Novie Craven: You are listening to the Inclusion Revolution Radio. I'm your podcast host, Novie Craven. I'm a Special Olympics DC athlete and a Special Olympics International employee. On this podcast I interview athletes, partners, ambassadors, employees and supporters of Special Olympics. This podcast is for anyone and everyone who's interested in Special Olympics and the work that we do. New episodes premiere every other Friday at 10:00 AM Eastern Standard Time anywhere you get your podcast.

Novie Craven: You're listening to the seventh episode of season five of the Inclusion Revolution Radio podcast. My name is Novie Craven. I'm your host for today's episode. Today we'll be talking with Special Olympics Southern California athlete Ashley Singleton and her brother, Denver Broncos linebacker and Special Olympics celebrity supporter Alex Singleton. Welcome Ashley and Alex to Inclusion Revolution podcast. We are so excited to have you here today.

Alex Singleton: Thank you for having us.

Ashley Singleto...: Yeah, thank you for having us on here.

Novie Craven: No problem at all. Ashley started her Special Olympics journey at age eight and has not stopped since. Fantastic. That's fantastic. Ashley's favorite sport is swimming and she actually started swimming before she could even walk. That is tremendously... That is just overwhelming. Definitely it is. You must be really proud of her, Alex.

Alex Singleton: I am. It's the coolest thing ever. She's kicked my butt before. We did a swimming thing one time and she beat me and yeah, I mean she's been doing it forever. It's the most fun thing to go support, is her and her swimming.

Novie Craven: Sweet. Ashley's favorite sport is swimming. She actually started swimming before she could walk, which is why Ashley became a gold medalist. Winning at swimming is no surprise. When she's not competing, she's constantly cheering on her friends, teammates, she made through Special Olympics. Ashley's younger brother is Denver Broncos linebacker Alex Singleton. Originally signed by Seattle as an undrafted free agent in 2015, Alex played three seasons in the Canadian Football League before he joined the Eagles during the 2019 training camp. He now plays a dominating linebacker for the Denver Broncos and recently resigned for a three-year deal with Broncos. Congratulations.

Alex Singleton: Thank you.

Novie Craven: That's huge. You must be really proud of him, Ashley.

Ashley Singleto...: Yes, I am very proud of him. He was signed back to the Broncos.

Novie Craven: Alex's inspiration for getting involved with Special Olympics came from his sister Ashley. Alex first volunteered with Special Olympics at age 15 and has been extremely involved in the movement. That's tremendously amazing. Wow. Ashley, can you tell me more about how you got involved with Special Olympics and watch swimming is your favorite sport?

Ashley Singleto...: I got involved in Special Olympics since was eight. I first started with track and started with gymnastics and swimming and bowling and soccer when I was brought up, and I competed since and I haven't stopped but now I'm still swimming with Special Olympics right now.

Alex Singleton: And why is swimming your favorite?

Ashley Singleto...: The reason why swimming is my favorite sport because I part fish and I'm funny and I really love swimming, because that's why it's my favorite sport.

Novie Craven: Alex, what about football drew you to the sport?

Alex Singleton: Oh man, my whole, everyone in my family, my dad, my uncles, my grandpa, everybody played football growing up and so when I was seven years old they put me into tackle football and I loved it from the first day I was there. So that's why I've stuck with it and obviously been able to make a job out of it, which makes it even more special.

Novie Craven: What has been the most exciting Special Olympics experience for you both individually and together?

Ashley Singleto...: I know we did live workouts in the garage with Special Olympics, and we did level ones and two and threes with our buddies or [inaudible 00:04:49], but they want to do it. And we also did a lot of our talking on the video on sports... On Sportsnet, on the TV. We did a lot of things together, we're involved in Special Olympics.

Alex Singleton: Yeah, we got to be featured on ESPN for it, which was pretty cool. And then also we traveled when I was playing in Canada, we got to go up to the Yukon in the middle of winter. It was minus 40 the whole time and support their indoor soccer, which was a really cool experience.

