



Episode 31 Transcript

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Brandan Fokken's Wild Fitness Journey

Nick Collias: This feels like conversation here, we should probably start the podcast.

Heather Eastman: I'm pretty sure they're already recording, intend to be recording at this point.

Nick: Hello everyone, welcome to *The Bodybuilding.com Podcast*. On my left, we have [Heather Eastman](#).

Heather: Hello, everyone.

Nick: Across the way here's [Brandan Fokken](#), longtime Bodybuilding.com athlete, personal trainer, cover model, IFBB pro, Dymatize athlete, corporate wellness coordinator?

Brandan Fokken: I actually just left that position.

Nick: Did you? Okay. I wanted to ask you about that. I think it's an interesting, it's interesting thing.

Brandan Fokken: Yeah.

Nick: But, first also you're a new father. We were just discussing with a nine and a half month old? Who is teaching you what true fitness really is?

Brandan Fokken: Nine and a half month old. He's teaching me what *life* really is. He's the light of our lives. He is everything I thought he would be and then everything more. Nothing can really

prepare you for parenthood, being a father and everything until you have one and then you're still ... you have no idea what you're doing every day.

Nick: Every single day.

Brandan Fokken: Yeah. That's the joy of it.

Nick: Except, you know exactly what you do, which is, you're bending over and picking the kid and all the time. Bending over to get everything and so, all of a sudden you're like, "All right, did all those, all that lifting up all these years did it actually translate into me being a more functional human being?"

Brandan Fokken: No, but I am a smarter human being because he can stand on his own, rather than pick him up straight from the floor and make him crawl up my leg, and stand up. It's about a four-inch difference but those four inches are a huge leverage point.

Nick: And, I will point out that Brandon's son also has twenty thousand followers on Instagram. I'm not going to give up the details but I discovered this yesterday. That struck me as kind of wild to have twenty thousand in nine months. That's a pretty steep trajectory.

Brandan Fokken: Yeah, yeah people ... I mean he's overdeveloped I would say. He's ahead of everything. Size-wise, he's already measuring as big as a two and a half year old. I mean just everything else is going to personality, his fun, his mom documents a lot of his life but at the same time he was very difficult for us to have, too. It's not something that we just got pregnant and here he was. It was a long drawn out process to have him. So, our appreciation for him is probably accelerated a little bit more because of that. And, because of that mom literally documents his entire life and people like to see him, I mean he's got a great personality and he's fun. So.

Heather: Yah, he's a happy little baby.

Nick: Cool. Now, you've had a long and varied road through the fitness industry, as well. If you go to Bodybuilding.com, you can see Brandan's story and several of his workouts but I wanted to talk a little bit about where this all started for you, as well. As a kid, who were the icons that you looked up to?

Brandan Fokken: You know, as a kid, I've made no secret. I had a real tough childhood and because of that I found myself fixated on characters like Superman, Hulk Hogan at the time, because they were bigger in life and they were strong. And, because they were strong, they were never hurt. As a little kid, I went through a lot of stuff, no little kid should have to. So, I wanted one of that to be a part of my life. And, along with that, they also did good with their strength and that was something else that attracted me to them.

But, there was a phase from probably four years old to about eight that I tried to flex in every single picture I took-

Nick: This is the Hulk Hogan years?

Heather: The flex years.

Brandan Fokken: I was after it, man, and you could not convince me that I was not strong even at that age and it's something that stuck with me. I just continued on with it. As I got older at the age ... I was a great athlete and played all sports, I moved around a lot, so athletics were how I made friends and when I got to high school I had grown faster than anybody else. I could dunk a basketball, I could outrun anybody, but I was not strong at all. I could not bench press a hundred pounds in my freshman year at high school. In the hierarchy of whose cool, and who's strong is what you can bench press at that age.

I got made fun of, and is something I didn't want to continue to deal with so, I buried my head in MuscleMag and Muscle & Fitness and that's where Mike O'Hearn actually came into my life. He was the biggest model at the time and his workouts were everywhere and I started to follow those and I probably did that for the next five years and over time I continued to bring that into my training protocols as I learned. But, it's funny to look back to that point at the age of fourteen and here I am, friends with Mike today, which is completely crazy for me.

