



SoundBites Podcast Transcript

Episode: Tyson Gillies

Dave Fabry: Welcome to Starkey Soundbites. I'm your host, Dave Fabry, Starkey's Chief Innovation officer. Our guest today is going to bring a new perspective to this podcast as an athlete with hearing loss. Tyson Gillies is a retired baseball player who recently made his debut on team Canada's deaf hockey team in the Olympics. And also I think many people don't realize that you won a gold medal in the Pan Am games with Canada in 2015 when they were played in Toronto. You're an Olympian several times over here and in multiple sports. And I think that alone is testimony to your athleticism. We're going to talk with you about the unique needs of athletes with hearing loss and really appreciate you're willing to share your journey with us. And some of the perspectives that maybe the audiologists and hearing specialists that listen to this podcast may not be familiar with.

Really you come from the unique perspective of somebody who's performed at a very high level in athletics with a significant hearing loss. And I'd really like to begin by saying thank you for coming today to share your journey with us. And let's talk a little bit about your journey with hearing loss all the way up to the Majors, and then also where you're going now too. Tyson, thank you for being here.

Tyson Gillies: Well, first off, Dave, it's a pleasure to meet you. Thank you so much for having me and again, it's a pleasure to be here. And yeah, I'm definitely happy to be here and love to tell my story and teach people about the environment we live in the deaf and hard of hearing community and anything I can do to help, to spread awareness and give these kids a dream like I had a dream as a kid, and show them that this dream can really become reality.

Dave Fabry: Excellent. Well, let's go back to the beginning and talk a little bit. You're Canadian and born in BC. One of my favorite places on the planet. I've had the opportunity, I had a buddy that taught in Edmonton and a very memorable trip that I took on a motorcycle to see him. And then we came down the backside in Jasper Baff into the Okanagan valley.

Tyson Gillies: Oh, amazing. Yeah. Wine country.

Dave Fabry: And Kamloops and Kashona. Kelowna.

Tyson Gillies: Kelowna. Yep.

Dave Fabry: Kelowna and that whole area. Best peaches I've ever had in my life.

Tyson Gillies: My parents live in Peach land now.



Dave Fabry: Oh, they do?

Tyson Gillies: Yeah.

Dave Fabry: I mean, I think August is, July/August is the time when they're at peak ripeness, where you bite into them and you're like biting a bag of juice.

Tyson Gillies: Exactly.

Dave Fabry: And I can't tell you how many memories I had from that trip. And the other times I've had the good fortune to be in Canada, but where you're from Vancouver and all of that, talk about your upbringing. You were first identified with hearing loss at a pretty young age, right?

Tyson Gillies: I was four and a half years old.

Dave Fabry: Four and a half. Oh, okay.

Tyson Gillies: I was already reading lips and actually speaking pretty well as a two year old. And I had a couple little behavior issues that were going on here and there, I was getting lost in shopping malls. My mom's like, "Oh, Tyson, we're going over here," not a thing. I'm going, taking little U-turns here and there. And obviously preschool was very tough for me. They started to really notice something different is because of how I was reacting to whenever anything was out of routine.

Dave Fabry: Yeah.

Tyson Gillies: Because I was really using my eyes at such a young age. And everything was so visual for me, so I started to memorize what we'd do on a Monday, what we'd do on a Tuesday at such a young age, because it's just your survival instincts will kick in. And yeah, finally, after having that third or fourth time in the hearing booth, finally they closed the blinds and realized that I was lip reading this entire time.

Dave Fabry: That's a good lesson for audiology students out there is really don't take for granted that even young kids are capable of compensating for their hearing loss by adding. I mean, if you think your hearing just with your ears, your ears are sensors that supply the brain and they integrate that information that's coming from visual, through lip reading. And so you are already very adept at compensating at a young age for this and professionals are taught in school not to, and for those listening, you won't get this, but push the button and then look up and push the button and then look up.

Tyson Gillies: Yeah.



Dave Fabry: And any kid that is as sharp as you obviously were, can figure out to push the button and get through and compensate like that. And then as well for the word, understanding to be able to read those lips.

Tyson Gillies: Exactly.

Dave Fabry: You can about 40% of the content from lip reading.

Tyson Gillies: Yeah. It takes me back to knowing situations when I was a kid, I have a memory that goes back so far because of going through that, going through the hearing loss, growing up, knowing in preschool that my father was sitting there in the classroom for two weeks because I was misbehaving and my parents were like, "He's so good at home. We don't understand what's going on." And him just sitting there watching me and all of a sudden teachers talking, I would get up and just start dancing or moving around. And then he would look at me and I would look right back at him and I would know I would have to sit right back down.

