

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:09 What's up, everybody? Welcome to this week's episode of Hidden Forces, with me, Demetri Kofinas. Today I speak with Sam Walker, the Wall Street Journal's Deputy Editor for Enterprise, the unit that directs the paper's in-depth page one features and investigative reporting projects. A former reporter, sports columnist, and sports editor, Walker founded the Journal's prize winning daily sports coverage in 2009. Sam is also the author of The Captain Class, the hidden force that creates the world's greatest team.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:44 In addition to The Captain Class, he is the author of Fantasy Land, a best-selling account of his attempt to win America's top fantasy baseball expert competition, of which he is a two time champion. Sam, welcome to Hidden Forces.

Sam Walker: 00:00:58 Thanks, Demetri.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:00 How you doing?

Sam Walker: 00:01:00 I'm doing well

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:01 Well, I told you I read your entire book. I actually heard it as an audio book. That's how I do most of my books now because I don't have the time to actually read them. So, I will also endorse the guy who read your book, who did an amazing job. He did an amazing job with Accents as well, because you've got so many different sports teams and so many different leaders from so many different countries. And he did a really great job with that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:23 So, before we get into this I want to say to you and to my audience why I strayed, I think, from the normal distribution of shows that we do. We've done one other show that wasn't sort of in the science, technology, philosophy kind of space, and that was episode four on media history ... on television history. I think the reason that I was attracted to your book is because we have interviewed so many fund managers and so many different entrepreneurs, and I think that one of the things that we have not been able to touch on is what makes them great at their job, beyond simply their knowledge set. What makes them great leaders? What makes them great competitors?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:02 Your book is called Captain Class, and it is an exploration of what you feel has made these teams that you identify as being the greatest teams of all-time great. Why don't we start with walking us through. Give us a summary of what this book is and then we'll start to delve into that total sort of category.

Sam Walker: 00:02:21 Sure. Well, I think the title, Hidden Forces, I mean, I think that really kind of hits the sweet spot of what I was trying to do with this book. Which is ... You know, I'd always wondered why certain teams were not just good but extraordinary. It wasn't so much a team that wins, but a team that has a winning culture and that does something phenomenal that no other team has ever done. No one had ever just studied those teams as a group.

Sam Walker: 00:02:47 I thought, "Look, if you can go all over, globally, and look at every single freak team ... super team ... that's ever played in any sport all around the world. Really, just round up the outliers, right? And see if there's anything that unifies them." That was really the genesis of that. I just wanted to understand. I've always loved teams. I've been obsessed with them. I've never gotten a good answer from athletes, from science, from anyone about why a team is extraordinary. And so, that's where it started.

Sam Walker: 00:03:18 It turned into a giant rabbit hole. It was a very long, many year project of putting this together and really trying to come up with my study sample. Once I did, then it was another incredible amount of time trying to piece it all together. There's no data for something like this. You have to use anecdotes almost as data points and try to find patterns. It took a long time to figure it out. In the end, the book is about what I've found, which is the clearest, most slap your forehead, obvious conclusion I've ever seen from a pile of data that large. It is that the secret to extraordinary teams' sustained success is a presence of a certain kind of player leader.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:04:00 Well, you actually have a great quote that I'm going to pull out of the book that is summation of what you just said, but I think very well-articulated. "The most crucial ingredient in a team that achieves and sustains historic greatness is the character of the player who leads it." We'll get into that. I want to go into the details of how you came to that determination. How many years were you looking at data and sort of teams and looking at reels and stuff?

Sam Walker: 00:04:22 I tried to say it, but I started this project after the Boston Red Sox won in the World Series in 2004. So, it was 2005. Do the math. It's been about 11 years tip to tale. The first part of it heavily looking at 25,000 teams in sports history and trying to bring it down to the greatest teams ever. Then the process of profiling these teams and then profiling the captains. So, yeah. It was many.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:04:47 Did you start by like, segmenting by sport to make it easier for you? How did you structure it for yourself? Separate from the way that you structured it in terms of judging criteria.

Sam Walker: 00:04:57 Yeah, no, I really started ... It's funny. I wound up writing a book about leadership. I had no intention to do that. I didn't know that was where it was going to wind up.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:05:05 Did you have a sense of where it would wind up?

Sam Walker: 00:05:06 Yeah! I thought it was going to be coaching or talent or tactics or money or something. Some other factor. I always thought that chemistry would play into it because I've seen enough teams ... As a sports writer, I've been around some really elite teams. Michael Jordan's Bulls, the Patriots, Barcelona, and the San Antonio Spurs. I'd seen teams of that caliber. So, I knew there would be something chemistry related, but I really wasn't sure what the source was.

Sam Walker: 00:05:32 I segmented it really by I had to do this project and I had to cast the widest possible net. I just poured in. I spent a lot of time digging up old records from professional soccer in Argentina from the 1930s in, you know, Uruguay. And handball and all these obscure sports, and trying to just collect the stats so that I could actually find those outliers. So, that took a lot of time. But really, once I got rolling, I've got to say this hit me really quickly. I mean, this captaincy thing jumped out early in the process, and I didn't really believe that it would become the book. Over time it just became this overwhelming pattern.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:06:09 That 2004 run by the Boston Red Sox ... At some point in the season they were struggling, right?

Sam Walker: 00:06:15 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:06:16 That's actually a moment that you highlight in the epilogue of the book because they don't qualify even in tier two, right?

Sam Walker: 00:06:21 No.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:06:21 They're not one of your tier two teams. That's how vigorous your criteria is. We'll get into that. But there was this really important seminal moment. Why don't you tell us a little bit about that moment and that sort of sent you on this journey? And how that maybe also kind of fed your sense of your thesis about leadership and captain class?

Sam Walker: 00:06:39 I spent a lot of time with that team. I was writing my first book. I never spent that much time with any one team. Many, many days and nights behind the scenes with the 2004 Red Sox when no one really knew what they would become. They, at the beginning of the season, struck me as just a fun group of guys, really undisciplined but not contenders. They didn't seem like the serious teams I'd seen win in the past. They didn't have that, whatever that was that I recognized.

Sam Walker: 00:07:06 Sure enough, come July this team was really scuffling. They were nine and a half games behind the Yankees. They were kind of left for dead by just about everybody. I wasn't surprised. I thought, "Yeah, that didn't have the vibe that I thought that great teams had." But then something happened in August. They just completely clicked and just turned it around. I mean, they became this swaggering, dominating force ... A lot like the other great teams I'd been around. I was stunning. And then when they won the World Series in that epic fashion by taking the Yankees down, I just realized people were talking about this team as one of the great baseball teams of the century.

Sam Walker: 00:07:39 I realized something important, which is I had known a lot ... I'd looked at great teams, I'd been around a lot of great teams. But by the time I showed up they'd already gotten there. They'd already become great. The Yankees, Barcelona, Patriots ... They'd kind of already made the journey. What I didn't know was how they got there. I didn't know what provided that spark. I was looking for that moment when it all happened. That's what I didn't know. So, that's what really energized me to start the project and to really try to figure out if I could first, identify this group of outliers, and second, to try to figure out not only what sparked it, but then after that, what sustained it and whether there's any DNA of a great team that it's just a lot easier than we think it is to find.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:19 In that case it was Jason Varitek's punching Alex Rodriguez. I think what's interesting about your book is different captains exhibited different features, different qualities, in more abundance than the ones that you laid out. In that case ... In the case of Varitek, it reminds me in some ways with the case of Carles Puyol and Barcelona, with respect to the narrative of the cities.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:41 So, Boston had this really strong narrative, right? And so did Barcelona. Both of those players fed off of that narrative. In the case of Varitek, it was sort of punching Rodriguez, the big star who snubbed Boston, right? There's something to me about

igniting that emotional energy. Making it mean something. Making that game mean more than just a game, right?