Nick: So, you're following Mike O'Hearn routines when you were fourteen?

Brandan Fokken: Yeah.

Nick: That's wild.

Brandan Fokken: Yeah. I mean obviously, I wasn't lifting anywhere close to him-

Nick: Right. No, but we hear that, too.

Brandan Fokken: The principles of ... what you put out there...

Nick: Jim Stoppani told us a couple weeks ago that he started following old Muscle & Fitness routines like straight up bodybuilder splits when he was like seven. But, those things come to you and you can't control the age at which they come to you, regardless of the amount of weight that you're lifting.

Brandan Fokken: At that point in time, I mean, other than yourself, I was truly convinced I could be just like him. And not until later was I like, "Well, maybe I don't have the genetics or the ability or whatnot, those doubts." But, those doubts are usually cast on you by other people. "Oh, you'll never do this, you'll never do that" or whatever but at that point time, I looked at the magazines and thought, "Well, you know, I want to be like that. So, that's what I'm going to shoot for."

Nick: Sure.

Brandan Fokken: Mike has about three inches on me and about forty pounds still, but-

Nick: But Hulk Hogan had that on everybody.

Brandan Fokken: Yes.

Heather: Yeah, right!

Nick: I think it's, yeah you got me going down the Hulk Hogan rabbit hole recently. But, when I grew

up, Hulk Hogan was, he was everything to a little kid like me and now, I feel like he's lost a ton of the luster just because he's a human being, he has this whole sordid reality TV thing going on or whatever over the last twenty years but when we were growing up, he was like the ultimate force for good. One of the things I remember him saying, he was always, "Yeah, you know each of vitamins, say your prayers." But, he also said, "Train." The first thing he said to kids, "Train, eat your vitamins, say your prayers." He was telling little kids to train. Nobody else was doing that in the '80s.

Heather: Oh, yeah.

Brandan Fokken: That's the unfortunate thing about today. The media is so big that it shows everybody's imperfections. And, as a little kid, he didn't have any to me. I just know when he was getting beat down and whatnot, he would always stand up and shake his head, and shake his arms and then take care whoever it was that was hurting him.

Nick: For me there was only him and Andre the Giant, though, but that was the ultimate. I remember staying up and watching those two and ... Hulk Hogan, he's down, he's down like at the whole world thinks he's down and he comes back up.

Brandan Fokken: And, being that come back always, and he was persevered through that and that was a positive example in my life. That's something that I try to encourage people that you don't realize sometimes how you affect other people. Hulk Hogan will probably never know how he affects me or how he had such an impact in my life. The same thing with you or anybody else. You don't realize just by the normal things that you do day to day, somebody sees that and you may be the reason why they become who they are someday or their biggest inspiration. They may never tell you so, that's a big thing and how I try to live is try to live with a positive example, promote positivity, be humble be kind, and stuff like that because again you never know.

I'm fortunate in this industry that I get to meet so many of these people at expos or they'll write me online and share their stories, which you're very humbled by, and it's incredible to hear some of these things like, "I got through my divorce because of your positivity." Or some darker stories, too. But, that's something that I started learning way back then.

Heather: Yeah, absolutely. Now forgive me, Nick was filling me in on a little bit of your background and he told me you had this horrible, horrible contest prep and we did a video of it on our website but for those who haven't seen it, can you just kind of tell us a little bit about that journey that you went through. He said you almost died.

Brandan Fokken: Yeah. The whole thing's a crazy story. I was in fitness, I didn't start competing 'til I was thirty and I did a few bodybuilding shows and then the physique division came out, and I thought people make fun of me if I did it, because you're wearing board shorts or whatever, and I did it, loved it, and I decided to do a national show, and that was 2011, July, USAs, and picked up a reputable coach, very well-known person that I won't ever name and I follow their protocol to a 'T' and they want to me to burn muscle off because I was coming from bodybuilding to physique. I was absolutely killing myself. I basically went almost no carbs for four months and I was doing two hours of cardio a day, half of that was outside doing HIIT or running outside, and it was ... that summer it was in the 90s all summer.

