

A New Angle

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Justin Angle: This is A New Angle, a show about cool people doing awesome things in and around Montana. I'm your host, Justin Angle. This show is supported by First Security Bank, Blackfoot Communications and the University of Montana College of Business.

Justin Angle: Hey, folks, welcome back and thanks for tuning in. Today, I'm speaking with Adam Peterman. This year, Adam put together one of the finest seasons the trail running world has ever seen, including a win in his debut 100 miler, the hallowed Western States.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, I would definitely say it changed my life. It was just totally crazy. It was something that I thought maybe I could achieve someday would be winning Western States, but I really wasn't certain it would happen like on the first shot.

Justin Angle: In November, Adam won the World Mountain and Trail Running Championship. At only 27 years old, his future looks bright. Adam, thanks for coming on the show.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, thanks so much for having me on, Justin.

Justin Angle: So, tell us, where did you grow up and what did your parents do?

Adam Peterman: Yeah, I grew up right here in Missoula, Montana. Yeah, my dad was the flight nurse. Chief flight nurse at Life Flight here at Saint Pat's Hospital. And my mom mainly took care of me and my sister.

Justin Angle: Super. So, let's kind of go through, you know, a basic running bio, you know, stand out runner at Hellgate High School and then went on to Colorado Boulder, had a mixed career there, but ended with a national championship. Is that right? What were your formative years as a runner like?

Adam Peterman: Yeah, I started running, I guess, in like early middle school. I wasn't really good at many other sports, you know, I played soccer a little bit, but yeah, got into track in cross-country, ran for Hellgate, which was just awesome. You know, Anders and Mike Foote and Kendrick were all the coaches then, and it was just like such a good fit for me. I always was a pretty outdoorsy kid, but I wasn't very good at any of the ball sports. And so, to find running and to actually be good at it and then to have these like great friends in the sport, it was just perfect for me. But yeah, I ended up training really hard, ended up winning state my senior year in the two mile, which got me a scholarship to run at University of Colorado. So that was like a huge goal of mine was to run Division One in college.

Justin Angle: And we should mention for listeners that don't know, like Colorado Boulder is sort of the apex predator of collegiate running in many ways, like the legendary school, legendary place to run.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, Yeah, for sure. Fortunately, I was able to get on the team and be there for five years and it was really, really cool experience. I mean, some of these guys you're training with are like some of the best in the NCAA. Coach would always say it's like every day you're lining up to like be out there with the pack of lions and someday it's your day and some days it's not. So definitely had plenty of workouts with the team where you just totally get spit out the back. But overall, like you said, it was a mixed bag. Like my freshman and sophomore year, our team was really, really strong. We won cross country Nationals those two years for Division One, and I was lucky to be a part of the team my sophomore year. But then as a team we kind of struggled. We didn't win again for the rest of my time there, and I definitely had a couple of years of injury where I wasn't really able to run like I wanted to. So, I feel like I definitely finished college with like somewhat of a bad taste in my mouth. Like just didn't have the achievements that I wanted to reach. But overall, like, loved the coaches, loved everything about the program.

Justin Angle: And so, after college, decided to move back to your hometown, work at Runner's Edge, you do a variety of things there. Describe kind of your yeah, your decision to move home and what that's all about.

Adam Peterman: I always loved, even when I lived in Missoula growing up, like I always liked it. I don't think I was one of those kids who was like really eager to get out of town. So yeah, like after college I had a great time at Boulder, great time in Colorado, but I just like, I just liked Missoula more. Missoula always felt like home to me, so I was pretty excited to move back once college was over. Move back. I actually ended up being an assistant coach at Hellgate again. So that was like the only job offer I had after college. I honestly didn't, I would say I didn't think too much beyond running in college.

Justin Angle: Beyond the next race. Right.