- Sam Walker: 00:09:01 Exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:09:02 Why do you think we love sports so much?
- Sam Walker: 00:09:04 I think what we see in sports when we look at these teams ... And this is something that I think attracted me to sports and made me want to write this book, is when you watch a great team play ... Not just a team that's going to win, you know, one championship. But a great team that knows each other, that trusts each other. There's something so infectious about that. I mean, I really think that we're hard wired to join teams. Teams are the foundation of everything important that happens in society. Every invention, every democracy ...
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:09:33 I think it's biological.
- Sam Walker: 00:09:34 I think it's biological. I mean, look. If we've gotten this far as human beings on the planet, you know that your ancestors have been on winning teams, right? They won the war. They didn't lose the war. You wouldn't be around, right? So, we all know what it's like to be part of a great, collective effort. I think we've really lost the plot about how these things come together, but we all know it when we see it. That's, to me, the great thrill of sports and why the playoffs' ratings are so much higher than everything else.
- Sam Walker: 00:10:02 We see that great team and we yearn to be part of it. We feel the same energy that they're feeling. It's a unique kind of human interaction that is incredibly powerful, because everything that we've ever built that means anything, every discovery, every invention, has all come from teamwork and a collective effort. We all thrive on that. I think that's the secret power of sports.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:10:23 It's an amazing equalizer too for conversations. It's a great outlet. It's viscerally enticing and exciting. We all understand it. We can get so immersed in the minutia of it. How did you go about setting limits or sort of a minimum threshold for what is a team? That was one of the first things I thought about when I was looking at your book. You get into it, but could you give it to use for our audience?
- Sam Walker: 00:10:47 Yeah, it was tough. I think people haven't really taken the time to define what a team is. I mean, by the dictionary definition a

team is any group of I guess more than two people. But if it's Oxen a team can be two. So, there's really no definition that's standard. What I decided was that what I was looking for is I was looking for the maximum team. The team that had no ... There was nothing about it that wasn't perfect.

- Sam Walker: 00:11:13 What I realized is that first of all, you have to look in the nature of the competition, because not every sport ... Basketball, you play offense and defense. You're constantly engaged with each other and also with your opponent. That's a team sport. But something like a rowing competition. You're not actually interacting.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:11:29 Or wrestling.
- Sam Walker: 00:11:30 Right. And then there's that other thing. It's like that individual sport that's under a team banner. So, I had to study that.
- Sam Walker: 00:11:37 The other question's how big is a team? How big does it have to be? What I wanted to study ... You mentioned figured skating, which was such a great example. Figure skating ... Is that a team? Is a pair skating team a team? I don't think so. I think it's a partnership. I think you need to have enough people on a team so that you can't assume that one person's effort is going to tote the balance in one direction.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:12:00 Okay. So, what other criteria did you use? You mentioned these three. What else did you use to start to whittle down all these teams? First of all, how many teams did you look at over what time period are we talking about here? How many sort of sports total? And regions. I suppose that would be too difficult to answer. Like, all over the globe.
- Sam Walker: 00:12:16 It was completely global. It was really every sport in the world. I sorted every sport of any significance in the world and every team. These were 37 categories of sports. I started in the 1880s when I really feel like organized sports really began. Team sports. I looked at men's sports and women's sports throughout the entire world. I think the initial group was about 25,000 teams. The first cuts were easy. Teams that didn't win anything, gone. Teams that were mediocre. But then I had to really figure out how to whittle the list down. That was when things got complicated.
- Sam Walker: 00:12:49 So, I finally decided ... There's no algorithm for this. All sports are so different. There's no way to use a formula that would apply. You know, the regular season doesn't matter. The

playoffs are everything. Some teams barely play once every four years. It's hard to do that. There's no statistical way. So, what I came up with is if a team is the best team in the history of sports, what would it have to be able to say? It had to be able to say that it sustained its dominance. I set the floor at four years. To me four years rules out any possibility the team just got lucky.

- Demetri Kofinas: 00:13:21 So, when you say sustained its dominance, does that mean that it was the champion or that it was just ... Because you have the Spurs, for example. They were like, 17 years or something like that.
- Sam Walker: 00:13:30 Right.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:13:31 So, what does that mean? How do you define a sustaining the dominance?
- Sam Walker: 00:13:33 There couldn't be any major falloff in their performance. There was cases where I would let one team, you know, slide in like, Bayern Munich, you know, once like, mystifyingly finished 10th in their league but they actually won the Champions League. So, there's some cases where I let them in. Really, I just wanted to see sustained dominance, where you could just say the team had a culture that sustained itself and there wasn't any major drop off. Right. It wasn't major drop off or a foul period. So, that was how I looked at it.
- Sam Walker: 00:14:02 The other things I had to be able to say, they played at the absolute highest level of competition in the world and they played against the best teams in the world and they had occasion to play all the best teams. They also played a sport that was significant and global and has millions of followers and has a big talent pool. So, that ruled out some sort of smaller sports. College sports had to go, sadly, because it's not the highest level of competition in the world, right? So, I wanted to say if you're the maximum team, you have to have all these things.
- Sam Walker: 00:14:32 But there was one last filter and the real one that mattered. I had about 122 teams with that first group of seven, the criteria. The last one was the uniqueness. They just had to have done something in the history of their sport that was completely unique.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:45 I think you used the word freakish. Is that what you're talking about?

Sam Walker: 00:14:48 Yeah. It just had to be an outlier

Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:50 How do you quantify that?

Sam Walker: 00:14:55 You can't. This is the thing about this. I think when you're talking about scientific studies, the tendency is to throw out the outliers and to have control groups and everything. This is one of those subjects that you can't do scientifically. You can try but you can't measure aggregate talent. You can't tell what the expectations were on a team, because you can't go back in history and measure it very carefully. We're dealing in this world where you have to set some parameters that might make you uncomfortable as an empiricist.

Sam Walker: 00:15:25 Look, the point for me was I'm not trying to settle this debate. No one can settle this debate forever about what the greatest teams are. I wanted a pure sample. I got 17 teams. There's no question that they were extraordinary, freakish teams. And I say freakish because they astonish people. They baffled people. There were times that people just shook their heads at what they were doing or just the trophy cases they put together. That was my criteria. It's kind of like you know it when you see it.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:15:53 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Before we get into the examples of the captains, let's begin with the team that you actually began the book with, which is the Hungarian national team. I knew nothing about this team and when I brought it up to my father and to my uncle both, they both knew immediately who they were. They had watched them play. I did exactly what you recommended in the book. I better start watching.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:13 I watched that game against English. 1953. I was astounded. I was astounded. Now, the film's a little prickly, right? But you see these giant English footballers, right? And you see this small Hungarian team and they are lightning fast! Like, this tribe of lightning monkeys! It's like moving towards the goal. Tell me about this team, tell me why you chose this team, and how this team and its captain related to its success?

Sam Walker: 00:16:42 It was incredible what they did. They came from this tiny, impoverished country, which was in the middle of incredible political turmoil. One of the poorest countries in Europe. Very small in relation to these other soccer powers. This team came in and they beat Italy at home, you know, what six to nothing. They went to Wembley where England had never lost in its entire history!

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:03 Never! 83 games?

Sam Walker: 00:17:04 81 years!

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:05 81 years.

Sam Walker: 00:17:06 I mean, they'd never lost at home. No one thought it was possible, especially to some team from Hungary! They just lit them up. They beat them six to three. They had 35 shots on goal to England's three.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:17 That's the thing. That's what was so amazing about the game, was the shots on goal. The first goal was in 43 seconds, right?

Sam Walker: 00:17:23 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:24 And there were 500 to one odds by bookies in London?

Sam Walker: 00:17:27 500 to one. There have been slightly larger sports bets that have paid out but not many. The English probably just didn't think it was possible. What they didn't realize too is when the Hungarians walked out onto the pitch, they looked at these guys. Like you said, they're wearing these weird form-fitting tops and they had these weird shoes that were made in Budapest that were very low. They weren't boots. They were kind of low cut. And they were tiny! They were very small. And they didn't understand. They just thought this was going to be a joke.

Sam Walker: 00:17:55 What they didn't understand was everything about that team was completely different, and the way they created space on the field. They changed their numbers every game because they wanted to create confusion, but also they wanted a fluid style of play. It confused the Hell out of the Brits.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:09 They were dynamic. They were dynamic. They were fluid.