And then, when I depleted into the contest, was in Vegas, I remember was like a hundred sixteen degrees there, I cut out my water, carb loaded and everything. I remember that morning I was

feeling really weird. My feet were tingly and just wasn't feeling like myself and I never made it to finals that night. My body started locking up on me and in my head I was like, "Oh, everything will be okay."

Nick: It's contest prep.

Heather: Yeah.

Brandan Fokken: I'm over-exerted, it kind of felt how I did after a bodybuilding show because I was flexing and posing the whole time. The next day I was wiped, like my muscles ached and were tightening up on me and it kind of felt like that. So, I was like, "Oh, I'll be fine." So, the next morning I woke up and could barely get out of bed. I remember sitting in my shower because it had a bench. I was just sitting there and my legs were locked up on me and my hands were tingling and I just didn't feel right. But, after a shower, I loosened up, ended up getting on the plane, got home and getting to my car, getting home, I mean was a task.

And I had a roommate at the time and we had dinner, and after dinner I sat down on the floor. I was sitting there for about twenty minutes and I went to get up, and I couldn't get off the floor and I was literally like stuck. Things weren't working, my arms weren't working and I'm like, "I need to go the hospital." So, they took me in the hospital, and right away in the ER, they thought I had a muscle wasting disease, was their first guess and-

Nick: Even though you had obviously tons of muscle on your body.

Brandan Fokken: Yeah, and I had a great spray tan, too. So, I was sitting there and they did all these tests and the guy came back and he said, "Your potassium level is this and you're supposed to be a 3.5 to a 5 to be normal and you're like a 2.6 or 2.2 or something, I can remember what it was exactly, but-

Nick: Well below normal.

Brandan Fokken: It was well below. So, they admitted me and throughout the night they were taking blood draws like every hour, like three blood draws and they're testing everything, they're giving me fluids and potassium and magnesium and all that and nothing was working. My body was rejecting all of it. That next morning, they basically came in and they were told me I was going to die. To hear that, I mean, I was 31?

Nick: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brandan Fokken: 31 years old and be told that you're going to die and I had another doctor come in and tell me you're going to die. And, I had another doctor come in and tell me I was going to die. So, I got used to that at least and, uh ...

Nick: Pretty quick, pretty quick.

Heather: Yeah.

Brandan Fokken: I was actually paralyzed. I couldn't walk or anything. My legs weren't working, my arms weren't. I was really, I was holding a lot of fluid and they kept coming back in the same my

body was rejecting everything and-

Nick: Did they have any sort of reason that they were giving up at that point?

Brandan Fokken: They were trying to figure it out. So, they were working with another hospital-

Nick: But, until we know, it's just, on the safe side, so you're going to die.

Brandan Fokken: Yes.

Heather: Yeah.

Brandan Fokken: Let's just-

Nick: Let's just tell you that.

Brandan Fokken: Let's just scare the hell outta ya. Let's get the cortisol levels going, heart rate going.

Heather: Yep.

Brandan Fokken: So, my body was basically in chaos. I got put on insulin, my heart rate was through the roof, my blood pressure was through the roof, magnesium, potassium, vitamin B, vitamin D, were all basically stripped from my body. Then a priest came in and basically prayed over me and didn't necessarily give me last rites but it was close enough for me. And, he left, when he left, I started blacking out and panicked. Kind of had a panic attack and in my head I thought, "Okay, I'm dying. This is it." And, I thought of all the things that I hadn't done. I wasn't married and have kids or anything and all I said in my head whether you're religious or not, all I said is, "God, if I get out of here I'll do good." That's all I said.

Another doctor came in and said, "Well, we talked with another hospital, we think you have Refeeding Syndrome, which is where essentially your body is treating you like an anorexic. So, when I started eating carbohydrates and sugar, my body was spilling nutrients to create body fat. So, it just spilled, spilled, spilled. That spilled so fast that my body couldn't catch up with it. So, that's what they diagnosed me with.

I've known other athletes to have had the same thing. I know another female that, she came even closer than I did to dying. She spent three months in the hospital and she still has to wear a heart monitor today because of it. They said because I had such a strong heart, that's partially why I made it through. So, they ended up putting me in the pulmonary unit, which everybody in there is ninety, just so you know, and then there was me, they put a PICC line through my bicep into my heart to give me fluids faster and I did that for the next six days. I was on a special diet, I was ... you name it. I ended up getting out of there.