But with no clue what was going around and the environment, what the teacher was saying, I was lost for words, as you say.

Dave Fabry: Interesting. You managed to fake your way through until you were four and a half or so. And then was that like kindergarten screening? In the US it's really common before you start kindergarten or in kindergarten, they'll do screenings. And then you clearly ran into someone who outmatched you on your lip reading capabilities to identify that you had a hearing loss. And do you mind sharing the degree of loss that was identified at that time?

Tyson Gillies: I have a cookie bite hearing loss.

Dave Fabry: Okay.

Tyson Gillies: I'm not too sure my decimal percentage back then, but my loss now has obviously depleted over the years and moved to profound. It's been difficult, but like I said, I've been getting through it and as being even a kid, what did I have to do? I had to adapt.

And even now with being older, a little bit more aware, a little smarter, I just have to keep on adapting and keep on surviving and living this life the best I can.

Dave Fabry: Absolutely. Well, did you have any other siblings or was there a history of hearing loss in your family or did this come completely out of the blue to your parents in that they weren't really thinking about it either? And your dad must have been... What a commitment for him to say, he would come into the classroom for two weeks and sit and observe because as is very common with hearing loss, kids are misdiagnosed as having behavioral problems, when you



had a hearing loss. But were your parents, did they have a history of hearing loss in the family? Any other siblings or family members with hearing loss?

Tyson Gillies: No. There was no history at all and they started to just... Yeah, they started to see my behavior be triggered a little bit or if it was even being disciplined by the school teacher or by a coach or it's... And it was really tough because I would get frustrated. And then I already know myself and kids like me, you go through those hyperactive behavior and you lash out and with all the frustrations building up and not really knowing why. Why am I being punished right now?

Dave Fabry: Yeah. You don't know anything any different than what you had all your life so how would you know that you were dealing with any issues different than any other kid in that classroom? And so I can easily see the frustration. But cool that your dad went directly into the classroom and did that, and then you were fitted. You were identified at four and a half and then fitted with hearing aids shortly afterwards?

Tyson Gillies: Yeah. And people-

Dave Fabry: Both ears?

Tyson Gillies: Yep. Both ears. And people don't know, after those two weeks he was with me in school, it probably wasn't much later that I was actually expelled from preschool.

Dave Fabry: Oh. You got expelled from preschool. You were fitted and then they expelled-

Tyson Gillies: No, I still didn't have hearing aids.

Dave Fabry: Oh, you still didn't have them and then they expelled you from preschool.

Tyson Gillies: Yeah, exactly.

Tyson Gillies: Expelled for not listening.

Dave Fabry: Then they got you fitted. Yeah. You couldn't hear.

Tyson Gillies: Yeah. I couldn't hear it and nobody knew. I think it was a relief for my parents afterwards because they're like, "We're doing our best here." and I can only imagine raising a young kid, but raising a young kid who can't hear you, there's a communication barrier right there.

I think it came a little bit of a relief to them as well, to know-

Dave Fabry: To put a diagnosis on it.

Tyson Gillies: There you go.

Dave Fabry: And this is the reason and then be able to say, "Okay, now we have to go from here. Get you fitted." And then did... Clearly they allowed you back into school, but so did you immediately... Do you have memories? You talk about having memories way back. Do you remember first being fitted and then did you see a transformation right away or did it take a while or what happened?

Tyson Gillies: Oh, that's when the real journey started.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. Yeah.

Tyson Gillies: Let alone... Yes. It was great to hear, but did I want to wear them? Absolutely not. I think-

Dave Fabry: Welcome to my life.

Tyson Gillies: Yeah. Welcome to my life. I think my hearing aids, at a very young time and my career with hearing aids, they took a couple spills. A couple in the toilets and a couple from the patio from four stories up in the apartment.

Dave Fabry: Trying to destroy the hearing aids.

Tyson Gillies: Exactly. I was very insecure to wear them, especially being around young kids and everyone always poking at my ears or laughing and... It was really tough and that's-

Dave Fabry: Kids are brutal. People want to think that kids are all kind and nice to each other, but they're particularly... I mean, they're just brutal at that age in terms of differences.