Sam Walker: 00:18:11 They were quick.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:12 They were quick.

Sam Walker: 00:18:13 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:14 And this was, you said, during a time when left-wingers, right-wingers, strikers, they all kind of kept in their zones and they were very fluid. They kind of broke with that. So, they were innovative as well.

Sam Walker: 00:18:23 Very innovative.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:25 I just want to run off some stats here for the audience about that team. During their run they outscored opponents 222 to 59 with an average of 4.2 goals per game. Their Elo rating ... Explain that for me ... was the highest ever recorded for 60 years until Germany topped it in 2014.

Sam Walker: 00:18:44 Yeah. Elo's probably the one statistic that I was able to rely on to be kind of a tiebreaker. It's interesting because it was invented for chess by a guy named Arpad Elo, who came up with this system. It basically is a running tally based on the weighted significance of the match and the outcome. So, it takes into account the difficulty of each match and the significant strength of the opponent. But it's also kind of on a rolling tally. So, it changes a little bit over time.

Sam Walker: 00:19:14 That's the best stat. I did this myself with great statistical help and professional soccer, trying to sort that mess out. But Elo's a good measure. Elo just basically shows you a level of dominance and how far above the competition they were and how badly they beat the other best teams. Hungary blew that statistic away. Like I said, they held that record for 60 years because of the dominating performances against Brazil and Germany and England and Italy and all the powers of the day.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:40 Now Puskás was their captain. We don't have the time to go through every team's captain or every team. So, I think just based on having read your book, there are certain captains who I am most interested in covering. In other words, I want to try to get through those first.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:53 The first one is Bill Russell. It starts with the Cullman play. Now, I wasn't familiar with this play. I was a basketball fan growing up, but I didn't know about this. Tell our audience ... Just give them the background on what the Cullman play is and why it was important. That'll shift us into a conversation about Bill Russell.

Sam Walker: 00:20:12 It was lost to history. Because back in 1957 the TV networks didn't think it was important to record live sports. So, they were taping and they would just tape right over it. So, this play does not exist on video, which is a shame. But in 1957, this was Russell's rookie year. At the time, he won a couple championships at the collegiate level. But he was an odd ball. He was a big man who didn't score. In the era that's all big men were supposed to do. He was not a great shooter, not a great

ball handler, kind of an awkward guy in some ways. But he was an incredible defender.

- Sam Walker: 00:20:48 He joined that team and the Celtics never won a championship. They had a coach who had a middling record before he came there ... Red Auerbach. They were not the Celtics. Let's put it that way. But he came to that team in 1957. They went all the way to the Finals. They went to a seventh game. First seventh game. With one minute left, the Celtics had a one point lead. The Saint Louis Hawks, the team they were playing, missed a shot. Russell grabbed the ball, ran down the court, and tried to dunk the ball. He missed. He totally mistimed it.
- Sam Walker: 00:21:20 Here's the situation. There's about 40 seconds left in this game. The Celtics have a one point lead. Russell is underneath his own basket, having failed the dunk attempt. The Saint Louis Hawks are at the baseline. They inbound the ball to mid-court to this guy, Jack Coleman, this forward. It was a sneak play. He'd been cherry picking back there. He had a running start. There was no one in front of him. So, he's at mid-court with a running start.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:21:42 And there is a recording of the radio announcer doing this, right?
- Sam Walker: 00:21:45 And that's bonkers. So, he's at mid-court and Jack Coleman's got an open layup. None of the other Celtics even thought about giving chase. Everyone had said, "Oh my God, they're going to go up by one with 30 seconds." So, what happened is he gets to the basket, he rolls in what he thinks is going to be this gimme layup. This blur comes from behind him and swats the ball. It hits the backboard and bounces off and the Celtics pick it up. Everyone's like, "What just happened?!"
- Sam Walker: 00:22:07 You hear the radio announcer just screaming his lungs out. So, here's what Russell did. He was underneath his own basket. It's 96 feet from the other basket. Coleman caught the ball, half of that distance with a running start. At a dead stop, Russell started running and he covered 96 feet in the same three seconds it took Coleman to run half court and got there in time. So, I sat down and actually calculated the steps. I'm like, "That's crazy." If he had kept that pace up for 400 meters, he would have won the Olympic Gold medal that year just by a fraction. So, it was an incredible athletic attempt.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:22:42 What happened there? What do you think happened there?

Sam Walker: 00:22:45 This is Bill Russell. Now, here's the thing. Russell almost quit basketball to run track. He was really fast.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:22:49 He was a really fast runner.

Sam Walker: 00:22:50 And he knew it. He knew that he could do this kind of thing. But no one would have thought in that position.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:22:56 Wow.

Sam Walker: 00:22:57 Everyone thinks about it as a great example and the game seven and they won and it was like, saved game seven. So, it's a famous play. But what was really amazing is that he even thought to do that. Here's a situation where as a rookie, he had missed a dunk. He was the last person anyone thought had any responsibility for dealing with this. But he could not bear to lose. He did not think twice. He took off and made that play. That was the level of team oriented thinking and troubleshooting, problem solving. Just having no thought to your own, to yourself, and being able to step out of yourself. Russell just epitomized that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:23:32 Are they eight qualities of what make a great captain?

Sam Walker: 00:23:34 There's seven.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:23:35 Seven, seven. Out of those seven, what does that play capture?

Sam Walker: 00:23:39 It's relentlessness.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:23:40 Relentlessness.

Sam Walker: 00:23:41 Yeah. I know the first quality that I looked at, which is probably the least surprising, given that we're talking about elite athletes who achieve amazing thing. It's relentlessness. It's a doggedness. It's never giving up. They played at one speed. All of these captains have the same thing. It didn't matter if they were up by 40, down by 30. They played with the same intensity on the field. Russell never let up. In fact, Russell was so intense that he would throw up before every game.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:04 Right. Famously.

Sam Walker: 00:24:05 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:07 We learned that when the NBA turned 50. They did the whole ... Remember that? They did all that stuff.

Sam Walker: 00:24:11 Right. Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:11 That is, I think one that many of us can wrap our heads around. I think that's something that's a common archetype of a leader, right? The relentless, unwilling to lose ...

Sam Walker: 00:24:20 Absolutely.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:21 It's an admirable trait. We'll probably end up getting back into the Celtics because they're such an incredible team. They won ... What was it? 11?

Sam Walker: 00:24:27 11 in 13.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:28 11 in 13 years. That's just unbelievable. It's also ... By the way, I should say, there are so many beautiful pictures of the era where Russell was playing against Chamberlain.

Sam Walker: 00:24:38 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:38 To see what a beast ... First of all, in general, these people ... I mean, was it Woody Allen's ... I think it maybe was Annie Hall, where Woody Allen was watching basketball and Annie was like, "Why are you watching these pituitary cases?" Something like that. It used to be a freak show to see these giants, right? It's remarkable to see Russell there. To see him against this freak, Chamberlain, right? And to understand that it was Russell's team that was dominating those years. I think that speaks to something that you also said, which is a characteristic of these great leaders, which is that they aren't necessarily the talent.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:25:12 In fact, I think maybe only Tim Duncan qualifies among your group. Perhaps not. But let's actually stick a little bit with this relentlessness. There's one other guy that you covered here. Actually, I think there are two that really stuck out to me. The other one was a girl. The captain of the Cuban national team, the volleyball team, which is my favorite. I mean, my favorite story of all. We're going to get into her ... What was her name again?

Sam Walker: 00:25:36 Mireya Luis.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:25:37 Mireya Luis. We're going to get into her. She's amazing. But we're going to get into her in aggression. Because she straddled those characteristics. I just love what she did there, but she was relentless.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:25:46 Let's talk about Carles from Barcelona, who you really like and you've met with and had the luxury to be able to spend a good amount of time with. Everyone knows that team. That 2008 to 2013 Barcelona team. The story though that starts that journey happened in 2000 against Real Madrid after Figo had left.

Sam Walker: 00:26:04 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:26:04 Tell us about that game.

