

- Paul Rieckhoff: [00:01](#) Ladies and gentlemen, angry Americans around the country and around the world. I am thrilled and honored to have a very, very special guest joining us today. A man whose work I've admired for most of my life. You know him from your living room for the last couple of decades and is in my view, one of not just the best sports writers, but one of the best and most important writers in America. The great and powerful David Aldridge joins us, sir. Thank you.
- David Aldridge: [00:49](#) Wow. Paul, thank you man. That's quite an introduction, I really appreciate that and thank you for what you've done and continue to do, man. For people who don't have a voice, it means a lot to me that you're advocating and fighting for people that deserve our attention and more than just thanks for your service, you know what I mean? So I appreciate what you do and pleasure to be on.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [01:12](#) Thank you so much. Well, first off, every conversation we're having now is always with an important inspiring and iconic American. You check all three of those boxes, but it's also the new COVID-19 world. So you're in DC, you've been a great ambassador for DC and an advocate for DC. Can you tell us, where are you, what's it like where you are and if you can give us some insight to life in DC right now.
- David Aldridge: [01:39](#) Well, I live in the city. I've been in the city, I'm from here, lived here my whole life and it's tough right now. It's just tough just to see so many a kind of iconic local businesses especially, driving by and seeing that they're closed and businesses that had been open my whole life here, in town, and it's sad. You think about the people that have operated those businesses, the people that depend on tips to make a living. We think about people who work in hotels that aren't getting more than minimum wage. You think about bartenders, you think about... I just think about the whole connectivity we have as a society, right? We kind of all take it for granted, I think. And you don't realize how many people you touch in a course of a given day or given week.
- David Aldridge: [02:38](#) But those connections are real and they're meaningful and when they're severed, they have real consequences for people. So I'm sure it's sad everywhere right now. I mean, I've got so many friends in New York and they're all being touched by it, if not directly, certainly indirectly, whether it's a family member or a friend or somebody. So, it's hard in DC right now to see the streets empty. You see nobody walking. I mean, we understand

this what we need to do, we have to do it, but it doesn't make it any less sad.

David Aldridge: [03:13](#) To know that they had to close the cherry blossoms off so that people wouldn't go down there and watch them and congregate. The zoo's closed all the things that we all kind of take for granted is happening here. And you feel the sense of impotence almost that you're in what is supposedly the most powerful city in the world. And we have no powers. It's Oz, you know what I mean? Like we're all having to deal with the same things as everybody else.

Paul Rieckhoff: [03:43](#) Yeah. I think it was last year. I was in DC during the White House Correspondence Dinner. I always feel like DC and the Hill, it's such a contrast, right?

David Aldridge: [03:52](#) Oh sure.

Paul Rieckhoff: [03:53](#) Yeah. I mean, I went out into Franklin park and I interviewed homeless people like two blocks away from Trump's hotel. And that contrast seems like a constant part of existence in DC, life in DC, and in DC is in the shadow of the Capitol and often seems forgotten by the Capitol. So we've seen the mayor and so many other people advocating for the district in ways that are powerful. I mean, we haven't really gotten into this in the show but we talk a lot about independence. How do you feel about DC statehood? I mean, you grew up there, you went to school at American right in DC. How do you feel about DC statehood?

David Aldridge: [04:26](#) Oh man, look, if you've grown up in the city and you understand what disenfranchising is all about. And it's been my entire life here paying federal taxes and having no representation in Congress. We're the only city in the country that does that. And you mentioned it well. I mean there's official DC, there's the political DC. If you're from the city, you don't have any real contact with with that world, that's as a different world. That's not a world that I'm used to, I'm not a part of it, I don't necessarily want to be a part of it. I grew up in the city with, my father was a mailman, my mother was a nurse, so I have him the special affinity for the nurses and doctors that are fighting this fight every day.

David Aldridge: [05:16](#) So it's two cities. And again, the fact that we were not treated like all the other States were with regard to the first bailout bill, it just speaks to the continual kind of systematic disenfranchisement that we've had to suffer through my whole lifetime, and before my lifetime, they didn't even have a

nonvoting representative in Congress, at least we have that now. So it's always a problem and you hope that... I've always said, Paul, you don't want to make DC a state, that's fine with me, but then I shouldn't have to pay taxes, you know what I mean? Like one or the other. It's fine with me if you don't want to make us a state for whatever political reasons you have. But then eliminate the federal income tax for people that live in the city.

- Paul Rieckhoff: [06:02](#) Yeah, yeah. I think that's a reasonable argument, doesn't the license plate say, "Taxation without representation?"
- David Aldridge: [06:06](#) Right, exactly.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [06:07](#) The DC license plate, anybody who's been down there.
- David Aldridge: [06:08](#) Exactly.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [06:09](#) Well, I see you're broadcast expert, a veteran in this space. I see you're in what looks like an addict away from your family. But I want to ask you as I do everybody, when you are taking a break from DC, you're taking a break from sports. What is your adult beverage of choice, David?
- David Aldridge: [06:28](#) Oh, it's a Bacardi and Coke.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [06:29](#) Really.
- David Aldridge: [06:30](#) Yeah, my dad's drink. That was my dad's drink, it's my drink. Following in my father's footsteps, that's, that's my go to. Some sort of, well can't be Barbadian Rum because I did that once when I was a young man and that didn't turn out too well. So I just stick with the Bacardi and Coke right now, that what I roll with.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [06:51](#) That's a great choice. Usually when we did these in person, we could share the drink together. So we'll have to put a peg in that and do it once all this passes. But you are such a great voice on not just sports but American culture and the intersection of economics and race and entertainment, so many other components. I really was eager to have this conversation with you because we've never seen a sports environment like this, I don't think ever, right. I mean during World Wars, I know sports shut down temporarily, but parts continued and they recovered. Can you kind of set the stage in your view how big of a moment is this in the history of sports and maybe a very big question. What do you think sports looks like now in the future?