Adam Peterman: Totally. And so, when that last race ended, I really took a minute and it was like, oh, shoot, I need to like, actually figure out what the rest of my life looks like. But yeah, fortunately, Anders at Hellgate, he offered me a job as an assistant coach, and I did that. I worked at the Trailhead downtown. I actually ended up doing a seasonal job in New Mexico for one summer. I was a range technician in this little town called Magdalena. But aside from that, you know, I've been back here. Assistant coaching. Anders hired me on to help out at Runners Edge events. So, I still have this part time job just helping put on these races around town. And yeah, it's been great. I love being back here.

Justin Angle: And so, in those first few years after graduation, what was your relationship with running, I assume running a fair amount, starting to get into the trail racing space. Your body's getting healthier. Let's talk about that process.

Adam Peterman: When I finished at Colorado, I wasn't really sure what my relationship would look like with running my whole dream for being like when I was younger and in college was to be a good runner and to maybe someday be a sponsored athlete. And I felt like when I finished at Colorado, like that dream was really, really far away and maybe, like, maybe wouldn't even happen. And so, I really had to reframe my relationship with the sport where I think it came down to more, I just chose to do what got me excited to get out the door and not necessarily look at it from a performance side. And so yeah, I was just getting out with my friends. I started making new friends in Missoula and like the community here, most of the guys I know were running trails, running trails in the summer and skiing in the winter and riding their bikes and like tagging peaks and just all the stuff I did when I was younger. And I think that was great. Like, that was like a soft introduction to me, to the whole sport of trail running. I think that first year back, I never thought I would actually take it to like a competitive or professional level.

Justin Angle: Yeah, I mean, that has to be an interesting thought process or, you know, you're navigating this space where, you know, probably the guys at the tippy top at Colorado are going on to pursue, you know, Olympic teams or professional road racing, career, shorter distance, different type of existence. You know, in the trail space at that point is kind of, it's emerged to some degree, folks sort of understand what an ultra is. But as far as training and competition goes, it's another beast entirely. You probably had to learn how to run slow, to learn how to run an ultra, right?

Adam Peterman: Oh, totally. Yeah. I would always show up to these group runs that we had. Guys would be like, I would have to actively, like, slow down a bunch to run with them. But now I don't feel that way. Now it's like the pace I go.

Justin Angle: Sure. So, describe your first ultramarathon.

Adam Peterman: You know, the first Ultra I did was the Speedgoat 50 K. That's a big race in Utah.

Justin Angle: That's a difficult race to jump in with.

Adam Peterman: Well, fortunately, you know, I had done, I did two trail marathons before that. It's called the Moab Trail Marathon. But I ran that in yeah, 2019 and 2020. And so, I had success at that race. And so, I fortunately, I had like two years of solid training before Speedgoat. Yes, Speedgoat was the first I ended up winning and just breaking the course record by like 20 seconds. It was really, really close. But yeah, I couldn't really ask for like a better entry into it. I think still, even though it went well, I definitely learned a lot. Like athletes always talk about bonking, like when you kind of run out of fuel in your body. I mean, I definitely bonked at mile 20 and had to come out of that like drinking a bunch of Diet Cokes, and I guess they weren't Diet Cokes, drinking a bunch of Cokes and taking all these gels at the aid stations. And it's kind of funny looking back now on the Speedgoat, because I think I could probably go quite a bit faster given how little I knew then.

Justin Angle: Sure. And that's just, you know, a little over a year ago, right?

Adam Peterman: Yeah, that was last July. Yeah.

Justin Angle: And so, describe I mean, I would imagine you're entering into these races with an amount of confidence as an athlete. You know you're a good runner, you know you've got speed and endurance. But at this distance and in this context, you're somewhat of a newcomer. Describe kind of your attitude. Some guys come in and they're brash right from the start. They're like, you know, I'm going to, these are people are old and slow and I'm going to come in and kick their butts. But, you know, what was your kind of mindset going into some of these races from the start?

Adam Peterman: I think I'm kind of lucky that I did have Mike Foote as an assistant coach in high school, like he was really a guy I looked up to even now. But like back then, especially, because he was always like such a humble guy. So, I think that was great. Like I try to still be a humble person. And then I also just learned a lot about ultrarunning from him that I think other high schoolers probably wouldn't have even had on their radar.

