Spotlight Session & Special Olympics Episode 5

**Intro:** [00:00:00] What's your story? What does accessibility mean to you?

**Josh:** Hello and welcome to another episode of the special edition of the Inclusion Revolution Radio collaboration with accessiBe's Spotlight Sessions. The Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023 have officially begun! We're so excited to be speaking with a guest today that is at the Games supporting all of the amazing athletes.

My name is Josh Basile, I'm your co-host for today's show. I'm a C four five quadriplegic, paralyzed below my shoulders, and a power wheelchair user. I'm the community relations manager at accessiBe and a passionate disability rights advocate and trial attorney focused on breaking down barriers to access and inclusion for people with [00:01:00] disabilities.

**Novie:** I'm Novie Craven, your other co-host for today's show. I'm a proud Special Olympics athlete and employee of Special Olympics International. I play bocce, basketball and just about any other sport you could think of. I love Special Olympics and the work our organization does to promote friendship, respect and of course inclusion.

**Josh:** Today we will be talking with a familiar guest of the show, Drew McIntyre.

Drew is a WWE superstar and Special Olympics Champion Ambassador. His work in and out of the ring has propelled him to the top of WWE fame and into the hearts of Special Olympics athletes across the globe. Thank you so much for joining us today, Drew, and welcome to the Inclusion Revolution podcast.

**Drew:** Thank you very much for having me back on the podcast. I'm very excited to be talking with y'all. Seeing you again, Novie, meeting you Josh, and being here in Berlin right now with the World Games. It's very exciting.

**Novie:** We're so excited to have you [00:02:00] back on the show. We last spoke in 2022. Tell us more about what life has looked like over the past year?

**Drew:** Ooh, my goodness. It has been a lot been going on for me the past year. Let's see. Where do I start? WrestleMania was very exciting. We were in Los Angeles. We had an incredible amount of people over two days, almost 80,000 people each day. Like 160,000 people attend in WrestleMania and I had a match with Seamus, my good buddy I've known since I was 19 and he's 47 at the time. He's only like 63 now. He's much, much, much older than me. We go way back, but he goes way back to the dinosaur time. He's the only person with an autograph copy of the Bible and doing third and a continental champion. So we had a triple threat match and it's a match I'm very proud of.

We got to meet such cool people at the WrestleMania event and the events [00:03:00] around WrestleMania and the unified events, which is my favorite time with all our primary live events. Whenever we could have unified events in the area, WrestleMania was no different. I am at a little time off since then. It's been weird cuz we are 52 weeks a year in WWE.

We never stopped. I got to be home for a while. I think people are starting to miss me. Social media tells me, so maybe it's about time Drew McIntyre shows back up in WWE sometime soon. And my cat is a little better and if everyone wants to know out there, Novie I've still got the cards in my bag.

It's actually a different hotel. I would be showing them on screen right now. I planned to show them on screen, but, I carry the cards with me, so I appreciate the thoughts, but he's still fighting right now. So any thoughts and positive energy anybody's got for Chaz, please send him his way.

**Novie:** Sweet, awesome. I was literally my voice in WrestleMania when your music hit, my mom had to come in my room and say, pipe it down. I said, Drew's on! but [00:04:00] she said, pipe it down, even though he's on, you gotta pipe it down.

**Drew:** I think I heard you from the ring.

I really,

**Novie:** At one point I thought you really had him. You know, definitely. I was just, I can't stand,

**Drew:** I think it was my most physical match of all. I may not have.

**Novie:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. But you were truly made,

**Drew:** never had a more physical match in my life. Shamus and I may have had to lie down afterwards as soon as we got backstage each...

**Novie:** yeah. So I saw that picture Uhhuh, but you did it too,

**Drew:** For the entertainment of everybody else, so I'm glad everyone enjoyed it.

**Novie:** Yeah. So my, I was, I think I lost my voice after that match. You did a phenomenal job with that match.

**Drew:** Thank you.

**Novie:** In March you toured our new headquarters office at the Watergate. What were your first impressions?

**Drew:** My first impressions were just how incredible the headquarters were and they're beautiful.

And I got the, the whole tour, but the coolest part was meeting the team, meeting all the athletes who were there, who are also dedicated to the inclusion revolution and [00:05:00] was seeing some familiar faces like yourself, Novie, and meeting some new people and meeting, you know, the leaders. I am that are pushing this movement worldwide.

So it was very cool to be right there at ground zero when it all happens.