Everything's different. The NBA has shut down. They're talking about reopening. I want to go deeper into that, but on a very macro scale, frame up this moment and your thoughts if you would please.

David Aldridge: [07:49](#)

Well look, I certainly feel like sports has kind of a unique place in the culture. It's kind of the escape, right? It's what people want to do when they don't want to think about a coronavirus or 9/11 or whatever calamity has hit our country in a given point in time. You could always kind of fall back on what at least they're still playing baseball or at least they still playing football, and I can watch a game and forget about it for three hours. So that's no longer available to people. And the unique thing about sports certainly is you go to a concert, right? It's whoever's there at the concert, right? It's 18,000 people sharing that experience together, but it's just those 18,000 people, right? So the difference was sports of course, is that you have both the people in the arena and then you have factors of 20, 30, 40, 50 times more people watching it on TV.

David Aldridge: [08:48](#)

So there's a communal experience that really cuts across most, not all, but most racial economic lines. You know, you can always talk to somebody about sports and the fact that you're denied being able to have that experience with other people, whether they're watching it on TV and talking about it on Twitter, which is what a lot of people do now, or going to a game and sharing that experience with fellow fans. It's so difficult I think for people to accept. And I understand that. But it concerns me that I think people want the sports back because they want to have that sense of normalcy. But man, it's going to be very difficult, I think, Paul, to restart, especially the team sports. I think you could probably start the PGA tour, right? And you could probably do that with no fans.

David Aldridge: [09:44](#)

It's a player and it's the player's caddy essentially. Right? That's it. They don't have an entourage, there's not coaches, so you could probably do that one. You might be able to do tennis. Tennis has more people involved, but you could potentially get tennis back online. But when you talk about baseball, basketball, football, especially with 53 and the pros and you know, 80 in college, I don't know how you do that. I don't know how you start that back up with the close contact, the physicality that people have in those sports, it's going to be very difficult. I just did a piece for the Athletic this week about the Japanese B League, which is a basket pro basketball league in Japan.

- Paul Rieckhoff: [10:28](#) Yeah. I wanted to talk about that piece especially.
- David Aldridge: [10:30](#) They stopped in the middle...
- Paul Rieckhoff: [10:31](#) It was really insightful, right? The NBA is shut down now, right. We're now like maybe more than any other sport where like the clock is running out, right. It looks like NBA is going to be gone, right. Maybe they'll salvage it, but I actually wanted to ask you about that piece specifically because [crosstalk 00:00:10:49], so powerful and you can go deeper. But you described B League where they reopened for a bit and then had to re-close. And also, what do they call it, the biosphere concept?
- David Aldridge: [10:59](#) Right, right.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [11:00](#) Can you talk about that as well please?
- David Aldridge: [11:03](#) We'll start with the B League. It's a 36 teams in two divisions and they have a semi-pro third division but it's mainly the 36 teams, 18 in each league and they tried to restart. They stopped in February when the pandemic was starting to really take off unfortunately in China especially. It didn't really... there's lots of different theories about why it didn't really take off in Japan as quickly as it did in other places, but it didn't. And so they tried to come back in mid March and they played exactly one weekend, two games, and they had to shut it down again because you had one team that had eight players and coaches come down with COVID. You had a referee get sick, you had three American players refuse to play because they didn't want to be susceptible to it.
- David Aldridge: [11:52](#) And so it was just a lot of chaos. And so they had to shut down again. And so the reason why I wrote that is because they had good intentions. I know there was no villain, they wanted to play again, they wanted fans to have an outlet again. They didn't play him in front of any fans. All the games were empty arenas. They tried to do everything to keep the ball sanitized and everything else that they could and it's still couldn't keep it out. It's a virus, man. You want to going to do so.? And it's a very contagious one. The problem for the NBA and for any league is how do you justify one death? How do you do that? What I've been saying to people, Paul, and you're very familiar I'm sure with the John Kerry quote, "How do you ask a man to be the last person to die for a mistake?" Right?
- Paul Rieckhoff: [12:48](#) Here you're asking how do you be the first guy to die...

- David Aldridge: [12:51](#) Right. So I mean, whatever league it is, if somebody gets sick and dies because you started playing again, what is that? Where do you go from there? So that's the problem I think for any leader in terms of what the NBA is trying to do. They want to have, as you mentioned, this biosphere concept where they bring every team to one city and they're talking about Vegas, you know? Okay, maybe you could do it. You've got enough hotel space. You could keep everybody kind of isolated from one another and they would try to keep travel absolutely limited. They have everybody quarantine for two weeks prior, they get tested. Obviously if they were positive they couldn't come, but if they're negative they could come and they will get tested every day while they were there.
- David Aldridge: [13:34](#) And you know, it sounds theoretically possible and certainly both the league and the players have a financial incentive to continue playing, but I don't know man. I just think it's going to be difficult and as you mentioned, at some point you just run out of days, you know what I mean? They want to try and start next season on time in October and so you have to finish in August at the absolute latest to give them some time off. So it's going to be a tight window very tight window.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [14:04](#) So the way it would work is they basically turn all of Vegas into a biosphere, right. And Nets would have The Hard Rock Cafe, the Thunder would have The Sands or whatever, right. In this contained bubble and they would never leave, right.
- David Aldridge: [14:18](#) That's the idea.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [14:20](#) Demented Sci-fi film of the future. Hope that a bunch of 22 year old millionaires follow the rules right [crosstalk 00:14:28] doing in Manhattan or anywhere else. Nobody in, nobody out. And it would also I guess theoretically it would regenerate some of the economy in Vegas as well but I guess...
- David Aldridge: [14:39](#) But you'd have no fans, that's the problem. There's no fans.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [14:43](#) They want to broadcast it right?
- David Aldridge: [14:45](#) Right, right.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [14:46](#) And I guess I want to take this a step further with you if I can, David, right. So how far can the leagues go before they theoretically go bankrupt or start to lose so much money that they have to do something, right? Can you think of an airlines

going bankrupt. I had Tom Colicchio, he says as many as 70% of restaurants-

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Paul Rieckhoff: [15:03](#) on. He says as many as 70% of restaurants could be gone after this. I mean the XFL has as imploded now faster than most folks predicted, but at what point does it reach a crossroads where a league, and maybe it's not the NBA, maybe it's a league that's more precarious financially says, "Okay, players you got to play or you don't get paid." And then we have maybe the ultimate union dispute by players, players versus owners dispute, we've ever had. Right because the players are going to run out of money at some point unless the league keeps paying them. At some point that becomes financially unsustainable so projections are that this could go on for 18 months. Where do you see that going and are there leagues that are particularly vulnerable in your view?