Tyson Gillies: Exactly. It was a very tough time growing up. And I probably went on for quite a few years, to be honest with you before I said, "You know what, this is what it is. I mean, this is how my life is going to be." I was like, "I got to accept it. I got to embrace it and I got to move forward."

Dave Fabry: Well, and so then, as you did, did you use like the classroom amplification systems where they transmitted directly to your... And how was that? Was that again stigmatizing?

Tyson Gillies: Oh yes. The FM systems.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. Yeah, the teacher had to put it on and then you were maybe the only kid with hearing loss in the classroom.

Tyson Gillies: Yeah. The only one.



Dave Fabry: Everyone knew the reason he or she was wearing that was for you and another sort of, the hard of hearing kid in the classroom. I hear this a lot in the stigmatizing aspect of that.

Tyson Gillies: It was just like another, here we go again, all eyes on me and... Yeah. Every question, why are you wearing that? Why are you wearing that? Oh, it's for him. It's for him. And it's just like over and over, just getting just... Always remembering it was always like a means for kids to like call me out or single me out. And it was very difficult, but like I said, when I started to embrace it, when I started to accept it and I started to make jokes, throw myself under the bus and just laugh with the kids and everything, that's when everyone truly started to ask me questions about hearing, get interested in it.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. Interesting.

Tyson Gillies: And really started to feel accepted. And I understand what it's like as a kid and you're out there, you're trying to be yourself, you're trying to show your brand, but kids can be cruel.

Dave Fabry: Oh yeah.

Tyson Gillies: They really can be cruel too.

Dave Fabry: Well, I had a chance to interview Lou Ferrigno a number of years ago and he was born with much more significant loss than you have, that went undiagnosed for a while, he compensated for his hearing loss by he always idolized superheroes. And he clearly put that effort into making his body bigger so that when kids picked on him that he could take care of things. Did you have any bent towards that because clearly I've seen your Instagram page and you've managed to build yourself up as a professional athlete. Did that factor in at all, that this was the way you could work hard to be bigger and buffer than everyone?

Tyson Gillies: Absolutely. I mean, that was the biggest thing. I needed them to talk about something else.

I needed them to overlook the hearing loss, to not think that I was a liability on the field or on the ice. It wasn't just, "Oh Tyson Gillies, he's got some pretty good skill set, but you know, what if a ball gets hit into the right field gap? Is he going to run into our center field or our right fielder?" And I made him talk about something else. "Tyson Gillies. There he is again. Working hard."

Same old, same old. So it started to just really mask what they had to talk about. And that was my goal always and in life, still to this day. I mean the work ethic's always been there and it has to be there.

- Dave Fabry: Every kid in Canada grows up to want to be a baseball player. No, I mean, I think of hockey player, it's the national sport. Talk a little bit about, did you play both? Did you find baseball and hockey at the same time? Which did you find first? How did you balance it? How did it help you take the focus off of your hearing, onto your athleticism?
- Tyson Gillies: Funny enough, I grew up playing hockey. I started hockey at five. And I didn't start baseball till 11. Baseball was just something to do in the summer while I was waiting around for a hockey season.
- Dave Fabry: Okay. Just to stay in shape, keep your activity going things?
- Tyson Gillies: It was really... Hockey is my first love. It always has been even until this day. And yeah, baseball just complimented the hockey so well, and I started to grow with it and I got picked up at 15 to leave home for baseball. And at the time I felt like I would have a better opportunity to get a college scholarship, go to the states, travel the world a little bit and so I took it.
- Dave Fabry: Certainly have done that too. I got to believe that in the minor leagues, in baseball, I think of all of the sports. Well probably hockey too. You end up going, you end up moving a lot as you're progressing through. How was that for you? Did you embrace it in terms of, like you said, opportunity to see Canada, the US, to see the world a little bit, or do you like the moving around like that? Or was that something you took as a burden, as a necessary part of the journey?
- Tyson Gillies: I mean, I loved it, up until last year, I was living out of a suitcase for 16 years. And moving town to town, city to city and being with team Canada for baseball and traveling the world and seeing different countries and the international scale.
- It was some of the best moments in my life. I met some of the most amazing people that you form a bond with because you have to survive with each other, growing up into a sport and you can be 16, 17, 18 years old and trying to survive financially as well and having to take care of each other. Being in the minor leagues, we don't really make a lot of money. We're sitting there in a three bedroom apartment with six teammates, an air mattress beside a, could be my teammate from Nicaragua, could be my teammate from Cuba. It's just, you start to meet so many people and you start to learn the different cultures of the world. And I've found so much value in that. And I think it's really shaped me as an individual today.
- Dave Fabry: No question. I always say that the thing that will keep us from trying to destroy each other from around the world is to break bread with people from around the world to understand that basically they're looking out for the same things as you are.