**Novie:** Sweet. And Ricardo and Donna, Ricardo and Donna really we're really excited to meet you and can't thank you enough how much you really have helped, not just them, but also myself included, but other athletes included it, but definitely they just wanted to say thank you so much for all you do and continue to do your amazing work.

**Drew:** I always appreciate it. Appreciate it. Thanks. But it works both ways. At WWE, we always say we're there to put smiles on faces. It's not just a motto we just say, but also it's a bit selfish because every time I meet athletes like yourselves, I come away with the biggest smile on my face.

**Josh:** And Drew, can you tell us a little bit more about the continued partnership with Special Olympics and tell us how [00:06:00] that's continued to grow over time?

**Drew:** I mean, it's such a privilege to partner with organizations like Special Olympics who change the face of sport to insure sports available for everybody, no matter what your ability and background is. And I mentioned that we're all about putting smiles on faces and inspire the impossible, but it's athletes like Novie who inspire me to be the superstar that I am.

It's cool to play a superhero on tv, but when you meet the athletes, you meet some real life superheroes, so that's pretty cool too.

**Josh:** That's awesome. And can you talk a little bit about what it means to represent the WWE at the Special Olympics World Games Berlin?

**Drew:** This is amazing, and this is something that I have a bucket list, but things keep coming up and being created that I didn't even realize were on my bucket list because I never thought of them until now.

Like, being here and getting to, to walk out with Team Great [00:07:00] Britain and be part of that opening ceremony. I've heard so many cool things about the opening ceremony. I've seen videos of how incredible the opening ceremonies are, but I'm gonna be right there in the middle of it, getting to experience it. And, you know, when it comes to my role in WWE's role being with Special Olympics, for me personally, this is one of the coolest things of my life. Like, I'm a, I'm a husband, I'm a cat dad. I'm a WWE superstar. And I'm a Champion Global Ambassador for Special Olympics, and that is one of my coolest titles.

**Novie:** Amazing, amazing answer. What are you looking forward to most while at World Games?

**Drew:** Everything, if that's an answer. There's, I've already just started like I landed this morning and got straight into it, straight to meeting boards of directors and everybody involved with putting the event together and hearing about.

The plans for the future. And it's just amazing the growth rate of [00:08:00] Special Olympics over these past few years and it's still not enough that we wanna keep growing and growing and growing, but it's so impressive to see those facts and figures in front of my eyes, so that's been a great start to hear so many, you know, positive things and I just can't wait to start meeting the athletes, seeing everybody in person.

Everyone's worked so hard. To make it to the games. They're the best of what they do. So I can't wait to shake everybody's hand. And of course, like I said, walk out there with team Great Britain and I would walk out with anybody if they let me on the field. I'd sneak onto the field if I had to, but I guess I've gotta pass.

Guess they're gonna allow me and get to see that opening ceremony up close. Cause that's the thing everyone's been talking about. It's that opening ceremony. So I'm absolutely buzzing for it.

**Josh:** Drew, can you share a little bit about what WWE has done to make venues more accessible and how online content is created to reach fans with and without disabilities?

**Drew:** Yeah, I mean, I think I mentioned earlier, that [00:09:00] we're 52 weeks a year, no reruns, no off season. WWE never stops. We're not just America. We're worldwide and we partner, we're proud to partner with the best facilities there is with the most modern accessibility to all of our WWE universe as we like to call 'em the fans, no matter what their disability is.

And we wanna make sure all of our fans can access a program whether it's from the comfort of their home, going to live event. Our Premier live event like WrestleMania, we have massive global appeal. We've currently more, it always blows me away when I hear this number, more than a billion social media followers across all of our online platforms, and our fans can enjoy access to unlimited content from now, from decades and decades ago.

Up to the minute action interviews. And it's just unreal. Like for me personally, I'm still such a fan, even though I'm a superstar and I love how much content we have, and I sit there around all day long until my wife tells me enough wrestling, Drew, you need to do something else. Cause I'm so addicted to it and I'm [00:10:00] glad all of our fans across the world have got that access right at their fingertips.

And this year there was a really cool moment of WrestleMania. You know, I love my entrance with the sword and setting fire off and everybody gets a special entrance. But this year, John Cena had the best one of all, he had, I believe it was 21 Make-A-Wish kids on stage with them. They got to have the WrestleMania moment and be part of Cena's entrance at WrestleMania in front of 80,000 people.

But on the flip side, it was a WrestleMania moment for everybody watching cuz that was such a special moment with all the kids and John on stage.

**Novie:** Yeah, Bianca, I heard Bianca. It also had a amazing

**Drew:** Oh, her entrance, yeah, was amazing

**Novie:** With the dance program and one of, I think one of the kids had just lost her mother like before, before she went on the show.