David Aldridge: [15:52](#) Well, I think about college basketball because they depend so much on March Madness, right? It depends so much on the tournament to generate the revenue. I think it's something like 70% of their revenue comes from the tournament and that revenue in turn is used by the individual colleges to kind of fund their sports, right? And so we've already seen, I think it was University of Cincinnati is going to have to eliminate some sports because they're not going to get the revenue that they expected this year. And so that could potentially be a problem. The difference with the pro sports leagues, I think at the very least is they're unionized, right? And so in the case of the NBA, the union has already agreed with the NBA on a certain amount of salary reduction.

David Aldridge: [16:43](#) If the season's canceled, the players will give the owners a certain amount of that money back to kind of not make them whole but at least ease the pinch so that they should be okay for this year and presumably they would do this as long as the pandemic is in effect and games aren't being played. And also the pro leagues have lines of credit that they can access billion dollar lines of credit so that they have a little bit more cushion than a smaller league, certainly a startup league like the XFL or didn't have that kind of financial cushion, they had nothing to fall back on. But the big four of baseball, basketball, hockey, football I think should be okay going forward, at least for the next year I would think.

Paul Rieckhoff: [17:30](#) So it's a good pivot into the NFL. So this week is the virtual NFL draft, right, which is going to be surreal. They're going to essentially do it online, but there have been even concerns about letting film crews into the living rooms of players that are going to get signed for that big moment when Bob Rowe or Atua or someone else finds out when that phone call comes. Now it's going to be I guess on Skype, right. I've been to the draft and it's one of the most exciting, I think moments, not just in sports but in America see these families and these kids that have worked so hard that entire life in that moment where you can see their socioeconomic future change immediately for generations of their family if they don't screw it up, right, it's all that hard work, all that...

Paul Rieckhoff: [18:14](#) It's really the American dream manifest, right? And especially the sports American dream. But the NFL draft is going to happen. I mean they may be drafting for a season that never comes. So what are your thoughts on that? And I can't have the great David without asking you to talk about Brady and now Gronk going to Tampa Bay as governor Ron DeSantis is pushing to reopen the stage. I mean if it was a team that was going to come online quickly it'd probably be Tampa. [inaudible 00:18:44] see teams relocating to South Dakota, but can you break down your thoughts on the draft and all the chaos that's happening in the league right now?

David Aldridge: [18:54](#) Right. Well I mean the NFL is kind of the number one sport, right? It's the colossus I think in terms of team sports in the States certainly. I think short term they'll be okay, the draft. The only thing that's really affected is that first round where you see the guys go up on the stage and they get the hug from Goodell and all that and that's a great moment. Don't get me wrong, it's a terrific moment. But after the first round, everybody's at home anyway right? So I mean that's usually how it works. So they should be okay. The question, as you brought up was what happens to the season? When can they start the season? They've already missed a lot of the off season work that they would be doing, that they would have done already and that they would do in the next six weeks with their draft picks that they bring online this weekend.

David Aldridge: [19:43](#) So it's going to be difficult, man. I mean I've covered enough football and I know enough football players to know that the only way you get good at playing football is playing football. There's no substitute for it and there's no substitute for the hitting and the physicality of it and so it's going to be very difficult and you wonder about injuries. I certainly will whenever



they come back now, I think they probably will. My guess is you'll see a very limited preseason schedule, but you have to have at least one or two practice games after all this time off.

David Aldridge: [20:19](#) Now what happens with Tampa, I mean, Brady's no kid and he's going to need to... You don't want him to get rusty. He's got to learn a new system anyway, at least he's got Gronk to throw to. So now they got a smart coach down there in Bruce Arians who knows what he's doing. So they could probably figure out ways to mitigate that, but it's still going to be a challenge for them. It would be a challenge with no problems, but certainly with this it's going to be a major challenge for them.

Paul Rieckhoff: [20:50](#) David, you've got great contacts across all the leagues, right? You're a guy that's trusted, that's respected. I think for folks that don't know, it was interesting to see your journey starting out at the Washington post and transitioning hard into sports and now making the leap to the athletic, which is really kind of at the forward edge of where media is going. But you're talking to players all the time. You had Barclay on your podcast, which was fantastic and I love the podcast and I love the conversations you have, but it's clear you have a trust with the players. Can you talk about that trust and an insight into what that's like as a journalist? We've had a lot of different kinds of journalists on this show, at a time where the president is calling journalists enemy of the state. That includes Marines, like James LaPorta we had on and theoretically it includes you, right? But talk about your lessons learned in how to develop those relationships in what you're hearing now. What are players thinking and concerned about and talking about in this time?

David Aldridge: [21:53](#) Well, I think the trusting is just... I hope that it's a matter of the fact of the function of me over the years. I never try to pretend I know more than I know and I never try to pretend that I'm someone I'm not and I never played football at a high level, so I have no idea what it's like to be an offensive tackle so I ask them. You know what I mean? So I try not to pretend that I know more than I know. And if I don't know, I tell you, "Hey, I don't understand this, explain this to me." Right? And I think they appreciate that because you're talking about their jobs and their livelihood and they want people to get it right and you had the courtesy of asking them and so I always feel like if you're fair to people, they'll be fair to you.