And it's really when we only read the news or the high level, that's where we see the conflict in many cases. Now, obviously there are exceptions to that, but I think that ability with team Canada to see the world and to interface with athletes all over the world is one thing. And then I think as well on the baseball side, you made it to the majors first with Seattle. All the way up to the bigs.

Tyson Gillies: My furthest I got with Seattle was the exhibition series. In Las Vegas in 2009.

And yeah, while I was with the Phillies, I was on the major league roster for most of... Four year four out of the five years I was there.

And with injuries plaguing on my shoulder and my foot, I was just scratching the surface right there and I couldn't stay healthy to get on the field. But at the same time, I got to experience everything, the World Baseball Classic, got to experience international baseball, playing in the Pan Olympics two separate times with the gold and silver medal. And now I want to switch over to my first love and hope to get the opportunity to play with the deaf Olympics in hockey in 2024.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. That's awesome. And so before we pivot to hockey, talk a little bit about your hearing loss and how that impacted you on the baseball field. What sorts of things did it challenge for you and did your hearing loss and your lip reading capability give you a better ability to steal signs?

Tyson Gillies: Well, I would have to say that pitchers started to know. When you see that pitcher-pitching coach interaction there, they made sure to cover their mouths when I was on the dugout. But it was actually very tough, too. We talk a little bit about my hearing loss in baseball and the effect it had on me was, it was tough for some of it because I had coaches telling me, "Don't worry about stealing third base, because you can't tell me... I can't yell at you and you can't hear me to get back." And I'm just sitting there. I was like, "Why would that ever be a thing? Why would that ever be an issue?"

Dave Fabry: Placing limits, limitations on you.

Tyson Gillies: They were placing limitations on me and it was a very frustrating time. And I told myself way back when I was a kid, when I was training to be quarterback in high school and I couldn't fit my hearing aids in my helmet. And the coach told me, "Well, you can't be quarterback then because you can't hear out there." They made me the field goal kicker.

Dave Fabry: No kidding.

Tyson Gillies: I was just-



Dave Fabry: You played three sports, so you played football. But you got blocked into the field goal kicker because of your hearing loss.

Tyson Gillies: Yeah.

Dave Fabry: Because of the... I see.

Tyson Gillies: I told people, I would never... That time I was in grade eight or eighth grade as you say in America. I said, I would never let that happen again. And it was very frustrating. It was frustrating to be labeled by fans. Walking through the tunnel and having fans yell for an autograph and being beside me or behind me and just couldn't hear them. Yeah. And always getting labeled as having a bad attitude or being ignorant and these are the things that people who are deaf and hard of hearing have to go through that people don't realize. It's such a big secret and a lot of people don't have a general understanding of what it is we really go through.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. People just think, "Well, I'll just shout everything." That doesn't help. It just distorts and makes everything worse. What would be one thing, if you consider that there's not only consumers, hearing aid users that listen to this podcast, but also professionals, what would be one thing you would want professionals to know and understand from your journey that would help them be more empathetic and understanding to the issues faced by people with hearing loss?

Tyson Gillies: Oh, I would just have to say just the general understanding of just having the patience, the patience and really get to know your patient and what environment they're going through every day, whether it's work, whether it's in sports and trying to get to the bottom of how to not just help your hearing, but how that will relate to their mental health in general. These are things that really tough with me because not being able to hear and going through all these frustrations, you start to get mixed in your emotions and your mental health really takes a toll. And that leads to a lot of frustrations, a lot of isolation. And these are things that I know kids are going through because I went through them all. And even nowadays, I'm 33 years old now and I'm still learning so much in this world and I'm still trying to just get through some days as well. The grass isn't always green all the time. The sky's not always blue, but I'm trying to figure it out and trying to adapt just like everybody else.

Dave Fabry: Oh, no question. And I think that you highlight a really important point. Too often, especially when people get right out of school or finish with their training, that they're looking at the audiogram and thinking about, "Okay, what do I need to fit on this patient based on the audiogram." And there's so much more, as you just articulated, about the patient that they need to learn. They need to learn about the auditory issues, certainly. But then all of the non auditory lifestyle factors and you don't really know a patient until you get to know them.