When I got out of there, in my head I'm like, "I'm never competing again. This is crazy, blah blah blah. I could barely walk. I had to go the doctor every day for tests. Just to test everything and as I was walking down the street by my house, I just said in my head, I said, "Now what?" And, literally that night, Muscle and Fitness magazine called me and said I won their online model contest and they wanted me to compete at the Olympia. I said in my head, I'm like, "Okay, that's in five weeks.

Talk to my doctors, talk to-

Heather: Five weeks?

Brandan Fokken: Five weeks. Yeah. I talked to my doctors, talk to my coach at the time because I'd switched to my previous coach which I had worked with before and I just said, "What do you think? My doctor said, "Well you can do it, we just need to monitor you." So, I had to go in like every other day for those five weeks and get blood draws to monitor me. I couldn't exert myself for the first few weeks. So, in three weeks, I got ready and did the model contest. There was 84 guys, and I took third, out of 84.

It was my first big expo. Craziest thing I'd ever seen was the Olympia and first person I met was Greg Plitt who's passed, and the thing that surprised me was Greg treated me like I was part of the group. Like I was a somebody. I don't ever, I mean I'm a guy from South Dakota. I haven't done anything and he was really encouraging and he was really great and I was like, "Wow, that was such a great experience." I literally turned and walked over to the Bodybuilding.com booth and I had been following Bodybuilding.com for years, been on [BodySpace](#), I think since like 2007.

I had been watching a lot of Jamie Eason's cooking videos at the time. So, I got in line, the first person I met was Furious Pete and we talked back and forth and I met Kizzito right after him, and I got to Jamie and I got to her and she looked at me and reached out like hug me and thought she knew me and I'm like, "Jamie Eason knows me, like what?"

Nick: Jamie said that you've been eating those turkey muffins. Smelled like turkey muffins...

Brandan Fokken: Yes. But she I thought she recognized me and then I'm like, "I don't know you." We talked back and forth and she just kept telling me she was like, "I really think you could be a part of this industry." Gave me her number, gave me her agent's number and then encouraged me to do the Bodybuilding.com Spokesmodel Contest, which, I made the finals that year and changed my life completely. I could give you the list of things since then, but everything ... there was groundwork laid beforehand, before the hospital and all that but, all the majority of everything I've done in fitness came after that, almost like it happened for a reason, whether you believe in stuff like that or not, but ...

Nick: You had a serious test beforehand though. I mean anybody else would have maybe just run screaming from the whole enterprise. Were you waiting for somebody to come along and say, "You cannot do this. This is just ..."

Brandan Fokken: I probably would have done it anyway. I don't know if you'd say *crazy* but I knew what I wanted and fear is probably the most powerful motivator I have. I might have a fear of failure based on how I grew up with a tough childhood. Everybody that I cared about left me. So, I was feared to disappoint people because if I did, they'd leave and I carried that through. Now that I'm older and I understand that, I'm not motivated by the same things, but when I was in the hospital and everything else, that's how I was motivated. So, my fear of ending up there or whatever, it would not have deterred me. It would probably push me but, which it probably ended up doing anyway. But, yeah definitely, a life-changing moment for me, so ...

Nick: So, when your son comes to you one day and says, "I got to do a show." Because, you and your wife both compete.

Heather: Right.

Nick: Dad, mom, I'm doing a show.

Heather: What are you going to say?

Nick: Well, my wife as I'm now, has said she's retired. She concentrates more on the industry stuff and we've had that talk a lot, even with me she doesn't want me to compete anymore and she said, "Isn't being a pro good enough? And, I'm like, "Yeah." In my head I'm like, "No." But with him, I think all the things that we learned about the industry or dieting or training that was wrong—those are the things that we need the lies to protect him. You see these people like me or anybody else, she and I have both been through the no calories, the massive amounts of cardio and everything else. So many people in the industry have gone through that with terrible coaches that just run them into the ground.