David Aldridge: [22:42](#) If you try to be a wise guy and a smart ass and try to kill people in print or on TV, that doesn't last man. I mean that has a shelf life because people remember things and they're human beings

and I never wanted to make it about me. Most people in my business don't, but there's a few, there's a few who want to call attention to themselves and it's just not who I am. But there's a lot of people like me, Paul. There's a lot of reporters that just want to get it right. That's the motivation for 99% of the people that do this for a living. We just want to get it right but sometimes we have to ask tough questions and that's the job. If you don't want to do that, then this is the job for you. So you got to do it.

Paul Rieckhoff: [23:27](#)

And what's the chatter, I mean, I hate to consider athletes a monolith, right? But where do you feel like players are at right now? I mean, is everybody watching and waiting? I mean, nobody wants to be the guinea pig, right? [crosstalk 00:23:41] league to go. But there comes a point where they got to stop shooting Instagram videos in their backyard. But where do you feel like the leadership is and obviously the most notable players like a LeBron or Brady, it seems they're going to have an out sized influence. You mentioned the NBA, I think that's important because their union is so strong. But what do you hear and who do you look to, to be the leaders for all of sports in a time like this?

David Aldridge: [24:07](#)

Right. Well look, I think these are as you know, the most competitive people that you could put together, right? I mean amazingly hyper competitive people. They want to play, look guys want to play, they want to compete, they want a chance to win the championship. Whether you haven't started the season yet like baseball and football or you're in the middle of your season like basketball and hockey where you want to... The whole point of this is to find out who wins, right? So I mean they want to find out who wins but they are responsible and understanding that it's not going to be something that's simple to do. And so I think you have, whether it's baseball, baseball was talking about doing something similar bringing everybody out to Arizona and some guys were immediately like, "Hey, that sounds like a good idea." And other guys were like, "I'm not so sure for a bunch of different reasons."

David Aldridge: [25:02](#)

So I think that they are pretty reflective of our society at large. I think most people understand that if the best way to kind of flatten the curve is to stay home, then stay home. But there's some that are kind of restless and want to get back out and certainly most of them want to resume playing as soon as possible and as safely as possible. But I think these are guys that don't mind risk. I think they understand risk, physical risk certainly and so after a while I think you're going to see more

guy say, "Hey, we understand that this is a gamble, but I'm willing to take that gamble because I want to keep playing."

Paul Rieckhoff: [25:49](#) Yeah, in some ways it kind of feels like the National Anthem moment, right? Where it was like who is going to step forward? And you probably couldn't have predicted who was going to be vocal, who is going to be silent but in this show we've really covered the intersection of sports and politics, which I think is impossible to decouple, right? We've got some media places recently which have said, ESPN and others have said, "We're only doing sports, we're not doing politics." I don't know where you draw that line anymore now, especially now because the leagues are going to be dependent upon policymakers. [inaudible 00:26:24] Dana White's trying to pull together UFC fights and he's exploring every location under the sun and it could be that a governor or a county executive or a reservation leadership says, "Okay, you can do it here." But do you see any leaders or voices emerging that you think are kind of built for this?

David Aldridge: [26:43](#) Well, I think if on the basketball piece, that's my area of expertise, so I would stick with that for now at least. I think LeBron certainly is a guy that I would look to, to kind of provide some leadership. Chris Paul is another guy who certainly is the president of the player's union, a very vocal guy. You've got some guys on the executive committee like Andre Iguodala and CJ McCollum and there's some really thoughtful, smart guys that I think will take a lead on this because I think the players in the NBA, certainly much more so than in the NFL, the players really kind of run the show. I mean it's their league and so what they want to do is what's going to happen and so my suspicion is that they've been talking to the league this whole time about how to do this.

David Aldridge: [27:31](#) So I think they'll come up with something. I think they will come up with something that's palatable enough for the majority of players that they can get it through and get a season finish. Now, whether that's going to be going straight to the playoffs, having all 30 teams, having just the playoff teams, that I don't know. That's going to be a logistics question as much as anything else. Can you do this, right? Can you do this safely? And then we obviously are all kind of running on the parallel track of testing and when they come up... Do they come up with a vaccine anytime in the next year or is it going to be 18 months? Is it going to be two years?

David Aldridge: [28:12](#) But I think certainly going... I think in the summer it's different because people can just go outside at least theoretically and do something to enjoy themselves. But I think when you get back to the fall, it's going to be hard not to play. It's going to be hard as this fall comes and then leading into winter. If we're still not playing, it's going to be awfully difficult to keep leagues from figuring out something to do.

Paul Rieckhoff: [28:41](#) Your story I think is inspiring and part of why I wanted to talk to you, but I don't want to have you on this show and not take you in the way, way back machine. [inaudible 00:28:49] question I ask of all our guests, whether it was in DC or somewhere else. David, what was your first car?

David Aldridge: [28:56](#) My first car was a Chevy Chevette. A blue Chevy Chevette that my mother had and she gave it to me essentially and I drove that around college, while I was in college and for the first several years when I was out of college. Yeah, it didn't have much of anything, but it got me where I needed to go Paul, that was the important thing.

Paul Rieckhoff: [29:24](#) What year was it and what color was it, David?

David Aldridge: [29:27](#) I want to say it was an '81 Chevette and it was blue. It was light blue and it was tiny.

Paul Rieckhoff: [29:38](#) Like a North Carolina blue, like a baby blue or what kind of [crosstalk 00:14:42]?

David Aldridge: [29:41](#) No it wasn't powder blue? It was more like a... It wasn't a dark blue. I'm trying to think what would be a good blue the Thunder's road uniforms, it was like that. That kind of blue.