And that really requires listening as well as talking and not just telling you everything that I know that's going to put in, my expertise in fitting you, but listening, what are your concerns? What are your fears?

Tyson Gillies: Exactly.

Dave Fabry: How did you get here?

Tyson Gillies: And it's a very intimate thing that you can have with your audiologist or hearing professional fitting you. We can learn so much from our obviously audiologists, with new technology and custom settings and they can learn so much from us about what environment you're in, what environment he's in, she's in, they're in. And I think that's very important to really get into their present, their past, to help their future.

Dave Fabry: Well, and too often, in Canada and in the US, we're being faced with the fact that the biggest competitor... You're all about competition. Our biggest competitor is not the other brands of hearing aids that are produced, but non-compliance, non-use. Only about a third of the people who have hearing loss, do something about it. Meaning two thirds of the people still have the cost or the stigma or the accessibility all of those other things.

And so the more that we can raise awareness for what people with hearing loss are capable of, not placing limitations on them, but looking at the opportunities. Maybe some adjustments that have to be made. But they're capable of doing every bit and more of what a person with normal hearing, no hearing loss, can do.

Tyson Gillies: Exactly.

Dave Fabry: But it's that understanding that's so crucial to that. And I think when clinicians worry about their role being commoditized by over the counter hearing aids or low cost providers, the one thing that can't be commoditized, I always say, is caring. And if you really care enough to find out more about what brought your patient in to see you and just like you said better than I can, that is going to prevent your role from being commoditized. You can't commoditize caring.

Tyson Gillies: Exactly. Exactly.

Dave Fabry: Right now I know you're wearing Evolv AI devices.

Tyson Gillies: Yep.

Dave Fabry: And I'll put a pin in that for a minute because I want to transition as you... Your baseball career, you're retired and now you're competing at a very high level in hockey to, as you said, have a goal to participate in the [Deaf] Olympics in 2024.



Tyson Gillies: Yes. That's right.

Dave Fabry: Tell me a little bit about that.

Tyson Gillies: I've actually always had the dream to play with this team. I mean, I think I've known about this team for probably close to 10 years now, and I've always been playing baseball and always seen their trips that they've been going on, like the Deaf Olympics in Italy in 2019, where they won the silver medal. And it's very exciting. And being a part of the clubhouse and being with the guys and these are the things that a retired athlete by any means is going to miss the most. I mean, the stories with the people that have been so close to you that you went into battle with, and that's something that I want to hold onto as long as I can.

Dave Fabry: Sure. 33's not that old. You've still got lots of time.

Tyson Gillies: Lots of surgeries later. I'm back getting on the ice and ready to sacrifice my body some more just for those memories. And I had the opportunity to play these two exhibition games this past weekend against team USA. And it was an amazing... I have never... It's been a long time since I've felt that alive.

And it's the first time I've actually been in a room with people, deaf and hard of hearing like myself, who play sports. It's the first time it's ever happened. And to see the way those guys carried themselves and the way they take care of each other and how accepting and welcoming they were for me as a 33 year old rookie coming into the clubhouse. The youngest kid at 17, the oldest guy right here. And just how amazing they took me under their wing and taught me about hockey and teaching me a sport that I haven't played in 17 years.

Dave Fabry: Wow. What position are you playing?

Tyson Gillies: I was playing left wing.

Dave Fabry: Left wing. Okay, fantastic. Well, we'll look forward to seeing that as you continue your journey towards the Deaf Olympics in 2024. Where are they?

Tyson Gillies: I believe they're either in Quebec or Portland. I think they're trying to make the decision now.

Dave Fabry: Awesome. That's great. Well, let's talk a little bit. You're wearing now... You've had multiple sets of hearing aids, I'm sure, over your lifetime, since you were fit now, some nearly 30 years ago. How has the technology changed from your first set of devices to your Evolv AI ones?

Tyson Gillies: Oh, it's been... You can't even compare to the old hearing aids back in the day to now. I mean, this sound quality in general and being able to hear that R I couldn't hear before, that TH sound. And it's allowed my mind to roll and be



able to put together a sentence and the topic of what we've been talking about and be able to come back and be a part of a conversation. And that's huge. And especially now with all the features that have been so amazing for my everyday life, as far as being in the Thrive app and having the activity tracker. I mean, [crosstalk].

Dave Fabry: You like the activity tracker.

Tyson Gillies: Oh, it's been amazing for my calories and my total steps in a day to being the best healthable hearing aid on the market that you can get as far as making sure that you're interacting with people, you're putting yourself out there, you're engaging in conversation, you're trying to grow as a person.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. Now, are you fluent in both English and French?