Sam Walker: 00:26:06 This was something that had never happened in the history of this rivalry. You have to understand Real Madrid and Barcelona are a rivalry to the extent that Americans do not understand. This is about blood and war and history. There's so much more on the line.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:26:22 You see it in politics today! Right?

Sam Walker: 00:26:23 It defines the whole country. It's this fault line. It divides the whole country. It's this incredible, tribal thing. Up to 2000, there was never any thought that anyone would ever defect from one side to another. It wasn't possible because you were one tribe for life. But you know, the era of the Galáctico was starting in professional soccer ... where there were just players who wanted to dabble in a lot of great clubs. Luís Figo was one of the best players, if not the best player in the world. He was a Barcelona ... Sorry, he was Portuguese and all the fans thought, "Well, you know, he's an honorary Catalan and he's part of our ..."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:26:57 Figo.

Sam Walker: 00:26:58 Figo. He's an honorary Catalan. He's become, you know, part of our culture. He decided ... Figo was one of the first players that had a wandering eye. He thought, "You know, I want to try something else."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:27:08 Because now ...

Sam Walker: 00:27:09 It's prevalent.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:27:09 Players are promiscuous. There's no loyalty to clubs.

Sam Walker: 00:27:12 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:27:12 But this was at a time when there was still that expectation and he's like, "I'm going to go to Madrid."

Sam Walker: 00:27:16 Yeah. It's like, "I want to try something new. I've done this and I know it."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:27:20 And he was a good looking guy. He had the character, right?

Sam Walker: 00:27:22 Yeah. He was everything. He just was like ...

Demetri Kofinas: 00:27:24 He's a classic superstar.

Sam Walker: 00:27:26 Right. And he was also kind of a good guy. I mean, he wasn't like, a real hot head or anything. But no, so, he not only left, but he signed the biggest transfer deal ever and he went to Real Madrid. This was just high crime. This was just ... So, the first time they came to play, no one had any idea what was going to happen. People really thought they were going to burn the stadium down if they lost. This poor guy! His name was Ferrer. He was the coach of Barcelona.

Sam Walker: 00:27:51 Can you imagine? He knew that if this guy even scores a goal, he's fired. They're going to fire him on the pitch. So, he's like, "What do I do?" First of all, you've got to mark this guy. When you really want to stop someone, you put a man marker on him in football. So, they had to put someone on this guy full time. They didn't have anyone. They didn't have anyone who could do it. They didn't think anyone was up to the task. There was only one person they thought might be able to handle it, and it was this guy, Carles Puyol. And Puyol had only been on the team for a short time.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:24 How old was he at this point? 23?

Sam Walker: 00:28:26 He was 22, 23? He'd actually come to the sport late. They'd actually loaned him out, trying to get rid of him at one point. He refused to leave. So, he was kind of a marginal player. He would be playing out of position too. But he was this crazy kid. He had this crazy hair, curly hair. He was from the mountains of Catalonia. They knew ...

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:44 Native son!

Sam Walker: 00:28:44 Yeah, he's a native son! He was a patriot, right? He cared. They knew he was quick. He played Figo in practice. So, they wound up giving it to him.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:52 He played him well in practice. He played him well in practice.

Sam Walker: 00:28:55 Yeah, he played him pretty well. He didn't do that ... He didn't embarrass himself. He wasn't afraid. He wasn't intimidated. So, they put him out there. Everyone thought, "This is just the lamb to the slaughter." But it was incredible. Puyol, with his incredible energy, just chased him everywhere. Frustrated him. Got in front of him. Laid down in front of him, risking getting spiked to stop him from attacking.

Sam Walker: 00:29:14 In one case he made a beautiful slide tackle and then just took Figo out perfectly. Got a yellow card but didn't get ejected.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:19 I think that's the picture right there with slide tackle.

Sam Walker: 00:29:21 Yeah. That's the one.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:22 They didn't give him a red card. They gave him a yellow.

Sam Walker: 00:29:25 When Figo ... You could see the frustration on his face. At one point he finally threw a forearm and hit him in the back of the head, Puyol. He got a yellow card for that and the place went bananas. But they were throwing garbage. They were throwing bike chains. They had all these signs up about Figo and calling him all kinds of names. It was this crazy cartoon atmosphere. Just this Halloween roar.

Sam Walker: 00:29:47 Through all of that, Puyol just shut the guy down completely. They won the match. Afterwards, you know, he just showed this incredible humility. He just said, "Look, we won. That's all that matters. I'm happy with my performance. I did what I was supposed to do, but the team won." A star was born. People in Barcelona just melted for this guy. Because he didn't have any ego at all, and he had just done something under immense pressure and stopped this guy.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:12 A higher calling.

Sam Walker: 00:30:14 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:14 A higher calling.

Sam Walker: 00:30:16 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:16 It was about the team.

Sam Walker: 00:30:16 It was about the team!

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:17 It was about the city. It was about the club.

Sam Walker: 00:30:19 Yeah!

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:19 It was about the mission. It wasn't about himself. Something that I think is becoming exceedingly rare today.

Sam Walker: 00:30:26 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:26 More rare than it used to be. You know, the superstars are so out sized ego now. Like you said, it's the world of a wandering eye. Everyone sort of thinks that it's their right to just kind of move where they want to go. You've got these superstar-studded teams, which is also kind of the irony, right? You end up getting like, teams like, Golden State in the NBA, which are star-studded, which is like, goes against what you would normally expect, which would be something where these guys would want to go play in their own cities and have their own teams.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:53 Yeah. I mean, amazing. Will to win, right? That relentlessness. That will to win.

Sam Walker: 00:30:57 Collectively. Not personally.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:59 Exactly.

Sam Walker: 00:31:00 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:00 Let's get to Mireya. Because I actually said ... It was in my category for aggression. It's actually not ... Certainly she showed aggression. But it was about the bending and the breaking of rules. I love what you wrote about in that chapter, in discussing their team. I absolutely love it. Everything from her crying on the phone to her mother, to her mother's reaction to her, to the way ... This is how I experienced it, and I want you to tell me.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:25 I found the footage. I watched it. Unfortunately, I couldn't find the complete footage and I couldn't find an American commentator. So, I was listening to it in ... I think it was a Brazilian commentator. But what I love ... And tell me where I'm mistaken, and then tell the audience what the story is. It seems to me that there was sort of this moment ... This kind of like, rising from the grave, unwilling to die, to the point where it was just visceral and they started just attacking with profanity, the other team, just to sort of shake up her teammates to get them to win that game. Tell us that story.

Sam Walker: 00:32:01 So, Brazil was probably the second best team in the world at this time. They were coming into the Atlanta Olympics. The Cubans were incomparable. They've never been a team like this. They came from a tiny country, nine million people. Politically repressed. Poor. This is not a sport that they had ever been terrific ... They were okay, but they'd never been great. They had not lost any match of consequence in six years. They were unbelievable. They were shorter. They weren't big. They weren't as talented as the other teams, but there was something incredible about them.

Sam Walker: 00:32:32 Coming into Atlanta, they were just worn out. They had to go to Japan to play high level competition and they were tired. Fidel Castro wouldn't let them play professionally like some other athletes, so they were dispirited. Things were falling apart. They got to Atlanta and they were more interested in the Olympic hairdresser than they were in practice. They lost a couple of matches in the early rounds, very uncharacteristically. Barely squeaked into the knockout phase of the tournament. So, it was over in their minds.

Sam Walker: 00:33:01 Mireya Luis, she was the captain of the team and she had a bad knee, and she was dispirited and tired. She had this moment where her mother really told her, "You represent Cuba. You have to make this happen," and she ...

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:13 She called her mother because she could sense that they were losing their edge.

Sam Walker: 00:33:17 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:17 The thing you mentioned about the hairdressing, about looking pretty. Again, they were in a Communist, closed country. They're visiting other countries. It's the Olympics in Atlanta. She's already feeling like they might lose, right? Like they might be losing their edge.

Sam Walker: 00:33:30 She thought there was nothing left that she could do. She called her mother to tell her. Started sobbing in the phone to her mother in Cuba. Her mother would just have none of it.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:38 I love this.

