

Exclusive Interview with Magnus Scheving

- Published: 14 March 2006, 05:38
- *Nicksplat, March 13th, 2006*



1. How do you manage to juggle it all – medal-winning athlete, TV producer, writer? Do you focus on different things at different times? What is your motivation?

To be honest, I don't always manage to juggle it all because there is so much to do! But one of the strengths that I think I have is to have a really strong focus on one thing that I am doing, and then quickly switch my focus to another task, and then switch back again. I try to do only one thing at a time and to do it with extreme focus, and then switch to something else and focus only on that.

As for what motivates me, well, that's simple! The best feeling in the world is when you see something happen that you have been working so hard to achieve. For example, I have spent most of my adult life trying to motivate people, especially children, to improve their lifestyle. So, when I get an email from a little boy who tells me that he could only do 1 push up before he saw *LazyTown* but now he can do 50, or when I get a letter from a teenager who tells me that she never started smoking because she wanted to follow my example, I am filled with such a sense of satisfaction that it drives me to want to do more and more. That is what motivates me!

2. Would you consider yourself a health freak? How do you maintain your level of fitness, being as busy as you are?

Even though my message is all about healthy lifestyles, I don't look at myself as a health freak. To me, the most important thing is for a person to be in balance. We all have to find a balance between work and play, between overdoing exercise and doing enough or between eating a very strict diet and enjoying foods that are less healthy. No one should be too rigid about their lifestyle or they will lose their sense of balance.

I try to build my fitness routine into my daily life so that it will be easier to do. For example, before I go to bed at night I do 100 push ups, or before I take a shower I'll do 20 jumping jacks. Often in meetings I will use a chair to do arm press ups, or I will get in some stretching while I'm listening to someone giving a presentation. I've also set my studio up in a way that makes this easier to do for all my employees since we have exercise facilities right in the building, and we often have meetings while we are walking or running!

3. When and where were you born? Were your parents supportive of your careers and were they a positive influence in encouraging you to go for your dreams?

I was born November 10th 1964 in Reykjavik, the capital city of Iceland, but I grew up in a

small country town nearby. I would say that my parents have always been supportive of my interests. My father especially encouraged my sports training because he was a physical education teacher (as well as the local school master!). But the most important advice he ever gave me relates to all the different careers I have had, not just sports: He said “Practice, practice, practice!”

Once, when I saw a person ski-jumping on TV and I was amazed that it was possible, he said “Do you know how he did that?” When I said I had no idea, he said “He practiced. He practiced over and over again until he was able to do it, and that’s the same way you can learn to do anything you want to!” I have followed that advice all my life, and it has brought me a lot of success in all areas of my life because I knew that I could do anything I put my mind to by trying hard enough.

4. What do you think of fast food? Are you concerned about the junk food that’s easily available in schools? What’s your opinion about chef Jamie Oliver’s campaign to get Britain’s schools to serve more nutritious food?

Obviously fast food isn’t the healthiest food around, but it is just another part of this “fast” society that we all live in today where everything has to happen now and we don’t always have time to sit down and eat a complete meal. However, fast food isn’t necessarily bad, it’s just how you think about it. Isn’t an apple or a banana fast food? And what about ready-made salads or vegetables? These foods are as fast and easy to make as can be, and they are super healthy as well!

The kinds of high-fat, processed foods that our children get at school is a huge problem and people like Jamie Oliver are doing great work to help change the minds of the decision-makers in the school systems and governments. We started tackling this same problem in Iceland nearly 16 years ago, which is one of the reasons that I created LazyTown in the first place. Today, he and I are really working on the same problem from opposite ends: He is trying to get the schools to offer more healthy food, and I am trying to get kids and their families to choose healthier foods in their everyday life. Hopefully we will be able to make a big change in the way schools and families think about nutrition for kids.

5. And all the somersaulting we see you do on LazyTown — is that all you or is CGI involved?

All of the stunts you see on LazyTown are real stunts performed by real people, and I do most of them myself. We don’t use CGI to make our stunts or use harnesses or wires, etc. The idea is that these stunts or movements are things that real people could actually do with training and practice. However, we take all the proper precautions to make everything as safe as possible and children should never try to do any stunts without the proper adult supervision.