Tyson Gillies: Just English.

Dave Fabry: Just English. Have you used the translation feature at all?

Tyson Gillies: That's what I was going to get to next as far as my love to travel the world. I've actually, playing in Quebec city, I've used it, the translation, and I can't wait to travel the world even more and try it out in all different countries. I mean, I think that would be my goal to go about... 27 on the list right now.

Dave Fabry: Awesome. Awesome. That's fantastic. Well, and we have the ability, as you said, to have the tracking, to be able to track your physical activity, your exercise, your steps, and as someone who's easily gamified, I like to fill those buckets up and get that maximum score every day.

One of the other things we talk about is the reminder feature where you can set reminders. And we typically talk about this in terms of medication reminders for older people. But for someone like yourself, you can remind yourself of appointments or places where you have to be and things, and you can set up a daily, weekly, monthly, or even an annual reminder so you don't forget anyone's birthdays and things like that. Have you used the reminder feature at all?

Tyson Gillies: Oh, I mean, it gets me through my week. Especially very busy with the youth baseball and training kids all the time to know that I have to be on the field at this time, I have a private instruction hitting lesson at this time. Oh, I got to take some time for myself at this time. Yeah. It's been really amazing. It's been very accommodating and very convenient.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. It's something that a lot of people think of, "Oh, well, that's just for older people." And I think the use cases for all of these features really transcend age. And going back again to the pointer for the professionals listening, get to know what your patient's lifestyle is. What their needs and expectations are. Don't



presume that you would think medication reminders, but think about setting up reminders for your programs that you're running, for your appointments that you got to go to. All of those things can really serve as additional... I say it provides you with superpowers. You get an audio reminder and you can even control the hearing aids using voice commands. Have you ever tried that? You can try turning up the volume, change programs.

- Tyson Gillies: Yeah. Exactly. I mean, I love all the features. I feel like a modern day Inspector Gadget most of the time.
- Dave Fabry: That's awesome.
- Tyson Gillies: It's been truly amazing. And yeah, people ask me all the time about the settings and they're floored by it. And it's very exciting to talk about. And I think that talking about that with different people, they're more likely to now, "Okay. I might as well go get my hearing tested. There's such cool things. You can stream your music, your calls everything's hands free." I mean, it's just amazing.
- Dave Fabry: Now do you wear in-the-ear custom devices or over-the-ear? Do you have both?
- Tyson Gillies: I wear both.
- Dave Fabry: When you're putting a helmet on, I would assume in-the-ear is easier.
- Tyson Gillies: Easier and it's a lot easier because with all the moisture and sweat and the hockey helmet or the baseball hat, or if you're out and it's raining on the field. Yeah, it's definitely really convenient having the in-the-ear hearing aids in.
- Dave Fabry: Yeah, we talk about, I mean the ear is a hostile work environment. And especially for someone playing outdoors or playing on an ice rink, a hockey rink where there's moisture and there's humidity close to the ice and you're falling and you want to make sure that they stay securely in your ears. And that's why I was curious, the customs probably are that best solution. Do you use the rechargeable batteries?
- Tyson Gillies: Yes. That has been huge for me going forward is not losing those little batteries anymore and not sitting there and all of a sudden the pharmacy is closed because we all know that is very devastating moments.
- Dave Fabry: Yeah. You're out of luck then at that point. That's where I think having a backup pair, in your case, is useful. And then having both the custom and over-the-ear style. Do you have a preference just for one in general versus the other?
- Tyson Gillies: I think my preference right now would be my RICs with the AP molds, have been really great for me because it gives me that sound boost that I need and the confidence to have that conversation, gets a little bit louder. It's very, very, crisp



and really good for that conversation being in the restaurants and being in meetings and it's been very good for me.

Dave Fabry: Okay. Now going back to your youth and you talked about those FM transmitters and how you grimaced considering that because it singled you out. Have you used any accessories for your devices now that you live in the Bluetooth world and not only are you connected to your smartphone? And you already mentioned that you use the Thrive app to control the devices, you can stream phone calls, as you mentioned, you can stream podcasts and music. Have you explored or tried an accessory in any cases where there is a challenging listening environment? The Table Mic or the Remote Mic or the TV Streamer

Tyson Gillies: I've used the Table Mic actually in a team meeting.

Dave Fabry: Okay. Like it?