Sam Walker: 00:33:39 She's like, "You ... I did not raise someone to cry in front of her adversary. You represent Cuba. You turn it around. You figure it out. Stop going to the hairdresser." So, anyway. This gave her the confidence I think she needed. What they did was really

amazing. They knew they could get ... The Brazilians were great, but they knew that they weren't as mentally tough as the Cubans. The Cubans knew they could get to them.

- Sam Walker: 00:34:02 So, they came up with this plan, which is very indicative of these captains. It's not that they break the rules. It's that they're going to do anything they can to win and anything they can get away with. You've got to remember, the rules of sports are not the rules of society. I mean, rules of sports are meant to be tested, right? We often treat them like, you know, court of law, but it's not. It's something else. They are going to push them, even if it looks bad, even if they become villains, even if they're perceived as being dirty. They don't care. They care about the collective victory of the team. This is very hard for people to understand, and I get a lot of questions about this.
- Sam Walker: 00:34:39 She decided, "You know what? We are going to call them names."
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:43 Oh, not just any names.
- Sam Walker: 00:34:44 Not just any names.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:46 I won't even say on this podcast. There's no legal limit to what I can say on this podcast. I just don't feel comfortable.
- Sam Walker: 00:34:51 It's very distasteful.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:54 But it's so powerful. It's such a powerful image.
- Sam Walker: 00:34:56 No one had ever done this. There's a lot of psychological operations going on the volleyball match with the teams facing each other like that. But no one had ever done this. They just laid it on. Mireya said to her teammates, "The worst things that you can say to another woman. Just start throwing it at them."
- Sam Walker: 00:35:13 You know, at first you saw it didn't work. The Brazilians were fine. They just went to the referee. They're like, "They're calling us names." The referee gave them a couple yellow cards, but didn't throw anyone out. Then by the end in the fifth set you could see it in their body language. They were dispirited. They were trying too hard.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:26 The Brazilians were?

Sam Walker: 00:35:27 The Brazilians were too upset at mistakes. They wound up losing in really what was an incredibly thrilling match in the end, but they lost.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:34 They got in their head. I love ... So, a few things about that that I want to really focus on. One is the most important one. It's that as human beings we operate in conditional environments. We don't act the same way at home as we do in the office, as we do at the nightclub, as we do on the court. Right?

Sam Walker: 00:35:53 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:53 There are different rules. The point you're making there is understanding what the rules of the game are and where it's okay to push them, in what direction and where it's okay to break even those rules. Right? Sometimes breaking a rule, like punching somebody and getting ejected, could be just the thing you need to do to get your team to win.

Sam Walker: 00:36:14 Right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:14 Right? Even if you're not on the court.

Sam Walker: 00:36:16 Yeah. No, there are so many facets of this. It took me so long to unravel it, but what I realized is like, really diving into science and what we know about aggression. There are really two kinds. There's two flavors. There's a hostile aggression, which is when you're angry and you want to hurt somebody. Then there's another kind of aggression that they call instrumental aggression. Instrumental aggression's different. It's about doing something that may be aggressive and it might hurt someone, but is really about the pursuit of a goal

Sam Walker: 00:36:42 Everything these captains did fell into that category. Now, it wasn't pretty. I'm not endorsing their behavior in some cases. They usually went right up to the line and not over. Sometimes they went over. But here's the thing. This is the context you're in. Sports is different. If you're playing hockey you can punch somebody in the face. You know what? You might get ejected, you might get a penalty. If you did that five feet away on the other side of the boards where the fans are, you'd go to jail.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:37:08 Right.

Sam Walker: 00:37:08 Right? So, there's a different code of morality. I think athletes understand this. Now, this gets to the point of purity. It's about their only goal is to win collectively. Here's what they think. "If I

can get away with it and it's going to help my team win, I'm going to do it because it fits the collective goals. People are going to call me a lousy, bad sportsmanship. They might say that I'm a dirty player." They don't care. Their only goal is the collective success of the team. So, they're going to push it as hard as they can. That's what she did.

- Sam Walker: 00:37:36 The one thing that ... I went to Havana. I had a long interview with her and she's phenomenal. And she explained this to me very succinctly. She thought it was mortifying what she had done. But at the same time, she knew it was in pursuit of a medal. The one thing that was astonishing to me about all these captains ... As aggressive and the things that they did in competition, none of them ever got in any trouble. Ever. Not one of them was ever arrested, ever got in a fight, ever did anything aggressive off the field. It was limited to competition. It was a tool that they would use when necessary.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:08 I loved what she did. I love that will to win. That decision ... I feel like I've experienced it in my own life. Certainly in the arena of sports it's a common experience. There's a moment where you've got to decide, "What are you going to do?"
- Sam Walker: 00:38:21 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:21 Are you going to give it your all or are you not? And that can be the difference between everything.
- Sam Walker: 00:38:25 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:25 Between victory and defeat and being a champion.
- Sam Walker: 00:38:28 That's what I found. I mean, what I really tried to focus on in the book was ... This is the funny thing about leadership and elite leadership like this. Most of the time it's invisible. When you're winning and doing great, you don't really see it. It's not that important. The times that I focused on in that book were like the time when Cuba had to play Brazil in the Olympics. It was about to go south. It was about to end. This whole thing was about to come crashing down or never get started in the first place. Those were the moments I tried to look at.
- Sam Walker: 00:38:56 That's when you see leadership. That's when these leaders could reach into that tool bag and they would pull out one of these seven behaviors, whatever fit the situation. They would apply it and they would use it and they would be able to pull their team through. That's what leadership is. That's when it

happens. People aren't going to back and look at the Figo game as the moment that Barcelona became Barcelona. But that's when it happened. You know?

- Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:18 That's interesting.
- Sam Walker: 00:39:18 It's those weird moments they don't always get credit for. You don't always see them. It's not someone hitting the big, game-winning shot. It's something else. It's the name calling in Brazil. That's why the Cuban team went as far as they did.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:30 It's also amazing to see from a physical standpoint, because Mireya is not a physically intimidating character. What is she? 5'7"?
- Sam Walker: 00:39:37 5'9".
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:37 5'9". But she's got incredible hops!
- Sam Walker: 00:39:41 Incredible.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:41 She jumps so high! It's amazing!
- Sam Walker: 00:39:43 Amazing.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:43 They would set her up consistently. Incredible to watch that.
- Sam Walker: 00:39:47 She was four inches shorter than the typical Olympic striker.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:49 She's amazing.
- Sam Walker: 00:39:49 Crazy.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:50 Let's talk about another one. Another characteristic, which is the ability to regulate emotion. I think this one also is at the very top of that list, for me at least. The sort of prime example that you give in the book is ... How do you pronounce his name? Jérôme Fernandez?
- Sam Walker: 00:40:02 Jérôme.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:40:02 Jérôme. Now, he was part of the French national handball team. Tell us his story.
- Sam Walker: 00:40:08 Well, Fernandez was a kid who grew up in Bordeaux. Both of his parents had been, you know, kind of low level, professional handball players. And if you don't know anything about

handball, don't worry. It's a big sport in Europe. It's actually a very cool sport. But it's a huge sport in Europe, so it's a big deal.

- Sam Walker: 00:40:22 Now, Fernandez was on the French national team. He had just taken over the captaincy. This was in 2009. A lot of people didn't think he was the right guy. There was some question about whether he was the guy to be the captain. They made it all the way to the final of the 2009 World Championships. This was before their dynasty really began. Two days before this final, which was the biggest match of his life under his new captaincy, he gets a call from his mother. His mother told him that his father had been admitted to the hospital and that he had terminal cancer, and he had a few days to live. This was a complete surprise to Fernandez.
- Sam Walker: 00:41:03 They didn't know any of this was happening. They hadn't told him. His parents hadn't told him because they didn't want to distract him during the World Championships. So, he had this wrenching decision. A lot of athletes play through difficult circumstances, but this was something I'd never seen before. He had to decide what to do. Do you go home?
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:19 He had a very close relationship with his father.
- Sam Walker: 00:41:21 He was very close to his father. They were almost like brothers. His father was very young when he had Jérôme, so they were very close in age and they had this incredible closeness. What would you do?! Would you go right home to make sure you saw your father again? Or would you play in the biggest match of your life?
- Sam Walker: 00:41:36 So, he consulted with his coach. He decided ... He made two decisions that were astonishing. One is he decided to stay and play. He was going to play. He was not going to abandon his team in this moment. But the other one was amazing. He decided not only was he going to play. He wasn't going to tell anybody what was going on, because he didn't want to distract his teammates. So, he bore that incredible emotional burden by himself for two days and all the way up to the lead up of the match, didn't say a word to anyone.
- Sam Walker: 00:42:03 He not only played well, he played spectacular. One of the best matches he'd ever played. He scored the clinching goal, in fact, in the final minute to beat the Croatians, to upset ... The Croatians were heavy favorites. So, after that he collapsed on the court, sobbing. His teammates had no idea what was going on. They thought maybe he had injured himself. When they found out what he had done and what he had sacrificed for

them ... He did make it by, by the way, with the Gold medal to see his father in time. They realized something.