So, teaching him there's a better way whether we're counting macros with him or what not, just making sure that he's doing it the right way because there is a right way and there's a wrong way and I've done it the wrong way. I almost lost my life because of it. So, would I be encouraging it? Yeah. If that's something he wants to do. The biggest thing with him, everybody looks at him and because he's so big, they're like "Oh, he's going to be a football player, he's going to be this or that," and before I had him, I would've been always like, "Yeah, that's awesome right?" Now I just want him to be a good person.

So, our biggest thing is, we expose him to the world and we expose him to everything: foods, culture, music, everything people and we want to decide. The biggest thing is, we just want him to be a good person. Competing is part of that then we'll support it.

Brandan Fokken: So, now I know you speak to kids who have rough backgrounds like your own now as well ... What do you what do you tell them about what fitness can actually do? Because, if you think about it, there's a low barrier of entry—anybody can do *some* fitness. It's a way to take control of your life when there is no control, perhaps.

Nick: I've spoke, I was talking to someone about this yesterday ... I've spoke about 90 different engagements currently. So, I do it when I have time or when I'm invited to, and colleges and universities and high schools and I talk to kids that are in lockdown. It's funny how I relate to so many of them and I know when I walk in, I always purposely wear something that is sleeveless or revealing or whatever because as a kid, they're like OMG, like this guy knows what he's talking about!

But, the biggest thing I preach to anybody is that anything's possible and I'm a prime example. I came from the worst background, I went through all these different things. I'm from Sioux Falls, South Dakota—the middle of nowhere. I'm going to be 38 next week. I'm not young for this industry anyway. I've done this later. I found out yesterday I just landed another cover. I was on Iron Man's cover last month. I'm continually growing in an industry that essentially works a lot with younger people. And, if I can do it and if I can do all these things coming from my background, my age, where I'm from and everything else, then I should be a shining example on that they can do. They resonate with that.

Heather: Your story wasn't even perfect. You had that traumatic experience and still came back from that. So, you had the, "He's down, he's down and ..."

Nick: To bring it back to Hulk.

Heather: To bring it back to Hulk.

Brandan Fokken: That's the thing. I'm big on the mental aspect of stuff. If you ever read anything that I write or anything like that, it's the smallest steps that add up to the biggest victories. A lot of times when you take giant leaps forward, and when you fall, you don't know how you got there. I'm the culmination of all the good and all the bad that's ever happened to me. I got to where I am taking small steps. I've never had any giant leaps and I encourage people to be respectful and appreciative of those small steps. Because, the small steps will take them anywhere that they want to go.

Unfortunately, we're all in the world where we want it now. That's why we have drive-thru windows and everything else but if you respect what it is that you want to do enough, respect yourself and you truly want to succeed, learn everything you can along the way. Because, it's going to make you that much better and at the same time, is going to better equip you because the road is never straight, your path is never straight. It's always going to divert, and if you have that skill set leading through that path, when you're diverted, you're not going to freak out and just fall off the path. You're like, "Okay, I'm equipped, ready for this."

Same thing with ... I was talking about leaving my corporate position. And, people like, "Well, why didn't you do it a long time ago or why weren't you doing this or why didn't you do that," because all of the stuff that I learned while I was doing that, while I was competing and coaching on the side and judging and everything else, brought me to where I'm at today and my skillset is completely different now and it's equipped me to do the things that I want to do next. It happens in due time because I respected the process, I left when it was time to leave and now I'm working on some amazing projects that, five years ago I would've had the ability to do. I just wouldn't have been equipped with the skillset to do so.

Nick: Well, and the corporate wellness is a really interesting sort of burgeoning field right now that you've been in for maybe longer than most people are there for what five years at least or-

Brandan Fokken: Seven.

Nick: Seven years?

Brandan Fokken: Yeah.

Nick: So, what was that like and what is it ... what did you take from that as a ... it's not the sort of career that maybe fit people think of, they think, "Oh. I'll be a trainer or whatever, I'll go pro." But, you're trying to share the gospel with a whole different clientele at that point.

Brandan Fokken: Yeah, very different clientele. I started off, I went to school for business marketing and it's funny because I just redid my résumé recently just to have it to give to people. And the guy that I worked with, in my head, I'm all Fitness but in his head he's like, "You're Marketing." With all the brands that I've developed and everything else, and I'm like I guess I never really thought of that. He goes, well, fitness is a big part, but you're this, too.