Paul Rieckhoff: [29:58](#) [crosstalk 00:29:58] especially at a time where it's been... One of my.

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Paul Rieckhoff: [30:03](#) One of my criticisms early on was, I still believe there are two groups of people there. There are a group of people, they believe we're a nation and a world at war against the virus. And there are a group of people who don't, right. 97% of the country right now is shut down, 3% is not. But in the early stages of this, I felt like there was a bit of tone deafness in the sports world, especially because it was signing time and free agent time. And Brady, I was criticizing Brady quite a bit because he signed this big contract in him mansion. I was in New York city with sirens

outside my door going into hospitals. So I feel like thankfully that shifted a little bit, the league's going to focus on COVID-19 during the draft. But, I hope that there'll be this rush of energy from the players to really use their voices to make an impact.

Paul Rieckhoff: [30:58](#) But there's also some anger on the flip side. Some of these people who are protesting in places like Michigan and others saying, "I want my sports. That's why we need to reopen." So there's anger and frustration I think happening on all sides. But you're a very thoughtful guy. So I want to ask you another question I ask of all our guests. David Aldridge, what makes you angry?

David Aldridge: [31:18](#) Hypocrisy. Hypocrisy makes me angry. I don't mind there being rules as long as we all follow them. And bullying of any kind at whether it's physical or emotional or economic, I just detest that and I'm a big believer in we all are on this planet. And so... to get the most out of this planet, we all got to kind of figure out how to do this together. And again, I'm fine if you say, "Everybody stops at a red light." But everybody's got to stop at the red light, if that's the rule. You know what I mean? So that's what really angers me is that I think there's a lot of, do as I say, not as I do in this country right now.

David Aldridge: [32:16](#) And it's troubling because I think it continues to divide us unnecessarily and I think we could do so much more if we work together than if we continue with this tribalism that we're doing now where we're, we're not ever pulling in the same direction on anything. I mean this country, we've seen what this country can do and we're all pulling the same direction. We can do some pretty impressive stuff. We have an incredible work ethic and we have an incredible ability to produce things that matter in people's lives if we're all on the same page. And we haven't been on the same page for awhile, I'd like us to get back to it if we could.

Paul Rieckhoff: [32:55](#) I appreciate that. And I think you've been a leader who's led by example. I know a lot of folks consider you a role model and appreciate the integrity and the way you've approached your craft and your life. But you're also kind of touching on something that I wanted to get into which is we've never had, in my lifetime, a president who is so aggressively attacked sports figures, even manipulated. I mean, the national Anthem is just one piece, but now it's become an issue of, "Shut up and dribble." Or, "Are they going to come to the white house after a championship or not?" As much as you're comfortable, your

thoughts on the president and the climate he's creating in his leadership or there lack of in this time.

David Aldridge: [33:40](#) Well, it's unfortunate. I'm not a fan of Donald Trump, let's be blunt about it. I don't think he is a serious person and he's in a serious job, unfortunately. I don't have any animosity towards him if he wants to be, rich guy living a rich guy's life. Okay, that's your right. But when you involve other people who didn't ask to be involved, that's when I have a problem with it. And so we can be a great nation or we can be a small petty nation. And I just think we're better than this. I just think we're a better country than this. When I say that I'm not ignoring the history of this country. I understand and I'm a black guy. I understand the history of this country. I understand the racial history of this country. But I also understand that there were times, rare though they may be, there were times where we moved forward. We said, "Look, let's try to do this a little better than we've been doing it." And we can get back to that, if we had people who wanted to get back to that.

David Aldridge: [34:48](#) And I think appealing to people's kind of base instincts is not a way to govern. You don't govern by attacking other people. I just don't think that's the way you govern. It doesn't move us forward in any direction. I may have disagreed with George Bush, Ronald Reagan about a great many policies, but at least they had some. So this is just a presidency by tweet. I mean, forget inspiring people, that's just basic leadership. If ever there was a moment where everybody would put their politics aside and say, "Lead us. We're scared. People are scared, people are dying. Lead us and tell us what to do and we'll do it. But tell us intelligently. Tell us with facts what we should be doing." I think people would do that in this particular climate.

David Aldridge: [35:50](#) I mean, for a president to say, "I'm not responsible anything." What? What is that? That's a complete abdication of leadership. So, I don't know. I was hoping for better, but I expected the worst and we're getting what I expected.

Paul Rieckhoff: [36:12](#) Maybe in a stark contrast as we have this conversation, one of the things that many Americans are sharing is this ESPN series, The Last Dance. It's really fascinating and fantastic. For the folks who don't know, two episodes were dropped this past Sunday and I think they're going to drop two every week for five weeks.

David Aldridge: [36:33](#) Five weeks, right.

- Paul Rieckhoff: [36:34](#) And really, it's so far, the documentary series, I want to sit down my son at some point to explain to him the Michael Jordan that I saw and the Bulls that I saw. But it's a real insight into Michael Jordan and into that time and into America, that's what make it so big. And then there's a cameo by a certain person in contrast to Trump, of course, president Barack Obama who was labeled as Chicago Resident.
- David Aldridge: [37:02](#) Former Chicago Resident.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [37:07](#) Chicago resident -- which is genius. But this seems like a moment. We aren't sharing a whole lot of things. I had Jeffrey Wright on the show. Westworld has become a moment we're all sharing now. Food with Tom Colicchio, I had on. We're talking about food... But The Last Dance is really good.
- David Aldridge: [37:28](#) Yeah, it is.
- Paul Rieckhoff: [37:29](#) But can you talk a little bit about that and your thoughts on it now?
- David Aldridge: [37:33](#) Yeah, no, I mean I'm just glad that people under, let's say 35 probably even if they remember Jordan, they were kids, they didn't really understand it even if they saw him. I think that I'm glad they're getting to see kind of the totality of the guy and whether you like them or not and you don't have to like them. I understand that. I mean he can be abrasive and off putting to a lot of people. But if you want to understand why he was the way he was, I think this show shows it to you. It's just he's just wired differently than other people.
- David Aldridge: [38:10](#) I've never seen in 30 years a guy as competitive as that guy was. And it permeated every fiber of his being every moment he was awake. And you can decry that, but that's who he was and that's why he was so driven and that's why he was so maniacal in terms of winning. He wasn't running for father of the year teammate of the year or anything like that. He was trying to win championships. And in that time Paul, that's what a lot of people did. He was no different than Bird or Magic or Isaiah Thomas, they were all lunatics. And they all were tough on their teammates. They all yelled at their teammates when they weren't doing what they thought they should be doing. So you had to be that way back then. Maybe you don't have to be that way now. But back then with the rules, the way they were then you had to be that way. So I'm glad people are getting to see this. And I remember Kevin McHale after Jordan retired the last