Novie Craven: Alex, what are the biggest differences between Canadian Football League and the NFL? How did the experience help you transition to the NFL?

Alex Singleton: Yeah, I would say the biggest differences one, there's 12 players on the field in Canada and there's only 11 in the NFL. The field is bigger in Canada. They have a center line and then two 50 yard lines next to it. The end zones are also 20 yards, and the goal post in front of the end zone, not in the back.

Novie Craven: Repeat yourself please.

Alex Singleton: Yes, there is... The goalpost is in the front and the end zone is 20 yards and then the middle of the field they have a center line, which is the 55 yard line. So they have two 50 yard lines, so it's 110 yards instead of a hundred yards.

Novie Craven: That would be, that's be really confusing. Coming in playing start... You started off playing Canadian football, football, right? And then you transitioned to the NFL.

Alex Singleton: Yeah, so it helped though because I learned just different ways but I became more mature and confident playing up there because I was young coming out of Montana State. So going there and kind of learning to be the player I was really helped me transition from the CFL to the NFL and then to be able to stick in the NFL.

Novie Craven: Is it harder being in the NFL or is it easier being in the NFL?

Alex Singleton: Oh man, they're both really hard. There's not a lot of guys playing professional football for a living, but definitely, I mean sticking in the NFL is a little bit harder.

Novie Craven: Ashley, what is something, what more people should know about Special Olympics athletes?

Ashley Singleto...: For Special Olympics athletes? We all compete and we are doing that and we do a lot with special athletes.

Novie Craven: Sweet. I'll piggyback on that part. Me being an athlete myself, of course we love to compete, we love to make new friends, like you and Alex, and definitely just having this organization just says a whole lot about how people with and without disabilities can do amazing things together, and trust and believe, we can do anything. I mean, the doctors told me when I was little, you're not going to be able to walk, not able to talk, you're not going to be able to do anything. I'm sitting here talking to you guys doing a podcast, and things like that, and definitely that says a whole lot for this organization. Not as a whole but definitely became family and definitely, Ashley, I know you'll go far, because with a brother like Alex, you will definitely go far.

Ashley Singleto...: Yes.

Novie Craven: You recently attended, attended Super Bowl media row in Arizona as an advocate for Special Olympics. Can you tell listeners a bit about media row and your role? I love to hear about the interviews that you took part in with Special Olympics athletes as a [inaudible 00:08:49].

Alex Singleton: Yeah, it was an incredible time. I got to work with two really special athletes from Arizona, so they got to come down to Super Bowl media row and we got to go around to all the different media outlets from all over the country and not only talk about my football career, but we got to talk about Special Olympics, the Inclusion Revolution, the unified school programs and just how what Special Olympics is able to do and bring people together in the community using school and being able to stop all the negative things that happen in schools from bullying and all the things that happen in schools and to, like I said, to be able to unify them and to make every school in America a unified school and to be able to go onto media outlets from almost every city in the country for two days.

It is really cool to be able to share that because you learn, I think a lot of radio personalities get involved with Special Olympics, but just to be able to talk about it even more at them, be on the radio and in their local areas from such obviously a premier place like the Super Bowl media row, I think I had a great time.

It was one of the best times I've ever had, just getting to talk about Special Olympics and what they're able to do specifically and the unified schools and it was really, really special to me and it was really fun to be there.

Novie Craven: Okay. Alex, you first volunteered at Spacial Olympics when you were 15. What about the organization has kept you volunteering for this long?

Alex Singleton: Yeah, I think originally I started to be around my sister and to support her and see her friends compete. But eventually when I left for college and then after that to go to Canada and then to Philadelphia and then to Denver, to me it's something it's so important. It's a community that I think deserves to have the biggest voice in the world. So every time they're the first organization, the first director or person I call when I get to a city is, how can I get involved? What can I do for you guys?