6. What inspired you to become an aerobics champion? Did you have a sporty childhood? Well, in a funny way, it was telegrams that made me a champion and created Sportacus. Let me explain: As I said before, I grew up in a small country town. Many people did not have telephones at the time, so they could only make or receive calls at the town hall, where we had a phone operator and telegram office. By the time I was 6 or 7 years old I had already started gymnastics and was a pretty fast runner, so the town hired me to be a runner for the operator. When the operator got a phone call for someone, she would lean out the window and shout for me; then I would run to her window, she would hand me a telegram for the person and I would take off running to deliver the message as fast as I could. It was

important to deliver the telegrams quickly because the people calling had to wait on the open phone line for the other person to come and answer the phone. Some of the telegrams needed to be delivered to farms that were up to 6km away from town, and I learned to run all the way there and back without stopping!

So I learned two very important lessons from my earliest childhood: 1) I could get paid for being a fast runner and staying in good shape, and 2) I could help people at the same time. And these are things that I still do to this day.

7. Do you find yourself very competitive in real life?

The truth is that I am very competitive in everything I do. I set very high goals for myself in both my personal and professional life. But I don't mean that in the sense of having to win something. For me, being competitive means rising to the challenge—whatever that challenge may be. I don't worry about winning or losing. The questions I ask myself are: "Did I try my best?", "Did I give all my focus and energy to what I was doing?" and "Did I fight to overcome the obstacles and difficulties I might have faced?" If I can answer "Yes!" to these questions, then I can be satisfied that I have met the challenge.

Also, if people tell me that I can't do something, then I am going to try even harder to do it. Many people told me that I could never take a little Icelandic show called LazyTown and bring it to the whole world. Well, it took me 5 years of trying, but now LazyTown is on TV in 78 countries around the world. So never give up!

8. How does it feel playing your own created character – what's tough and what's fun about it? Do you feel you're playing your real self? How different or similar are Magnus and Sportacus?

This is a great question! And also a difficult one to answer because in some ways I am Sportacus and in other ways he is completely different from me. Obviously, Sportacus can do some things that I could never do, so physically I am playing a character that has special talents and abilities and that is the easiest part for me because it is so unlike the real me. As strange as it may sound, it is often easier as an actor to play parts that are very different from your real self.

But the way in which we are most alike is in the words that come from Sportacus. Basically, when you hear Sportacus talking, it's really me talking. He is the character that is telling my message to the other characters and to the world. So in that way I am actually playing myself when I am Sportacus. And for me, I find that much more difficult to do, especially with my Icelandic accent!

9. What's the laziest thing you're ever done? What is your most unhealthy habit/indulgence?

I was born with an extremely high energy level, so I'm not sure it's really possible for me to every really be "lazy" because I would be too bored! But of course I enjoy quiet activities like lying on my sofa and reading a book (I love to read) or getting a massage. Everybody needs to relax sometimes.

Unfortunately, because of my incredibly busy schedule, my most unhealthy habit at the moment is not getting quite as much sleep as I should. I'm the leader of a large company and a movie studio, so I have a hard time getting to bed at 8:08 like Sportacus says. But I am

going to try even harder to make time for more sleep!

10. Is it ok to be laidback often, you think?

Of course it's OK to be laid back sometimes! Relaxing is a way for us to recharge our batteries and calm our minds, things that are very important for good health. Just remember, it is important to live your life in a balanced way. Too much hard work or too much lying around is bad either way, so find the balance.

11. What advice do you have for children aspiring to be athletes, businessmen, actors or writers?

For me, the keys to success for anything that children may want to do in life are very simple.

First, you have to set goals for yourself. What is it that you want to learn or be or do? To get anywhere in life, you need to have some idea of where you are going.

Second, you must never, ever give up. When you make a mistake, don't feel bad about it. Learn from it and keep on working towards your goals. I have made many mistakes on the road to my goals, and they have all helped me learn how to succeed.

Third, and most important, is the advice that my father gave me and that I have followed all my life. To be good at anything you must practice, practice, practice! With enough practice, you can learn to do anything you set your mind to.

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