercise program in the UK and then move it globally. And I think we can do it. With what we're doing with the numbers that we're throwing up now and the approach and the back ends and the partnerships that we have, we're just really striving to for that. And I feel we want to become... When you signpost, so from a GP referral, we want to become the leading in signpost, prescription of exercise, because the couch of fitness product, it's such a good product to have as a baseline starter. And back to that, improving your fitness and confidence in your own home, it does all of that. And so that's our aspirations in the next five years, we should be throwing up with the big boys, should we say.

Milly Pelmore: One of the things that I would like to talk about is you've mentioned before that for that time that someone's in the park, whether that's now virtually or in the physical space, it's a completely equal playing field. A bit like we talked about

CrossFit at the beginning. Anybody can do it. It might seem quite scary on the face of it. You walk into a CrossFit box and there's a lot of scary machines in the room that you might never have seen. But one of the things that's beautiful about Our Parks is that it really is accessible to Aunty Gloria, to everybody. Everybody can show up to the park or in their house now and take part sport can really be a leveler. Yeah. In that sense.

Born Barikor: Yeah. No, a hundred percent. We live in a day and age where more and more things become accessible. So the stuff we can, we could do two years ago and what we can do now is just ridiculous. But also we still fight against the way that it used to be delivered. So there are, when we look at the change in under guard. So unfortunately you still have in that system and in decision making, you have me now been around for a while now. And I know quite a lot of people in industry and I actually would know that it's changing. Year one year, we getting more of our friends that were with us in on the Olympic park, in higher positions and in higher. So what happens is I, if we look at the evolution of physical activity in sport, at some point we're going to have people that where coaches or parkers with me in positions of let's say power to help change what the ecosystem is.

Born Barikor: We're not there yet. And guarantee that lots of people that are making decisions are still making really, really good decisions. I'm not saying they're not, but I feel where we are now we're starting to evolve. We're starting to get their new diversity. And again, it's being bought by obviously the new uniting and movement strategy, sports governance code. There's lots of stuff that are forcing organizations to be more diverse, to be more inclusive. And I think as long as we keep doing that, the only way is going to be up. I'm very excited to be in this kind of era of new CEOs or people that are trying to really make a difference. Because hopefully, we look back 10 years time say, wow, the journey was crazy. It was hard. It's not been easy. I've got a really small team and we do a lot of work, but it's for a good outcome.

Milly Pelmore: And what advice would you give to aspiring leaders within the sector, whether that's within the traditional bodies or somebody branching out on their own tech, sports tech venture? What advice would you give to those who are fighting for the more diverse, more equality?

Born Barikor: Yeah. Really find out what your mission and purpose is and just do it for what you believe in. I mentor quite a few people and PTs and personal trainers and sometimes it can be ego. So what I try and say is, if you take your product and you wasn't you, would you want to take part in it. It's quite a hard thing for someone new to do because automatically when you start something, you almost want it to be an extension of you. So you call it, I don't know, Gary's Gym or whatever it is. And it's great if your name's Gary and you want to... But it's one of those things where it's hard to teach. It's hard to teach someone to say, you want to create something where it is, when you're not there people can still buy into it because they understand the ethos of the organization. So if I can take anything away, I'd say just have a look at what you're trying to achieve and

have a look at the audience that you're trying to appeal to. And does your product, brand or service meet their needs if you were out of the equation?

Milly Pelmore: I think that's a really important point there about building your team around you, but also your team of those that you're trying to support. And not just assuming that, because I would do this, that everybody else is going to do that. And having to bring in people from all different aspects of whatever your service or product is to ensure that it really does cater for those that you think you're trying to support rather than just something that you would've liked as a kid. I think that's a really important point.

Born Barikor: Yeah. No, definitely.

Alex Zurita: Powerful. Yeah. I love that. Thank you so much for being so open, sharing so much. Love the short phrases that really brought up some of the points. So yeah, really, really thank you for joining us. You're not off the hook yet because we like to finish the podcast on a quick fire round of your chosen topic and your chosen topic is...

Born Barikor: Athletics.