time, I remember Kevin McHale telling it to me, "You know in 15 years they're going to forget about Michael Jordan."

David Aldridge: [39:20](#)

And I said, "You're nuts man. You're never going to forget about Michael Jordan." And he was right, he was right. Out of sight, out of mind. And so I'm glad that people who didn't get to see him play. And now you've got to remember now, this is a generation now. I mean he came back and played in Washington, but that was kind of not really what people remember. He retired 22 years ago. So I mean that's a generation so there's a lot of people that never saw him play and don't know what the fuss was all about. And I'm glad they're getting to see it.

Paul Rieckhoff: [39:52](#)

Yeah, you're great in it. I don't know if you're in it a lot in the episodes to come. But I think it was maybe Costa or someone says, "There was Babe Ruth, there's Muhammad Ali and there's Michael Jordan." Just in terms of his impact, we could argue a greatest player of all time. My uneducated view, I think he is. But I think you know, less arguably the most important player of all time, in terms of how he shaped the world on the global stage with the Olympics and the corporate components and his cultural influence. I think that's where his magnitude is really now being fully appreciated. But, do you have a story? You covered him, you met him, you were around him, you're in the doc. Any Michael Jordan story that you want to share that you feel like is one folks need to know?

David Aldridge: [40:41](#)

Well, I mean, yeah. The story I always tell Paul, is that when I was covering the Bullets, they were the Bullets then before they became the Wizards, I was the beat writer. And the Bullets played a back to back two games in two nights with the Bulls. The first game was in Chicago. Then everybody on a plane flew back to DC they played the next night in DC. So the first night in Chicago, the Bullets had a guard at the time named LaBradford Smith who was a first round pick, decent player, not great, but a decent player and LaBradford Smith had the game of his life. Just had the game of his life, he scored 37 points. Not all of them against Jordan, but a lot of them against Jordan and the Bulls, Chicago still won the game. But the story was, "Hey, this kid scored 37 points on Michael Jordan."

David Aldridge: [41:22](#)

Right. And after the game I was there, so I'm not guessing, LaBradford Smith was very complimentary. He was like, "Hey, I was lucky. Michael Jordan's still the best, blah, blah, blah." So the next night they're in Washington, same two teams and



Jordan scores 36 points against LaBradford Smith in the first half of the game. 36 in a half.

David Aldridge: [41:56](#)

And the story that comes out of this afterwards is that Michael Jordan claims that LaBradford Smith was dismissive of him the first night and kind of patted him on the button and said, "Hey, nice game Mike." And walked off the court. And he was angry and that fueled him to this performance the next night. The problem is the story's complete bullshit, he made it up. He completely made up the story about LaBradford Smith just to have something to motivate him the next night to go out there and destroy this guy. And that's Michael Jordan, that's who he was. It didn't matter, whatever slight real or imagined he would put into this blast furnace and it would stoke himself into a rage that he would use to play against whoever it was he was playing that night. And that's who he was, man.

Paul Rieckhoff: [42:54](#)

Wow. I think it's such an interesting time for this conversation to be happening because it's an exploration of leadership and you get to see Phil as a coach and you get to see Jerry Krause a GM and you get to see Jordan as a player and Pippin as a player and all these other folks in this amazingly colorful cast. I mean even for younger folks to be able to see Rodman as a serious player. Not the guys who's flying to North Korea and doing crazy shit. Was a six, seven time all NBA guy and defensive force. But taking another step back, maybe something else that's happening in this time. This week is the 16th anniversary of the death of Pat Tillman. And I've obviously covered veteran's issues, national defense, security, war. And I felt like that was really an important time, David, because it was the first time people felt like they lost someone they knew. There's so few people actually had somebody serving in the military. It's less than half of 1%. But when Pat Tillman died, people felt like they knew Pat Tillman. Every sports fan knew the story. Even if people weren't sports fans respected this guy.

Paul Rieckhoff: [44:06](#)

And I felt like in some ways it was a tipping point in terms of the public support because they felt a real sense of loss. Talented guy who didn't have to do it, was gone. So I'm always very reflective about the Tillman moment, not just a celebration of who he was, but then also finding out that there was a cover up and the way he was killed. In a very important way it's kind of a double edged sword showing and revealing that time in America. How it was the glory and the tragedy of post 9/11 all at once. But now, it's been 16 years, I think, do you have any thoughts or reflections on Pat Tillman in that time period?

David Aldridge: [44:43](#) Oh, there's no question. I mean Paul, we were both adults then and remember very vividly how the NFL have used Pat Tillman. I mean, that's the only way I could put it, is they used him. They used him in death to kind of promote this agenda that they wanted to-

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David Eldridge: [45:02](#) To promote this agenda that they wanted to put forward. And as you pointed out, subsequently, we found out that Pat Tillman was very much antiwar and certainly anti that war and it makes you think a certain way about symbolism. And it takes away from the real heroism of that young man. To walk away from a very lucrative career to serve his country because he felt like he needed to do that. And the reasons he felt they needed to do that were not the reasons we were told. It was a very abject listen to me and understanding the power of propaganda and how you have to really be a alert citizen to when you're being manipulated. And I always felt bad for his family because they were brought into this maelstrom that they weren't asked to.