- Sam Walker: 00:42:32 Fernandez, like all these captains, is a very humble guy. But he said, "You know, I think they did realize at that moment that I was a collective captain and not a personal captain. That I would do anything for the team." That level of emotional strength, the ability to take difficult, negative feelings and put them in a box, and to not just compete well but to compete even better than normally, was something that all these captains had. You know, it's something that we don't teach a lot in management. It's really about taking your personal issues and your negative feelings and just taking them out of the team context.
- Sam Walker: 00:43:04 It's so powerful because it shows everyone around you that ... the level of your commitment.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:10 A few things about that. In your book you go into more detail about how that conversation happened with his coach.
- Sam Walker: 00:43:16 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:17 And as I remember it, the coach sort of was sympathetic obviously to the fact that Jérôme was going through this, but he also made it very clear that he had a job to do and he had a decision to make about whether he was going to go back home, and if he wanted to that's fine, or if he was going to lead the team. But he had to make the decision. He didn't make it easy for him in that sense. I found a lot of value in that story, and I found value in what he said.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:42 You wrote that Jérôme responded and said that, "I want to play. I want to play for my father," or, "I want to win for my father."
- Sam Walker: 00:43:48 Right. Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:50 I mean, absolutely beautiful. It also reminds me of a story ... Do you remember when Pete Sampras lost his trainer?
- Sam Walker: 00:43:55 Right. Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:55 Remember that? He went to the French ... he went to the semis.
- Sam Walker: 00:43:58 Yep.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:58 He went all the way to the semi-finals. And then I think he was still grieving over that loss in the US Open, and that was that match ... I forget who he was playing against. Maybe it was even ... Who was the American? Andre?

Sam Walker: 00:44:08 Agassi.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:09 Agassi.

Sam Walker: 00:44:09 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:09 And he threw up on the court. That's a part of sports that I think we love, right? It's a window into the types of qualities that we deeply value.

Sam Walker: 00:44:19 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:20 Right? In human beings.

Sam Walker: 00:44:21 Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:22 Another set of these. Courage and maturity.

Sam Walker: 00:44:24 Yep.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:25 These are two separate ones that you have in the book, but I put them together. Because there was the great story of Vasiliev.

Sam Walker: 00:44:31 Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:31 The captain of the Soviet team that lost in the famous Miracle On Ice, 1980 game in Lake Placid ... in America, against the American team.

Sam Walker: 00:44:40 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:40 There's a great story you tell of him on an air flight, heading back to Moscow, where he threatens to throw the captain off of the airplane.

Sam Walker: 00:44:51 Choked him!

Demetri Kofinas: 00:44:52 The picture is one of like, grabbing a dog by the back of the neck and shaking it around wildly. Tell us the story and what you think that says when you talk about courage and maturity.

Sam Walker: 00:45:02 It's really this independence of mind. It's this ability to push back. These captains shock me because they were really difficult to manage sometimes. They just pushed back. They wouldn't stand for anything they thought was getting in the way of the team's collective achievement. This was extreme in some cases. The Vasiliev story is my favorite example of what this is.

Sam Walker: 00:45:21 So, they lost in 1980. This is the biggest humiliation I think the Kremlin had to go through during the Cold War.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:27 They don't like this kind of stuff in Russia.

Sam Walker: 00:45:28 No! In fact, the next day, it didn't even mention the match had even happened.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:34 That's so...

Sam Walker: 00:45:34 It's not good right? So, these guys were all on the plane, really going back to Moscow without any idea what was going to happen to them when they got there. They lost to these American amateurs and it was kind of terrible.

Sam Walker: 00:45:47 So, before they left, the coach, this guy Victor Tikhonov, was really kind of a taskmaster usually. He said, "Look. We lost as a team. The story that we're going to tell is that we all bare blame for this." But they got on the plane and Tikhonov's in first class with his assistants and a bunch of these like, really high ranking Soviet, you know, Politburo members. And he's saying a totally different story. "This guy was terrible. He's gone. This guy was awful. He's the reason we lost."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:46:11 He was like, "Why did we even bring them?"

Sam Walker: 00:46:13 He was singling out individual people. And Vasiliev ... He didn't know the cockpit door was open. Vasiliev was in the cockpit with the pilots, and he could hear everything that he was saying. And so, this guy was not the captain of the team. He was a defenseman. He'd been there a long time. What would you do, right? You want to go to Siberia? You know? He didn't care. He ran out and he choked him and threatened to throw him out of the plane.

Sam Walker: 00:46:34 It took me so long to figure out what this was really about. I talked to all of his teammates, as many as I could talk to, about what happened. They said, "You know what was really funny was when we got back to Moscow, we thought maybe he was going to a labor camp. We didn't know what was going to

happen to him." But actually what happened was he shows up at practice, he walks in, he's like, "Hey, coach. Hey, guys." Puts his skates on, goes out there, and starts working.

- Sam Walker: 00:46:58 This is what these captains did. What I realized after a lot of thought and a lot of research, there's two kinds of conflict. There's personal conflict, which is when you just don't like someone and you want to hurt them. And then there's task conflict, which is what you're doing maybe look like a personal attack but it's really about the process and making sure the team sticks together. That was what he was doing. He wasn't a personal, outrageous coach. He was trying to hold the team together in a vulnerable moment. Everybody realized what it was.
- Sam Walker: 00:47:28 The minute he did that, showed up at practice, showed he wasn't holding a grudge, his teammates eventually elected him captain, and they went on his five year run that's just unbelievable under his captaincy. I mean, it's just what they ... This is the greatest hockey team of any kind that ever existed. They played a group of NHL All-Stars in Canada. This team had Gretzky, Guy Lafleur, Gordie ... It has Dennis Potvin. It was the greatest Olympic team ... I mean, greatest All-Star team the Canadians ever put together. They beat them eight to one. I mean, just wiped them off the ice.
- Sam Walker: 00:48:00 So, that's contagious. It bonds teams together. It creates a sort of emotional context that makes a team better.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:48:08 Let's talk about one more, in the interest of time. I know we won't be able to get through everything. Let's talk about communication, because there's a story in the book that highlights this, it's Maurice Richard. The way that you described in the book that before a game he would look and every player ... He would stare longer than comfort.
- Sam Walker: 00:48:25 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:48:25 Than what's comfortable. You describe it like, that he was downloading his will.
- Sam Walker: 00:48:30 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:48:30 And sort of just like, getting in there. That felt so real and so true. And again, I've experienced it in my life. It sounds like you have as well. Certainly you've experienced it as a sports writer. Again, that's also the will, right? That sort of just ... You're in

there. Tell me about that and also, that could give us also an opportunity to talk about coaching. You bring up Lombardi as sort of an outlier.