Because just the passion of the athletes, the love the athletes have, the compete the athletes have. I think it's something that I can take, I think I use it more for myself than they use it or that the people that are around and those different organizations use it. It gives me so much. That's why I play football, the smile on my face. It's just because of what those athletes have been able to give to me my entire life, starting with my sister to every single athlete I've met over the, I guess 13, 14 years volunteering now to the 29 years of my life. I think it's really special and it's why I will always be involved in Special Olympics, whether at home with my sister or around the country with everybody else.

Novie Craven: The question is for both of you, how do you inspire each other to be better athletes?

Ashley Singleto...: I inspire them for everybody that we all did together. And I really love being with athletes.

Alex Singleton: And I'll say, I've always said this and it's kind of funny, but it's also true, and it's what something else Special Olympics gives is that my sister's going to be able to compete her entire life in Special Olympics. She's going to be able to get medals her entire life. And it inspires me because I'm only going to be able to play football for so long, and to know I'll always be the second-best athlete in my family no matter what I accomplish, it inspires me to keep going, do what I can as long as I can. But also just seeing her compete and all of that just puts the biggest smile on my face. Like I said earlier, it's the reason I play with a smile and play the way I do, and the passion that no matter what is shown on the field, she can wake up, not be too excited to go to soccer or baseball or swimming, but the second she jumps in the pool or is on the field, is so happy and it's just something that has been able to push me in my career.

Novie Craven: Alex, playing in the NFL is the highest level of success for an athlete. What tips would you give a Special Olympics athlete who wants to be successful in their own sport?

Alex Singleton: To believe in themselves. I think you kind of summed it up when you said doctors told you you wouldn't be able to walk, you wouldn't be able to talk, you wouldn't be able to do all these things. But, you know, you believed in yourself and you found an organization that would help you and give you the resources and the place to be yourself and compete in the sports that you wanted to compete in. And I think that's what I would tell everybody to do, believe in what they want to do. And you'll be able to do it, especially with an organization like Special Olympics. They'll give you the opportunities to be able to do that at whatever level it is and to believe in it and always, always play it with a smile because sports are too fun to ever play angry. So I would say that as well, to play them as happy as you can, no matter, no matter what. Win or lose.

Novie Craven: And definitely sometimes, we just had our basketball season and we came in last place, but we got a ribbon. But of course it was like, okay, well we played behind often and we really wanted to get that medal but definitely get a ribbon. It's like, okay, well you just got to suck it up and get it.

Alex Singleton: Oh yeah. And you still had fun though, right?

Novie Craven: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Alex Singleton: That's all that matters right there.

Novie Craven: Have you guys seen the movie Champions yet?

Ashley Singleto...: Actually I saw that last night with my couple of my friends.

Novie Craven: Sweet. You liked it?

Ashley Singleto...: Yes.

Novie Craven: I know. It's amazing. I mean, you have your whole, have the whole Denver Broncos organization go see that movie, Alex. It's that good.

Alex Singleton: I will. I'm back in three weeks.

Novie Craven: It's that good. I'm telling you. It's that good.

Alex Singleton: I'm excited. When I saw the previews for it, I got all excited so I can't wait to see it.

Novie Craven: Sweet. Ashley, I've read that you cheer that cheering on your friends is a favorite part of being an athlete. Besides being a swimmer, can you tell me why cheering and being a consistent fan is so important?

Ashley Singleto...: It's because I like cheering on my friends, because they do a very good job at what they do and I really love seeing them doing that.

Novie Craven: In a few words, can you both answer the question: what does inclusion mean to you?

Ashley Singleto...: Inclusion means that other people can do it too, if on the Special Olympics.

Alex Singleton: I like that. I think inclusion is bringing everyone together. No matter what abilities or disabilities, whatever it is, including everybody, I think it speaks for itself. Yeah.

Novie Craven: Thank you Ashley and Alex for joining Inclusion Revolution podcast. It was great to talk to you today about your experience in the NFL and with Special Olympics. We appreciate all the work that you continue to do for the Inclusion Revolution.

Novie Craven: Thank you for listening to the Inclusion Revolution Radio. Don't forget to subscribe. Tune in again in two weeks for a new episode.