That was just amazing to have. Yeah. That was just amazing. See how

**Drew:** she still, she was absolutely incredible and again a WrestleMania moment for her, something she'll never forget. A tribute to her mother, but also for [00:11:00] everyone watching that's a WrestleMania moment we're witnessing right there along with all the spectacular moves and moments like what she did is a WrestleMania moment.

**Novie:** Is there anything you learned from working with Special Olympics that you bring to WWE in order to create a more accessibility experience?

**Drew:** Positivity, I guess, I have to say I've been guilty of sometimes in the past being a little negative and like if you're just like feeling a little down, feeling negative and you face the day feeling kinda negative, you're never gonna find the positivity.

But if you're feeling a little negative and you try and find the positivity, you've got a good chance that day's gonna turn out positive. And since I've been working with Special Olympics, it's been like meeting the athletes, their positivity, no matter what situation they're in. I've been found myself being more positive in general.

And no matter wake up each day, I'm so excited to tackle the day and I don't let little silly [00:12:00] things bring me down like I used to in the past. And I feel so fortunate that WWE has not only been partnered with Special Olympics for decades, but I've personally been involved for so long. It's something that's got a special place in my heart.

I remember when I asked, can I get involved in the community area of WWE, cause I really wanna make a difference. And we started trying to find where I would fit in and when Special Olympics was brought to me and growing up, those that know my story, like my mother was looked at differently.

She had cerebellar ataxia where she was a, a balanced disorder. Like her hands would shake her eyes with kinda twitch and people would treat her differently just because of her disorder. It wasn't like an intellectual disability, but i remember the feeling of people treating her different till they got to know her.

And when I heard I had work Special Olympics and you know, people look at the athletes a certain way and people intellectual disabilities a certain way until they get speaking with them and being around them. And that really spoke to me and being able to work so closely with the athletes for so long [00:13:00] work on things like the hashtag Challenge accepted and the School of Strength, of course.

And finally get together with all the events. Like I can't tell you how much positivity I have in my world now. It's 24/7 these days. Thanks to that relationship.

**Novie:** Well, I can't say enough how you dedicate your, you name your sword off your mother. That's just definitely dedication too. But also that's also a part of you because you know, she's always with you and you know, when you have matches that you win, you have matches when you lose, you always have her with you. So that's just amazing to have just a, not a weapon, but a personal thing to you to have with you every time you get on, every time you get in the ring, or every time you get out of the ring. And definitely that's always wants to care, be with you all, all along. So definitely that means a whole lot. And when I tell people, say, do you know that he names his sword [00:14:00] after his mother? They're like, he did? I'm like, yes. You know, and you know, definitely that says a whole lot. I can't commend you enough for naming your sword after your mother.

**Drew:** Thank you. Yeah, it is really cool.

Like, I love when the commentators say, when I'm coming with the sword like a crazed person. Drew and Angela are hitting the ring, so it's like we're in there as a tag team , or Angela saves Drew from certain obliteration from the bloodline or whatever a particular group are trying to attack me.

It's fun that Angela, my mother was the equalizer and she always was when I was younger.

**Novie:** She wouldn't put up with Roman. I know that for sure. She wouldn't put up with Roman.

**Drew:** Oh, Roman. Oh my goodness. So how many days he had the titles now? 9,999.

**Novie:** Yeah, he did, he just, they just celebrated it over his celebration...

**Drew:** A thousand days, I believe.

**Novie:** Yeah. Yeah. And Jimmy, and Jimmy crashed the [00:15:00] party. But I can talk to you offline about that, but mm-hmm. That was interesting.

**Drew:** Dont worry, I've still got my eyes on him.

**Novie:** Mm-hmm. I know, for sure, right

**Josh:** and so much of what you're saying Drew about positivity. It can go so far. It can go take people so in such beautiful directions.

You know, a healthy dose of focus on gratitude can truly change your attitude. And it can really make all the difference. And I know with WWE, you guys do such an amazing job of reaching fans of all backgrounds, all abilities. How is it that the WWE is so successful in captivating such a diverse audience?

**Drew:** I mean, there's just something for everybody with WWE. You know, we've got our larger than life personas and superstars and it doesn't matter who you are or walk life you're from, there's one of these characters that's gonna connect with you, [00:16:00] and hopefully grab your attention. And the fun thing about it is you don't always need the volume on. The commentaries are great, they add to the stories, etcetera. But you can be anywhere in the world and turn off the volume and watch WWE and understand what's going on. So we're putting on these performances through our physical and actions in the ring and the way the live crowd respond to us. They're such an important part.