Tyson Gillies: Put the Table Mic great there because you have a conversation with the coach on one side, the other coach on the other, some of the players. All the different camera or different microphone settings in that, in the Table Mic, to be able to catch and real time translate right to my ears. It's been absolutely amazing. I mean, I think it's one of the... I really wish I had that as a kid.

Dave Fabry: Again, you think about how far it's come and that instead of something that you thought about, "Oh this is singling me out as the heart of hearing kid," versus something that, as I said gives you a bit of a superpower in that, to the degree that your hearing loss allows, it allows you to outperform exactly your normal hearing counterpart in the same environment. And then you get people saying, "Wait a minute, what's that? How's that work? How do I get that?"

Tyson Gillies: Exactly. I've had so many people come up to me or call me and be like, "Okay, I think I want hearing aids. I don't need them. But I think I want them."

Dave Fabry: For all of the things that they can do and see you doing.

Tyson Gillies: Exactly.

Dave Fabry: Well, so we talked earlier and you gave some great advice for professionals to consider when they're working with the patient and they're not just working with a pair of ears, but they're working with a whole human who has a whole journey before you and after you. What advice would you give young kids... And I know in Travail, now you are working with kids to develop their skills as athletes. And I'm assuming for both baseball and for hockey.

Tyson Gillies: We're doing it for baseball.



Dave Fabry: Baseball. Okay.

Tyson Gillies: Starting baseball.

Dave Fabry: Starting baseball. But what advice do you have for kids who want to grow up to be a professional athlete like you? And then are there any other... Given your history as a kid with a hearing loss, who overcame some of those early obstacles to succeed at a very high level, winning a gold medal at the Pan Am games, what advice do you have for kids who want to grow up to be a pro athlete? And what advice do you have, special, unique to your journey as a kid with a hearing loss?

Tyson Gillies: Listens to yourself.

Dave Fabry: What do you mean? Expand on that.

Tyson Gillies: I say, listen to yourself. I was like, you have a dream. I had a dream, I had a goal. And I had a lot of people telling me that it would never become a reality.

Dave Fabry: Placing limits.

Tyson Gillies: Placing limits, and telling me that... Laughing at me or telling me like... Because I wanted to be a professional athlete when I was a kid and they're like, "Well, you can't hear on the field or you can't hear somebody call for the puck." I was like, "Yeah, but I'm going to find a way anyways." I listened to myself and I allowed myself to reach for the clouds and I was going to go in there and I was going to put the work in. And like I said, we can go back to what I had to do to defy these odds, as you'll call them and get away from those limitations that people put on me and the labels that they put on me as a kid. And I was going to give them something else to talk about.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. The odds are long for any kid who wishes to be a professional athlete. And then in addition, based on the fact that you had a hearing loss, weren't identified, you were told you had behavioral problems until four and a half then were fitted. And still being able to pick up all of the players around when you have that hearing loss, you had to use your eyes probably more than the average person and paying attention to those details. But the fact that you were able to do that, commit to yourself, look at and listen to your own voice inside, use all of those, combination of senses that you're getting input on. Do you feel as though that your hearing loss made you more visual? You mentioned it a couple times that, being more in tune to the visual surroundings.

Tyson Gillies: I have to. I mean, it goes right back to just human survival instance as those had to kick in and going back to what you said about things that could tell, like the kids that have the dream of coming up, it's just like, we try and teach our kids, it's like fail now. Fail now and fail over and over and over.



Dave Fabry: And learn how to deal with that.

Tyson Gillies: Yes, exactly.

Dave Fabry: So that then the success will come.

Tyson Gillies: Exactly.

Dave Fabry: Is that what... Talk a little bit about Travail and how you work on that with the Travail translation to French. But what are you building in them at this age?

Tyson Gillies: Work.

Dave Fabry: Yeah.

Tyson Gillies: Work ethic.

Dave Fabry: Yeah.

Tyson Gillies: You look at the definition of that word and you can see an unbearable experience. I mean, I've grown up with an unbearable experience since day one. And I knew I had to put the work in. My business partner, Michael Krause and myself, we both went through kind of tough upbringings when it came to that. And so we teach our kids about failure, about sacrifice, because you got to build a certain threshold to be able to survive in sports and not even in sports. Sports is second. We're building character in these young men and women, and we're trying to get them ready for the real world. Sports is just a plus.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. John Maxwell says, "The dream is free, but the journey is not." And when you think about that journey to the professional level, seeing where they talk about 10,000 hours at a minimum, is what you have to invest in perfecting your craft. No matter whether it's music or sports or anything else, academics, you got to put 10,000 hours in. And everyone thinks about the dream. From here to there. But it's that work that comes in between that is essential to that goal.