- Sam Walker: 00:48:52 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:48:52 But you explain, in general, why you found that coaching actually turned out not to be the instrumental sort of variable in all of this.
- Sam Walker: 00:49:00 Yeah. Richard was such a fascinating character because he did not talk. He was famous for sitting on a train ... You know, they took a train for five hours. He would sit there, staring out the window, not reading a book, not saying a word to anyone. There were days where he said five things.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:16 This is the 1950s Montreal Canadiens.
- Sam Walker: 00:49:18 Right, right. The team that I looked at was the '55, '60 team that won five straight Stanley Cups.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:23 Also a similar thing with Barcelona, in terms of the fact that the Canadiens, there was a collective story there around the city and being oppressed as the French speaking Canadians versus sort of the larger country.
- Sam Walker: 00:49:33 Right. Richard was a hero among French Canadians.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:36 Right.
- Sam Walker: 00:49:36 There's so much to that story that I tried to put in the book to show how important he was. He wasn't a speech maker. None of these captains gave speeches. None of them did. Some of them were really inarticulate. But he was an outlier.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:49 Yogi Berra.
- Sam Walker: 00:49:49 Yogi Berra. Tim Duncan. You know? Ever see Tim Duncan give an interview? I mean, it's like getting a colonoscopy, right?
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:56 He's also great. You talk about how he would go around and touch teammates. You talk about ... In fact, I remember very much watching Tim Duncan. He would do that in huddles. He would put his hands on people. It was like a loving aspect, right?
- Sam Walker: 00:50:09 Yeah. What I learned is there's more than one way to communicate. Richard was the greatest example of this because

he was not a talker, not a verbal person. Duncan was in a way. He would talk individually to teammates. So, how did he communicate?

Sam Walker: 00:50:22 What I found was that all of these captains in their own ways, found ways to put themselves front and center in front of the team, and to do things that would show the level of commitment and passion, where it was almost they could almost project how much they wanted to win. They'd come up ... Sometimes they were creative ways. Sometimes it was just things they did during the course of play.

Sam Walker: 00:50:44 But Richard was the most interesting because he did that thing where ... Before the locker room, he didn't say much. He would put his skates on and he would look at every single guy in the room. He would look and mentally made eye contact and he would stare deeply. Then he would look at everyone. Once he was done he would say, "Let's go out and win it." That's all he would say.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:04 It's like an Arnold Schwarzenegger line.

Sam Walker: 00:51:06 Yeah, but they were like ... it was so ... I don't know why but it just ... We know, and anyone who I'm sure listens to podcasts a lot, knows enough about mirror neurons and some of the science that shows how interconnected we are emotionally. And how leaders who are able to tap into that emotional interconnectedness are able to have a real outsize impact on how a team performs.

Sam Walker: 00:51:28 They didn't read that science, you know, but they kind of understood that intuitively and they often did things that they knew would get inside their teammates and have a real deep effect.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:37 It's like that scene in Hoosiers where Gene Hackman says, "I love you guys" in the huddle.

Sam Walker: 00:51:42 Yeah. Yeah!

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:43 Very few words. Just very communicative. He was the coach of that team.

Sam Walker: 00:51:48 Yeah. Coaches.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:49 So, bring up a little bit Lombardi. He was kind of an exception to that rule.

Sam Walker: 00:51:53 Yeah, well, you know, coaches were the biggest mystery to me because I really thought they were probably going to be the things that made teams into these elite teams. They were so not even close. It's not that they weren't good and not important. It's that the majority of coaches of these teams came in with a losing record or very little coaching experience. Some of these teams actually changed coaches and kept winning.

Sam Walker: 00:52:15 So, they didn't seem to be the pattern there at all. It took me a long time to figure this out. So, the first thing I did was like, "I gotta find out. Well, Vince Lombardi. Greatest coach I think I have ever heard of." I went and talked to his former captain, Willy Davis, who is his defensive captain, who is now in his 80s. Did a lot of research on Lombardi.

Sam Walker: 00:52:33 This is the thing that I've found about coaches. It's not that they don't matter. They're extremely important. But here's how they matter. If you look at every great coach that we can think of: Belichick, Popovich, Phil Jackson, Lombardi, Alex Ferguson. Any great coach or manager. What did their peak level of success involve? It involved a captain just like this. But here's the thing about it. They had a different relationship than we are accustomed to with their captains.

Sam Walker: 00:53:04 Belichick and Brady have this. Popovich and Duncan had it. Roy Keane and Ferguson had it for a while at Manchester United. It's a partnership. Like, no joke. It's two people who respect each other and who are going to have constant conflict and who are going to come up with solutions. Sometimes the captain's going to get their way, sometimes the coach gets their way. It's really a partnership. It's not a hierarchical thing. All the great coaches that we revere hit their strides with this kind of arrangement.

Sam Walker: 00:53:33 I think it's really important to think about, not just for coaching but for managers more broadly. It's who's your second? Who's your field general? What kind of relationship ... Do you really trust that person? Can you really allow them to once in a while think independently and usurp your authority and do something like Mireya Luis did with the Brazilians. You've got to let things happen. You've got to give them some control.

Sam Walker: 00:53:54 That's what Lombardi ... all of these great coaches did. And it's really, I think, something that we don't think about. Coach doesn't think about ... You've got a coach ... Who's your captain and who's your coach? That's the most important pairing on any team and we don't really think of it even as a pairing.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:08 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Also, the other thing that you single out in the book is that these are professional ... These are adults. These aren't kids. So, the out sized personality of a coach doesn't weight as heavily on professionals as it does for high schoolers or for college students or for college players. Also, I think there's something else that's powerful, which is that there's just a difference between being in the game, on the field, versus on the sidelines.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:34 No matter how much the coach is invested, he or she is not in the game. Right?

Sam Walker: 00:54:41 No. I mean, they're wearing a suit. How do you have an impact? Obviously coaches matter in many ways. But really, as Alex Ferguson to me gave the best explanation of this, and he's probably the ... He's the Vince Lombardi of the rest of the world, right? I mean, the greatest football manager probably who ever lived. He always said, "My responsibility takes me all the way up to kickoff. Everything, every detail, everything the team does, everything that's happening. That's my responsibility. But the minute that the match starts, it is up to the captain to execute the game plan."

Sam Walker: 00:55:12 If you think about Ferguson ... used to sit there in the dugout. The modern coaches are all on the touchline and they're yelling and screaming. He's like, "What are they doing?" He said this. He said, "What are they doing? The players can't hear you. You're just distracting them if they can."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:26 He was like Joe Torre. Joe Torre was like that too.

Sam Walker: 00:55:28 Yeah. No, he was like, "You've got to let the players play." And, you know, we think of coaches as being these puppeteers and these geniuses and people who make everything happen. But really there's nothing you can do when the players are out there. You can call some plays and make some substitutions but you can't execute. The great ones understood this.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:47 I'm sure you pissed a lot of people off with whatever teams you had to leave out. The Yankees were obviously in the mix but there were so many great Yankee teams. That '96 team with Joe Torre, not only do I remember what a big deal it was that he sat there and everyone was like, "Well, Joe is just sitting. He's not getting up. He's not moving around." You know, Phil Jackson also famously did that with the Bulls, interestingly enough.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:09 But also I do remember and I don't know if you remember this. He had told all the players ... that was a big thing on that '96 Yankees team ... to not swing at the first pitch. You remember that? That was really interesting to me. That was an out sized level of discipline to be instilling on a team. That he would sort of tell them what they can and can't swing at.

Sam Walker: 00:56:24 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:24 It was always interesting. You knew they were going to sit tight on that pitch. Alright. So, Sam, in closing, just so our audience will know ... And I highly recommend any sports fan, anyone interested even in thinking about leadership in any sort of way, to read your book. I would definitely recommend it.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:41 The teams that you covered as the most elite teams, I have here. They were the Magpies, the Australian rules football. This was 1927 to 1930. The New York Yankees. The '49, '53 team with Yogi Berra. Hungary, we talked about. The Montreal Canadiens from '55 to '60. The Celtics. That famous Celtics team that was ... What was it again? 13 year run?

Sam Walker: 00:57:00 11 championships in 13 years.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:02 Yeah. From 1956 to 1969. Brazil. The Brazilian International soccer team from '58 to '62.

Sam Walker: 00:57:09 Amazing. Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:10 The Pittsburgh Steelers from '74 to '80. Tremendous team. I don't watch football, but all of us know about that famous Pittsburgh Steelers team. And there's obviously an incredible amount of footage to sort of go through for that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:22 The Soviet Union team. The USSR hockey team that we talked about. The All Blacks international rugby union. The stories, by the way, the Magpies ... I don't even want to get into it for our audience. But there is the most gruesome story ever about their captain. Who was that guy?