Of our product, they're our number one superstars. You could turn, turn the volume off, but turn the commentators off, or you could not understand the commentators and you could follow everything going on, and you could be watching ricochet one minute doing these incredible flips. And having you like standing out, clapping your hands and the next minute you've got giant, like almost a seven foot three, like, oh my goodness, look at that man lift up Bianca and Raya, for example.

The two females are such incredible performers from different backgrounds, just inspiring the future generations. And if you look across our roster, we're so diverse now. When it comes to absolutely every area, it is so cool cause I've been there since [00:17:00] 16 years ago, but it wasn't the case and when the females weren't represented the way they are now, and it's so amazing to see how far we've come.

**Josh:** Thank you for that. And it's just, I'm just so grateful that you've traveled thousands of miles to be in Berlin to do, to be present, to be, to actually, you know, believe in something and get behind it and spread the word about it, which. You know, it's changing lives, it's changing perspectives, and I'd love to know what advice you have for other brands and other sports leagues like the WWE, to develop meaningful connections with organizations that promote inclusivity, like the Special Olympics.

What can they do better?

**Drew:** Hmm. I mean, for a lot of them it's just taking the first step. Like with WWE, we are all about giving back and partnering with more organizations like the Special Olympics, that's part of our DNA. It's part of who we are as a brand and [00:18:00] we're all about making real change in the world we live in. And I feel like everybody should be feeling that way. And I believe a lot of sports leagues can learn a lot from the Special Olympics and its athletes, such as the power of inclusion drive, perseverance. So that's what makes exceptional. Athlete and individual, but for a lot of them, just take a seconds, look at specialolympics.org. Look at some of the facts. Check out the Healthy Athletes screening. You know, I was blown away when I saw some of the facts and figures about like one in 10 of our athletes, how they're affected physically and how doctors.. who you assume people with intellectual disabilities would get equal care or better care than people.

It's the exact opposite. And that was mind blowning to me. And I've been working with Special Olympics for a couple of years when I learned those facts and figures ,so if they'll take a minute to just learn those facts and figures learn, Hey, we all deserve equal treatment. We all deserve to be seen as equal, then the companies can maybe start. Taking a step in the right direction. Just like [00:19:00] WWE.

**Josh:** That's, it's so well said. Take taking that first step is you can think about doing good all you want, unless you're willing to like, take that first step and do something about it. You know, we're, we're living in the past without that first step. So thank you for taking many steps.

**Drew:** Oh, I'm sprinting to this point. I'm so happy to do it. So excited to do it. I wasn't gonna miss the games no matter what. I've been looking forward to it. Unfortunately know my wife was supposed to be here. She was looking forward to the games, but she lost her sister a few weeks ago. So it's been a difficult time for her family.

**Josh:** Sorry about that.

**Drew:** But she was very encouraging. I had to be here for the weekend, and I wanted to be here to support everybody, support the cause, and support the athletes.

**Novie:** Drew, I'm thinking of you and your family during your tough time. You definitely know that you've got not just me, other athletes in your corner. So you know, if you're feeling down, you've got millions of millions of athletes that will [00:20:00] definitely cheer you up, you know..

**Drew:** Trust me, they're gonna cheer me up over the weekend that were the ones doing the biggest.

**Novie:** Definitely, definitely. I know you've answered this question before, but can you expand on your answer to the question, what does accessibility and inclusion mean to you?

**Drew:** Accessibility to me means access and availability to all. Like there are no exclusions. We're in this together. We are one and we are unified. Heck yeah.

**Novie:** Thank you Drew for joining today's episode of Inclusion Revolution Radio podcast and the Spotlight Sessions Collaboration. As usual, you're crushing everything in your path.

Even this interview, we can't tell you enough how much your support of inclusion and accessibility means to us.

**Drew:** I really appreciate you all for taking the time, having me on again, and it is always good to see you Novie, awesome to [00:21:00] meet you, Josh. Keep doing what y'all are doing and keep your eye out on the TV for the, the giant man with the ponytail and beard in the opening ceremony running around like a crazy person and the world's largest cheerleader during the events.

**Josh:** Love it, Drew, and you can all learn more about accessiBe, Inclusion Revolution Radio and Special Olympics by subscribing on YouTube and following us on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn. Find us using our handles: at accessiBe underscore community and at Special Olympics. Thank you all. Thank you, Drew, and we are looking forward to the next episode.

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