Alex Zurita: Athletics. So we are going to ask you as many questions as possible in 60 seconds. And then if you get a question, right, you get a point and then we're going to accumulate how many points you get and then you'll be competing against, competing in loose terms, against other guests during our first season. So are you ready?

Born Barikor: Yeah. All good.

Alex Zurita: Good. Okay. Here we go.

Alex Zurita: Which event is the second last or penultimate event of the decathlon?

Born Barikor: 1500.

Alex Zurita: Javelin. Who achieved our world record of 9:58 seconds for the hundred meetings Berlin in 2009.

Born Barikor: Usain Bolt.

Alex Zurita: Correct. Which Sally was a world record hurdler and a 1992 Olympic champion.

Born Barikor: Gunnell.

Alex Zurita: Correct. What sequence do the three steps of the triple jump go in?

Born Barikor: Hop, step, jump.



Alex Zurita: Correct. How many hurdles are there in the men's 110 hurdle sprint?

Born Barikor: 10.

Alex Zurita: Correct. How many false starts are heptathletes allowed in track events before they are disqualified?

Born Barikor: Two.

Alex Zurita: Incorrect, one. Name a high jump technique used by elite athlete.

Born Barikor: [inaudible 00:44:00].

Alex Zurita: Correct. In inches, how tall are the women's barriers in the 3000 meters steeple chase event

Born Barikor: 100

Alex Zurita: 30 inches.

Alex Zurita: Time, time.

Born Barikor: Inches and centimeters. Oh, come on.

Milly Pelmore: That was brilliant.

Alex Zurita: That was good. My heart is pounding and I was only reading it let alone you answering it. That is it. Thank you very much, everyone. Born, very cool.

Born Barikor: Ah, thank you. Thanks for having me guys.

Milly Pelmore: Alex.

Alex Zurita: Millie.

Milly Pelmore: What an episode. So much to take away from Born there. I think some of the things that struck me, even pre-COVID, Born was so driven by his values and the things that he wanted to create. And it really shows through his passion for Our Parks. When he was talking about his children and the importance of play that really struck me. And I think as adults, we sometimes lose that. And it's really important that with whatever we are doing, we enjoy it. So I really liked that part of his story. Some of the key things for me that came out were about having someone in your corner. So he talked about him and his friends as a kid, seeing the tennis court and wanting to climb over and the caretaker that could have told them to never come back. But actually he went, come back the next day and he'd laid out the rackets and balls.

Milly Pelmore: And that really struck me. But more so perhaps the importance of mutual value and the co-creation with both the partners, but also the Parkers that he's providing the service for. And how important it is that when we create something, we are involving the people we're creating it for. Everything we do has to be with the audience and not just for them. Another thing I think that came out really strongly and we're seeing across the sector is how important the data side of it is. And how important it is to help focus your product and service. But also then demonstrate particularly in a world where funding is so important, really using that to evidence, the impact that you are having.

Alex Zurita: Yeah. I think those are absolutely brilliant points. I was inspired by the conversation. I love the point around surround yourself, in essence, with people that are better than you, know more than you. He also touched on a bit around if someone had a better idea than him, there was no ego. There was a really open approach to, do you know what, I understand that perhaps what I was putting on the table wasn't as well-formulated or as well-thought through, or there was just a better offer on the table. And that is for the best of Our Parks or Parkers or the sector. Lots of one words in there that were really, really inspiring around the lack of fear for failure, failing quickly, learning from failure, putting the use of the participant really at the core of what you are providing. The service, ultimately that you are providing. Even though it is a physical activity, that's still a service.

Alex Zurita: And the last point was around the potential negative impact of those first instances. So that tennis court example, if that caretaker would have said, do you know what come back tomorrow and I can open it for you. That could have had a massive impact on then what happens thereafter? But I suppose that has lived with him and Our Parks thereafter, that there's so much of an effort to creating positive first experience so that the individual, that Parker, then continues to love what they're doing, love who they're doing something with, are interested to continuously doing it. So I really hope that people have enjoyed that as much as we have. And if you have enjoyed it, do please subscribe, download, share this on your social platforms and leave us a comment on whatever is your preferred podcast platform. Don't forget to tune in for another episode and to hear from another amazing leader within our sector. And of course, talking in all things sport, tech and leadership. Thank you.