David Eldridge: [46:06](#) And it always bothers me when you do that to people, they're still grieving. They don't even have a time to grieve properly. It always troubled me. After 9/11 I did a piece about a guy that was in the Pentagon that died that day and was a former college football player, a running back. And I can't tell you just how moved and impressed I was with everybody connected with that, from his friends to his widow to the officers that were there with him that day. And there were a lot of people who sacrifice as you know, and the sacrifice should be enough. And to ask them to be something else in death is where I really take issue with. And so I certainly remember Pat Tillman's death and I certainly remember the controversy about it. And again, even though I was in my thirties then it was a good lesson for me to learn.

Paul Rieckhoff: [47:19](#) Yeah. And the NFL has learned a lot of lessons the hard way. I think over time, the last couple of years and anytime folks want to argue that you have to separate politics and sports.

David Eldridge: [47:31](#) You can't. It's too tough.

Paul Rieckhoff: [47:31](#) The NFL is the ultimate example. A lot of folks don't know about one of John McCain's last efforts when he was in the Senate was an investigation into how the Department of Defense was paying NFL teams to do these fancy welcome home ceremonies where the soldier would run out onto the field and the NFL,

more than anybody else in my view, has wrapped themselves in the American flag and gotten the power of the American brand at a discount.

David Eldridge: [47:54](#) Right.

Paul Rieckhoff: [47:55](#) That's never been more true than around Pat Tillman. I actually had a meeting with Goodell, I guess it was last year or a year and a half ago at the crest of the Kaepernick controversy.

David Eldridge: [48:06](#) Right.

Paul Rieckhoff: [48:06](#) I was leading IAVA and we had done a survey of veterans to ask them how they felt about this. Number one takeaway was that they didn't really think it was that important and they thought that other things were more important, but then they were divided. There were some folks who say, "I'm boycotting the NFL." They're were others who said, "You know, I'm going to support folks in their power to kneel." But I was interested in meeting Goodell and seeing that they didn't really have a plan for Trump and they've consistently seem to struggle with the politics in the face of the magnitude of it.

David Eldridge: [48:35](#) Right.

Paul Rieckhoff: [48:35](#) I told Goodell, I said, "You're getting your ass kicked." I said, "Trump's kicking the shit out of you and he has a plan and you don't, his plan is to just keep knocking you around and your plan is to just reel. You're on defense and he's driving this conversation." So I think the plan of the NFL basically was to keep their head down, put Kaepernick in the penalty box for it to blow over.

David Eldridge: [48:55](#) Right.

Paul Rieckhoff: [48:55](#) And that seems to have been the case, but I think the NFL is still something that brings me tremendous happiness, support-

David Eldridge: [49:02](#) Sure. I get it.

Paul Rieckhoff: [49:04](#) Sports brings us so much happiness and I think - look at it now. But you're a guy who brings a lot of positivity to everything you do. I want to bring positivity on this show anytime I can, but your insights on another question I ask everyone. David Eldridge, what makes you happy?

David Eldridge: [49:19](#) Well, I think it's a good question. What makes me happy at this stage of my life really, it's not a cliché. My family and my friends, they really do. I have had a great life. I've met a lot of people and it's been wonderful to live this life that I've led. But as you get older, as you know, you start losing people, right? You start losing friends and family members and you hold tighter to the ones that you still have. And I know that's been the case with me over the last 10 years or so. It seems like every day someone I know is losing a parent or losing a brother or a sister. I lost my brother last year and it's tough man.

David Eldridge: [50:04](#) It's tough. And so I have found that the company of friends and being with people, whether it's here in D.C. or out of town, is something that really makes me happy. Just knowing people who really do know me. And that I enjoy that. I enjoy being able to relax and enjoy that time with them because we're not here very long man. So you got to enjoy those moments when you can. It's one of the reasons why I took the job with The Athletic is because I just wanted to be around my family more. It was time. We have two sons and they're getting up there. They're both teenagers now and that means they're not going to be here much longer. So I wanted to make sure that I was more present and so that's what brings me joy right now more than anything.

Paul Rieckhoff: [50:54](#) Thank you. I've got two boys. They're much younger, they're four and one. But close- I think one of the hardest parts of this Corona normal is parenting. Whether your kids are teenagers, grown, or toddlers, you're a guy that a lot of folks feel like is a father figure in their life. If you grew up watching sports would look up to you. You have any advice as a parent or lessons learned now that you're a bit wiser and older.

David Eldridge: [51:22](#) I would say number one, your significant other is always right. That's a good lesson. Whatever they say. Yeah, you're right. That helps out a lot. Just be you man. You're a good guy, you're a good man and they will see that over the course of their lifetimes. And so if you're consistent in your values and what you try to teach your children, I think just being present is so important to them. Just them knowing you're there, whether they say anything to you or not, again, teenage boys are in that grunting stage where they don't really communicate verbally anymore, but that's okay. Them knowing that I'm here more often than I'm not now. I think makes a difference and so just being present in their lives, whatever it is they're doing, whatever their extracurricular activities are, if you can get to as many of them as you can, man, that goes a long way.

Paul Rieckhoff: [52:23](#) Amazing. Amazing. Well, I am extremely grateful, most of all for your example. Everybody I have on this show and I talk about a lot of our leaders in different industries, in different spaces, but folks that anybody can connect with their understand their journey and I respect your journey so much in the way you've done it. I went back and read the letter you wrote or the piece you wrote when you talked about going to The Athletic and talking about being connected to your family.

David Eldridge: [52:48](#) Yeah.