Sam Walker: 00:57:38 Buck Shelford.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:39 Yeah. It involves ... I'm not even going to say it.

Sam Walker: 00:57:42 It's a sensitive area of the male anatomy.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:43 It's a sensitive body part that was sacrificed for victory. Insane. Yes. Exactly what that implies.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:51 The Cuban women ... The Cuban national team that we discussed before. Australia women's field hockey. The United State women's amazing international soccer team from '96 to '99. An incredible team, an incredible run. The San Antonio Spurs. Again, there's 17 seasons ... How many seasons?

Sam Walker: 00:58:06 19.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:07 19 seasons.

Sam Walker: 00:58:08 I think this is their 20th. Yeah. It's crazy.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:10 Incredible. Did it coincide also with Popovich taking over the role from Greg Hill? Was it Greg Hill? Was that the guy?

Sam Walker: 00:58:17 Yeah. Well, you know, but Popovich almost got fired two years in. Everyone forgets. He'd never been a coach before.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:24 Yeah. No one expected that to happen.

Sam Walker: 00:58:25 He wasn't Gregg Popovich. He was some guy.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:28 Yeah. Barcelona. France, the international men's handball team. Then the New Zealand All Blacks. You actually had three very unconventional teams. I guess women's also, women's field hockey. But the All Blacks, the international rugby and two international rugby union teams and Australian rules football.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:46 In terms of captains, I'm not going to list them all here. You mentioned Carles was maybe your favorite. Who kind of really stuck out for you?

Sam Walker: 00:58:56 You know, Puyol, to me, is such a great example. It happened recently. It just shows you that even with all the money and everything in sports, it can still happen. I do think Russell is probably the greatest captain in the history of sports. He did something that I've just never seen before. He's phenomenal.

Sam Walker: 00:59:14 I love Tim Duncan too for the same reason. He's a contemporary example of this. We did not give him enough appreciation and credit for the role he played. Look at that team now. They're really struggling. He's another one. It's hard. It's like, I've gotten so affectionate for all these captains. I think they're all so incredible.

Sam Walker: 00:59:39 You know, what you said earlier is really true. Not all of them expressed every one of these traits in great abundance. But they all had them. They all used the ones that were necessary in their sport. So, I kind of love them for different reasons.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:59:52 It's also interesting to see ... The teams that failed to get into the tier one ... An example is Michael Jordan's Bulls. Also the Lakers, interesting. I wonder about Kareem. We didn't have a chance to talk about that. But Jordan's a great example. Jordan, in some ways, reminds me of Steve Jobs, in the equivalent sort of corporate, right?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:00:11 You have this guy who's immensely talented, incredible will to win, can step it up. But both of them have the reputation of having been not just mean, unnecessarily, excessively mean. In the case of Steve Jobs against so many people, there's so many anecdotes. But the classic one that you give of Michael Jordan is against Bill Cartwright, the center for the Bulls that they brought in by trading away Charles Oakley, which actually set them along a streak. He was sort of the captain of that team, Bill Cartwright.

Sam Walker: 01:00:41 He was! It's a miraculous thing that I didn't know until I started looking at this subject. First year, six years of Michael Jordan, they didn't win anything. He had this knock on him as the greatest player who will never win a championship.

Sam Walker: 01:00:53 Phil Jackson come along, second year. They started off the 1990 season badly. They were not good. Jackson made this crazy decision where he decided he was going to make Bill Cartwright the co-captain of the team with Jordan. Jordan hated Bill Cartwright. Like you said, they traded his best friend, Charles Oakley, for Cartwright.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:12 As if that was Cartwright's decision.

Sam Walker: 01:01:14 I know! But he took it out on him anyway. He called him Medical Bill because he had bad knees. He would sit in the locker next to him ...

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:21 What a bully.

Sam Walker: 01:01:21 And talking about how badly he'd played while he was sitting right next to him. He was an awful, awful bully. Everyone was scared of him. The problem on that team was no one wanted to play Michael ball. Michael was like, "You're all working for me. Work for me." No one really wanted to buy into that.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:37 He was very selfish.

Sam Walker: 01:01:37 The thing is, that can work is you have someone who is actually leading the team and actually mentoring the younger players and actually getting everyone to fit in and being that selfless character. If you look at the moment Bill Cartwright ... Got to do this! Look at the moment he became captain. Look what happened. They won ... I don't remember. 12 of 14! It started at that exact second.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:59 You know, it's so important. I think in corporate America or in business where we see this, if you're let's say the leader or the CEO, but you're not great with people or you're mean or whatever else it is, it's so important to be able to have someone under you who sees the good in you and can translate and be sort of that person that the rest of the team feels that they can talk. That glue guy. The guy of that team.

Sam Walker: 01:02:23 Right. It's communication. All the studies show it's constant, one-on-one, intense, meaningful conversations with people that matter. That's what leadership is. It's not fun. You're not going to get credit. It's hard work. It's not sexy and you're not going to be remembered on the magazine cover. But yeah, no, you need character like that.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:44 Just wanted to mention one more thing for the audience from your book that I really loved, since we're talking about the Bulls. After Michael Jordan left in the '94 season, when Scottie Pippen refused to get off the bench to take a shot against the New York Knicks. What happened in the locker room after that? He refused to take that shot because Phil Jackson wrote the play for Toni Kukoč, who ended up hitting the shot and winning the game. And then afterwards there was a scene in the locker room ... Just tell us about that scene real quick.

Sam Walker: 01:03:12 Bill Cartwright was devastated by this. He just sat down with Pippen and just said, "How could you?" And started to cry! You know, visibility in front of teammates.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:03:24 He was devastated.

Sam Walker: 01:03:25 Devastated by it. And, you know, it changed Scottie Pippen. Scottie Pippen went on to, you know, be one of the co-captains of that team when Jordan came back. I don't think he really fits my profile perfectly, but I think between him and Steve Kerr, I think they had a good leadership mojo there.

Sam Walker: 01:03:42 But no, that was Bill Cartwright in a nutshell. He cared so much about the team and the collective goals. He was heartbroken that Pippen would have done something that self-concerned.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:03:55 That also spoke to me a lot. That particular story. When you have a partnership with someone and you believe that you're ... You trust them. Right? You trust them and you think that they're on the same team. You sacrifice so much for them. In this moment they exercise such a petty level of selfishness. It's heartbreaking.

Sam Walker: 01:04:12 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:04:13 But to see that and for his teammates to see that, I just thought that was a powerful indicator. I think that's the major takeaway for me through your book. All the intangible qualities that make a person a human being and the vulnerability ... as much as the masculine and the feminine ... Not just that aggression and that will to win, but also that vulnerability that is in that moment. I think that combination, that whole humanistic sort of expression, is what I think makes these great captains, or I took from it.

Sam Walker: 01:04:44 Yeah. No. It's funny. I keep telling the teams that I have been talking to and companies that have asked me to come and talk ... I always say to them, "Look, you don't understand. When you have a leader like this in your midst, a magical thing happens. Everybody else knows this person's going to run into the burning building. They know they're going to do the thing that has to be done and a huge weight is lifted off of everyone." They know that they can focus on doing their thing and playing and being the best they can be because those fundamental functions of leadership are going to be taken care of.

Sam Walker: 01:05:19 It happens instantly. The difference is stunning. I've seen turnarounds within weeks when you have a character like this enter the picture. It's something that we all ought to think about, as we try to build teams.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:05:32 Sam, thanks so much for coming on the program.

Sam Walker: 01:05:35 Thanks, Demetri. It was really fun. Appreciate it.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:05:41 That was my episode with Sam Walker. I want to thank Sam for being on the program. Today's episode was produced by me and edited by Stylianos Nicolaou. For more episodes, you can check out our website at [hiddenforcespod.com](http://hiddenforcespod.com). Follow us on

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram at [hiddenforcespod](#) or send me an email.

Demetri Kofinas:

01:06:05

Thanks for listening. See you next week.