Tyson Gillies: Exactly. Exactly. You hit it right on.

Dave Fabry: That's great what you're modeling for these young kids. And have you had any prospects? I know you've been doing this for about three and a half years.

Tyson Gillies: Yeah.

Dave Fabry: Any prospects yet that you see really... Don't name any names because by doing that, you're putting lids on the other kid. But do have you seen any that really have promise that may be able to indeed achieve their dream as long as those odds are?



Tyson Gillies: Yeah. I mean, we do.

Dave Fabry: That's cool.

Tyson Gillies: We see it every day we see these young kids and we handle kids anywhere from five to 18, 19.

Dave Fabry: That's awesome.

Tyson Gillies: And we start to see these kids that have, they have a high ceiling and now we hope they can grow with us because they're teaching us so much every day, about ourselves and about their lives and what they have to go through. And it's been such an awesome interaction and an awesome exchange altogether.

Dave Fabry: Well, I appreciate your sharing this time with us today. And for the last couple minutes I want to do a bit of, what's become a tradition. We talk about this podcast is focusing on hearing better and living better and sound is the central theme. And as somebody that has achieved great success in multiple sports now, what favorite sounds do you have that you think of in the world? Whether it's in the sporting world or in your family or in any other area, in the wilderness. You've grown up in a great part of the world where there's a great wilderness there, but what are some of your favorite sounds?

Tyson Gillies: Oh, you won't believe this one. I kind of have this obsession with bagpipes.

Dave Fabry: Bagpipes?

Tyson Gillies: I love listening to the bagpipes.

Dave Fabry: Wow. And for me it's like you go to heaven and here's your harp, you go to hell and here's your bagpipe.

Tyson Gillies: Nothing gets the adrenaline going and gets me more excited than listening to bagpipes.

Dave Fabry: Where did that come from?

Tyson Gillies: I honestly, I'm not even too sure. I think the first time I heard bagpipes, I just loved that sound and how I hear that sound, which could be a lot different to how everybody else hears that sound.

Dave Fabry: Well, you've just given me inspiration. Your walk in-music could be AC/DC, Long Way to the Top. Which fits with Travail. And there's a big bagpipe role in that song. That's cool.

Okay, so one other thing that I want to ask again, specifically for you as somebody with a hearing loss, who's looked at taking limitations away, favorite movie? Because one of the things that I think about is, to date, we're starting to see more and more movies. In the past, whenever there was a movie with someone who was a hearing aid user, a cochlear implant user, that element, the hearing aid or the hearing loss or the implant was always a part of the plot. A Quiet Place, Mr. Holland's Opus, those kinds of things. Coda. But we're starting to see movies that can feature. My dream is to have someone with hearing aids or a cochlear implant that's in the movie and that the plot doesn't factor in at all to the fact that this person happens to have a hearing loss or a hearing aid. What favorite movies do you have and are you a movie person to begin with?

Tyson Gillies:

Oh, big time movie person.

Dave Fabry:

Okay. Well then, then it's easy. What's your favorite movie or movies that inspire you?

Tyson Gillies:

I think one of my favorite movies of all time would probably have to be Major Payne. And there actually is somebody in the movie deaf and hard of hearing.

Dave Fabry:

Okay. We didn't plan this out in advance. That's interesting. And so I think the goal is really just to get this to society where we remove that stigma. We recognize the importance of hearing aids and hearing loss, offsetting just like some people take medication for blood pressure, other people have to wear glasses, and hearing aids should just become a part of the landscape and without placing limitations. It pains me to hear even a man as young as you, 33, that you were told, "Well, you can't do this because you have hearing loss." And so I can't tell you how inspirational it is to have you here today, sharing your story with us. And I wish you all of the best in the future. And I'll look forward to seeing you in the Deaf Olympics in 2024.

Tyson Gillies:

I hope so too. Hey, it's been an absolute pleasure, Dave. Thank you so much for having me.

Dave Fabry:

Oh, it's my pleasure. To our listeners, thank you for listening to this episode of Starkey Soundbites. If you enjoyed this conversation, please rate and review us on your preferred podcast platform. And you can also follow us by hitting subscribe, to be sure you don't miss a single episode. We'll see, and hear you next time.