The thing with corporate wellness, I was originally going to open up my own gym and the guy that owned the company I work for, which was [Poet](#), they're world's largest ethanol bio-refiner. They got 20 locations nationwide. It's the biggest company in South Dakota, multibillion dollar industry. I got to work with a juggernaut of their industry.

Nick: But, just with lots of people to lock me up.

Brandan Fokken: Lots of people, a lot of different people and we were going to open up a gym together and the more I reflected back on corporate wellness, the more I'm like, he didn't have a program where I'm like, "You really should have this." So, what I did is, I went and I studied like Google and Microsoft and all these companies that were on the forefront of that and what they were doing and how people were reacting to it and how their insurance rates change and all that stuff. I put together a big portfolio and he and I were training at the time and afterwards I showed it to him and I said, "Hey, you know this is what I think you should be doing." And, he's a very visual numbers guy and he looked at me, goes, "All right, let's do it."

I just kind of looked around I'm like, "What?" And, before I knew it, I was literally on a company jet to Chicago to Life Fitness to pick out equipment. Through that process, you're working with a completely different clientele because they're engineers, they're scientists, they're not necessarily fitness people.

Heather: Right.

Brandan Fokken: I came from a complete fitness background and gym background, so I had to really change my methodology and how I would train and I would communicate to work with these people.

Nick: Just helping them set expectations, I would think. Like yeah, what expectations did they ... they come in and say, "All right, I want to change my life" or is it like, "You know, I just kinda wanna ..."

Heather: "Just want to move more."

Brandan Fokken: They were all different, and lots of different personalities and just like anywhere else, though, you have to continue to evolve the program. You have to continue to change it and offer new things and classes and have companies come in and do cholesterol checks and heart checks, and you have to have "lunch and learns" and bring people in to speak. You constantly have to keep them vested in your program and you can't not change and have that happen.

So, over 7 years, I continued to do that and we had 28 locations. I ended up building mini-gyms in all those locations. In the last two years I was there, we worked on the nutrition part of it. Worked with vendors, and put kind of like you see here at [Bodybuilding.com](#). They have kind of a health market. And, people can get healthy meals and whatnot and we introduced a spouse program, where spouses could come in for free because it was only a corporate gym and whatnot, those benefits were only for the people that work there but we moved it out to the spouses and lots of success.

The average corporate entity is looking at about 30 to 45 percent of their team members vested in a program and utilizing it and we were I think in the high '80s, people consistently used it day to day.

And that was something I was proud of but at the end of the day, you're building something for somebody else. You have great pride in what it is that you're doing but it can only change so much. You can't continue to grow a program like that. You can continue to change it but you can't continue to grow it.

For me, I'm always looking to the next thing. I kind of equate it to ... you guys ever seen "Napoleon Dynamite?"

Heather: Yes.

Nick: Sure.

Brandan Fokken: You know, Uncle Rico talking about high school all the time. Everybody knows an Uncle Rico. Right? So, this guy is always talking about high school because in his head he thought that that was his greatest moment and he never let himself leave it and that's, where I'm different is whether I get a new cover, whether I land a sponsorship or whatever, I appreciate it for what it is and then I move forward because otherwise you get stuck in your best moment and Poet is a huge part of my life and who I am but it wasn't my greatest moment and I knew that if I didn't leave that I would continue to just exist and do those things and I wasn't creating anything tangible to have and hold for my myself or my family.

Having a son is what I think would have changed my mindset the most because I wanted him to have everything that I didn't. And by me working there he did regardless I had a great salary and everything else, but I wanted the ability also to live on my terms and if I wanted to take him for a walk in the morning or go to the park or whatever, I could do that. If I wanted to have dinner with my family, sit at the table, I could do that. Whatever maybe take a vacation, drive to a state park, whatever. I wanted to do that and that was my inspiration I would say to leave and work on some new projects.

Nick: Ah, makes perfect sense.

Heather: So, talking about evolution just because I know everyone's going to be curious. Fitness or how you approached working out when you first started, how you approach working out now and especially now that you have a son and now that fatherhood is such a big part of your life like how is that transformed?