Paul Rieckhoff: [52:49](#) I can see anybody who's been around sports, you can tell who the players really respect and the coaches and the administrators and everybody else and everybody who talks to you has a reverence for you and a respect for you because of the way you do things and the kind of person you are. So I want to thank you for that and I want to thank you for your consistent voice.

Paul Rieckhoff: [53:08](#) You're really a fantastic writer. You've taught me to be a better writer. Reading you and watching your coverage. So I appreciate that very much. And this is the point of show where we would normally in person do a giving of the gift. So I'm going to do the virtual giving of the gift.

David Eldridge: [53:21](#) Okay.

Paul Rieckhoff: [53:21](#) If you don't mind. So first we have some Angry Americans gear that I'll send-

David Eldridge: [53:24](#) Oh dude. Oh, that's awesome. Thank you so much.

Paul Rieckhoff: [53:28](#) blue and red.

David Eldridge: [53:28](#) Oh, that's great.

Paul Rieckhoff: [53:29](#) You can have both but made in America by the veterans of Oscar Mike

David Eldridge: [53:34](#) Oh, that's ...

Paul Rieckhoff: [53:34](#) We don't have jerseys yet. We might have to work on that.

David Eldridge: [53:36](#) Okay, I'll take the tee shirts. It's fine.

Paul Rieckhoff: [53:39](#) Some quarantine men's products for you. They also have antibacterial wipes in case you can't shower or -- your boys might need a...

David Eldridge: [53:54](#) They shower occasionally.

Paul Rieckhoff: [53:59](#) It's tougher to to pick a whiskey. Usually I go into a whiskey store, but I got some Baker's-

David Eldridge: [54:06](#) Oh, wow. That's the good stuff, man.

Paul Rieckhoff: [54:10](#) ... that is American made.

David Eldridge: [54:11](#) Thank you.

Paul Rieckhoff: [54:11](#) It's seven years minimum, but you're a guy who's kind of seven days a week. You've been bringing great integrity and inspiration and impact and information.

David Eldridge: [54:19](#) Oh, Paul, this is very nice of you.

Paul Rieckhoff: [54:20](#) So I'll get this to you somehow.

David Eldridge: [54:22](#) I appreciate all of that man, seriously.

Paul Rieckhoff: [54:24](#) There's one last piece. I ran out of my stash of Peeps, the marshmallows.

David Eldridge: [54:29](#) Oh, yeah.

Paul Rieckhoff: [54:29](#) This is the last question I've been asking everybody. There are three colors of Peeps, yellow, pink and blue. David, which color would you pick and why?

David Eldridge: [54:39](#) Those three colors. I'm probably going to go blue. Probably going to go blue Peeps. I don't look good in yellow and I don't know, pink, not for me.

Paul Rieckhoff: [54:51](#) Do you have a favorite? What's your favorite sport, yourself? You're such a sport lover. Do you have a favorite sport you like yourself or you like to play or do?

David Eldridge: [55:03](#) I kind of petered out at softball. That was kind of the level I played at Paul. There's something to love in all the different sports for different reasons. But I certainly, because of my familiarity with basketball, I would say basketball. Because even after 30 years of covering it on a fairly close basis, I still almost

always see something amazing every night. Somebody does something incredible. And so it's the individuality within the structure that I just find fascinating. You have the individual talents of whoever it is, LeBron or Steph Curry or whatever, whoever's on the court, but they have to play with four other guys for the thing to work. Otherwise it's just a solo act. And so the fact that you have that great individual talent in a team structure when it works well, that's what I love about the game. I really do love about it. It's a great lesson for everybody.

Paul Rieckhoff: [55:58](#) I share that with you. And now that I'm at the point where I play old man basketball and half of my goal is just try not to get hurt.

David Eldridge: [56:05](#) Exactly.

Paul Rieckhoff: [56:06](#) I'm a guy who sets a lot of pics. So that's tough. Try to not to get hurt and set picks at the same time.

David Eldridge: [56:13](#) No, but it's actually easier to set picks. Less chance of getting hurt.

Paul Rieckhoff: [56:19](#) As I've taught my sons now how to play, it's the improvisation of basketball. The creativity maybe more than almost any other sport. You see the old guys on the court, now I'm one of the old guys. That creativity is part of what just makes it fun. The fun to basketball that I don't know if any other sport really has.

David Eldridge: [56:38](#) Well it's got the scoring. I think people like scoring and the back and forth and possessions are quick so it's a game for the 21st century for sure.

Paul Rieckhoff: [56:46](#) Well you are a man for the 21st century. You are a great leader, a great American, a great role model. I am very, very thankful for your friendship and for your time and for joining us. I encourage everybody to read everything you write on The Athletic, to check out your podcast, follow you on Twitter. But my deepest thanks to you, especially during this time for joining us, David.

David Eldridge: [57:07](#) Paul, it's my pleasure. I really appreciate you asking me to be on. I'm a big fan of yours, man, and the work you're doing. And I always feel inadequate around people that really do work with those men and women that sacrifice so much for the rest of us. And it's such a small percentage as you know, and they don't have anybody. They have very few people I should say, advocating for them. And you do that. And I really respect what you do.

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Paul Rieckhoff: [57:31](#) Well, thank you my friend. I hope we can get together soon and drink some whiskey in a really-

David Eldridge: [57:36](#) I would love that.

Paul Rieckhoff: [57:37](#) ...a really nice empty basketball arena. Maybe me and you could do a game of horse at Madison Square Garden. You might know a guy and we can hook it up and do it-

David Eldridge: [57:46](#) I might know somebody. That would be fun.

Paul Rieckhoff: [57:51](#) David Eldridge, the great and powerful David Eldridge. Thank you so much for joining lesson Angry Americans. Thank you, my friend.

David Eldridge: [57:55](#) Thanks Paul.

Paul Rieckhoff: [57:56](#) All right, I'm going to end us there, sir.

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