Brandan Fokken: When I was younger, it was all about being big and strong. It was about the heaviest weights I could lift, that next PR, how much I could bench, squat, deadlift. And I was just a big bulky mess and I had injuries all the time because I would always just push, push, push. When I started to get into competing, it changed because I had to develop a physique that looked a certain way especially when I got into Physique. I had to have the small waist, the round shoulders, big chest. So, I started to change my training more to a volume, what I call angled workout.

So, I hit my muscle groups at every freaking angle that I can as many reps and sets as I can and that's what really gave me shape and a lot of that inspiration actually even came from Arnold Schwarzenegger. He's another person that I admire and really, really look up to as, he was a powerlifter when he was younger and he said until he started training that way he didn't have any shape he was just big and strong.

So, I modeled that, came up of my own protocols on what worked for me and I got to a point with the Physique division and modeling and all that other stuff that I just needed to maintain. I don't necessarily need to get bigger, better or anything else like that, just maintain. So, that's been the last few years is more of a maintenance protocol. That doesn't mean that I don't get in there and still train hard but again, I, for the life that I live and the things that I do, I don't need to put on ten pounds or whatever.

When he came, it became about longevity and that means more cardio, usually being at a lighter weight throughout the year, checking my blood more often because when you're dieting and restricting everything you can have thyroid, all sorts of hormonal issues and just making sure that I'm healthy, getting enough sleep and water and ... my wife. My wife is I would say "half vegan" for the health aspects of it.

Nick: She's half vegan, as well.

Heather: I'm 98 percent vegan.

Nick: Ovo-vegan.

Brandan Fokken: That came with a lot of research and study, organic, everything. Just really is careful what she puts in her body as she wants to be here for him and she's also his food source currently. When it comes to me, whether I'm drinking certain drinks or chewing gum, she calls them my 'cancer sticks' because they have chemicals in them. She's on me all the time about making sure I'm aware of what I'm putting into my body, which that consistency has made me a little more ... it's something that ... it's kind of like the treatment of animals for instance. You know the crazy stuff that happens in a slaughterhouse but you just kind of ignore it and you have your chicken anyway. And, that's I guess what I've done with a lot of the things that I've consumed and I've been more open I would say since he's come along to cut those things to just make sure that I'm here long term.

Nick: Sure, sure. One thing that you said when you're talking about corporate wellness that was interesting, was talking about the many gyms. I think that's kind of an interesting idea because both from a corporate perspective but also from the perspective somebody thinking like, "Do I go train in the gym or do I train at home?" How essential do you feel like that is or how helpful do you think that is for somebody to either have ... for a company to have a little mini gym at work or for somebody to have their home gym as opposed to all of the expense and everything that goes with having gym membership.

Brandan Fokken: Having a gym at your corporate location you're going to find depending on the extent of it, you're going to find people and in my head I thought nobody really appreciated it. It wasn't a true benefit. People cared more about salary everything else but over time, people started to tell me from a compensation package how much it meant to them to have that. To have me as a trainer. To have me write nutrition protocols or whatever.

Having the smaller gym footprint, we had to do that because the plant sizes, they're rural. So, there're out in the middle of nowhere, some small town that doesn't really have a gym. So, it had enough to get a good workout. The biggest thing about that is the support and the education and getting them vested in it. Because, if you don't put the time into it—if you just put it up, they're not going to use it. A couple people will but they're not.

So, you have to have challenges. You have to stand behind it. Like we had a 'flex time' where people could work out whenever they wanted. They just had to either come in early, stage late, miss their lunch, whatever. We had to support that from the top down. The owner to the president, to whoever had to support people getting in the gym. You couldn't have a manager not letting their people go down to work out and when all the other ones did. Because it would put a bad taste in the mouth of the program.

So, if you're going to do something like that, the biggest thing is supporting it and I can tell you that after seven years, that was the biggest thing. If you're not supporting it, if you're not supporting them utilizing it, they're not going to.

The other thing is you talk about working out at home. It's hard for people who work out at home. That's your sanctuary, that's where you want to relax or you have a million things to do. You have to clean, you have to cook, you have kids and everything else. The last thing you can do is get a workout. I find more people check out whether it be at work or at a fitness club or whatever or it's going out of the park. I stress to people, you don't need to be fancy to get a workout in. Just checking out for a little bit, it's going to help your mind and it's going to help your body.

Working out at home, my wife does it a lot but it's circumstantial. She works from home, our kids at home. So, it's a bit tougher for her but she still would prefer to get out and use a facility, so ...

Nick: So, that about that third place away from work and home still could be very beneficial.

Brandan Fokken: Definitely.

Nick: So, you mentioned challenges. What was one of the more successful challenges that you did through the corporate wellness program that you feel like you really got people on board?

Brandan Fokken: The biggest one, I actually took a challenge, the Bill Phillips challenge that was done here.

Nick: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Brandan Fokken: I took his challenge from ...

Nick: A classic.

Brandan Fokken: I took that and I reworked it for our programming. And, it was basically repackaged. It still carried his name and what not, but I repackaged for our environment, what we had and did it with teams and that was the biggest one by far.

Nick: Teams. So, like, you and five other people ...

Brandan Fokken: Go through here and do it together. Yeah.

Nick: Okay, Yeah, because we have certainly done any number of challenges and things here and it's always very individual-based. What you feel like that the team added to it?

Brandan Fokken: Holds you accountable. Because, you are going to have a lot of people like I said

in that environment that don't have any fitness knowledge. They feel uncomfortable. A gym is a scary place for a lot of people. They don't feel comfortable, they don't want to go down on their own and so they don't but when you are accountable for points or something else with your team, you don't want to let them down plus the other team members going to be encouraging to try to get you down there. I know for a fact that not everybody wants to work out with me because I am intimidating no matter how much I talk to you or how nice I am to you or how encouraging, you still look at me as a 55-year-old female and be like, "I don't want ... he's going to kill me. I won't work out with him." They have a misconception in their head when I just want them to get better. They may have gone to a bad trainer that absolutely killed them and that scares them, but the team environment, it builds camaraderie, acceptance in it and it puts them at ease. They feel like they can be themselves, they can actually enjoy it and have fun with it and sometimes you see inter-group challenges when one person is challenging the other person and it was great, so ...

Nick: So, competition still really is just ... there's really no substitute for it, it sounds like.

Brandan Fokken: Competition's big, and competition for reward is bigger.

Heather: Yes.

Brandan Fokken: People like a prize. It doesn't even matter what the prize is. They want something. I can give you a fucking cucumber. And then, they'll be like, "Yes." They will let that cucumber, sit on their desk till that thing rots to nothing.

Prizes are big, definitely. It again it doesn't have to be fancy. I think a lot of companies or groups try to make these prizes so big and then they have to keep adding to that because the person is like, "Oh, we did that last time." Because, then they'll start comparing if you're constantly raising the ante like, "Oh, you know at the beginning we give away a hundred dollars, now we're going to give away a hundred thousand dollars because we have to keep upping it."

Heather: It's your trip to the moon.

Brandan Fokken: Yes. I think that you have to make them accountable to do it regardless, and periodically, I would do challenges for no prize just remind them like, why we were doing this is not just for a prize, is for health, happiness, longevity and the lifestyle of it. It's not for an iPad.

Nick: There's a trainer that we've both interviewed named Boss Everline who's like a celebrity trainer and he's big on challenges all the time and I asked him, "What are these challenges, what's the prize?" It's dinner. It's always just dinner.

Heather: Bragging rights.

Nick: It was different but, my God, people push for dinner, you know.

Brandan Fokken: It doesn't have to be big. It just has to be something that they feel accomplished. When they look at it, they know, I accomplished this. And, it could be anything. So, anybody in the corporate world or in any gym environment or any friends just putting together a challenge, it doesn't need to be complicated. People are motivated just to be motivated.

Nick: Okay, thanks for coming and talking with us, Brandan. Where do people find you out there?

Brandon Fokken: You can find me at BrandonFokken.com, @brandanfokken on [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#) and @BrandonFokkenFitness on [Facebook](#).

Nick: Pretty easy.

Heather Eastman: Awesome.

Nick Collias: Thanks very much.

Brandon Fokken: Thanks, guys.



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