Justin Angle: Yeah, I mean, having, you know, one of the top, you know, top 100-mile runners in the world as your high school cross-country coach is pretty unique position.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, it was huge. So, I think that kind of help from my attitude and then I just had like, it felt like right away in trail I had a lot more success than I did in road running and track running. And so yeah, I think that gave me like a lot of internal confidence just going into these races. And honestly, looking back, it's probably something I should have carried in track running and road running because, you know, I line up on the start line in the Western States 100 this year and having never run a hundred in my mind, I think I can win. And I have no reason to believe that. But I ended up winning. And like I think now looking back at these other races I've done, I probably should have had that same mindset. You know, you kind of have to, you kind of just have to have this like blind faith in yourself if you want to do well.

Justin Angle: You know, it's interesting you say that like a lot of guys I competed with in college just kind of always had that mindset from the start. They just were I don't know if it was innate or they developed it as a younger athlete, but they just whatever it was they were going to win and not winning was not even on the radar screen. And when they ever, whenever they didn't win, it had no effect on their confidence.

Adam Peterman: Oh yeah.

Justin Angle: Whereas you know, I've had some success, but I kind of had to grow into it. And then that sort of played out at the ultra-distance as well. Let's fast forward to that Western States experience. So, first of all, you know, you qualify into the race with a win, at, what, 100K distance, the Canyons.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, Canyons 100K.

Justin Angle: And that's on some of the Western States course, right?

Adam Peterman: Yep.

Justin Angle: So, you get some familiarity of the course. You qualify for the race. It's a race that's notoriously hard to get into. So, competing your way in is probably the most efficient way in.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, totally. No lottery or anything. Yeah.

Justin Angle: But you know as a relative newcomer to the sport, what gave you the confidence to think, okay, I'm going to take a crack at this hundred-mile distance now I'm ready.

Adam Peterman: The distance was definitely like the most daunting thing. So, I ran Speedgoat in 2021. I did a race called JFK. It's like a historic 50-mile race in Maryland. But I did these two races, and Speedgoat I had the course record and then JFK I was like a minute slower or something like that.

Justin Angle: And that's, you know, like you said, a legendary race, course record there. Who has the course record now?

Adam Peterman: It's Hayden Hawkes.

Justin Angle: Hayden Hawkes. So relatively recent. But like that's had a lot of top tier repetitions on that course. So, coming within a minute of course record is pretty outstanding.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, it was. Yeah. Thank you. It was, yeah, really good day at JFK. But I think that kind of just gave me confidence that like, hey, like if I want to do ultras in Western states, like, I think I can do well. Really, the unknown was the distance. I felt like if I could actually do Western States and finish that I would probably do pretty well. It almost felt like the biggest risk to me was like going out too hard and then walking it in at mile 80.

Justin Angle: Which has happened to a lot of runners kind of with that speed pedigree that you've had, they kind of don't I wouldn't say don't respect the distance, but yeah, it is a daunting endeavor to go that far. And some people describe, you know, a 100 miler as a different sport than a 50 miler.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, you're just eating all the time. I mean, Western States is really hot, so you have to have a great crew like giving you ice and keeping you hydrated. So yeah, it's definitely quite a bit different than the races we're doing in college and even like a shorter 50K,

I just felt like given the performances I'd had leading into Western States, I just felt like if I was able to get it done that I'd probably do decently.

Justin Angle: Did you approach it as a race in the sense that you're thinking about where you are relative to your competitors throughout, or were you kind of more on the I'm going to run my own race and pace myself and see where it lands?

Adam Peterman: You know, Western States was different. I feel like all the races I'd done leading up to Western States, I'd gotten, I kind of like geeked out and looked at like the splits it would take to get the course record. And like certain times, the top performance had been like at a certain aid station. And I tried that with Western States. Like I went into the hole, down the rabbit hole of like how fast, Jim Wamsley had the course record at Western States, like what his times were at the aid stations. And honestly, looking at that at Western States like totally stressed me out. So, I went into Western States just like I thought I could do well, but really run my own race. Given that it was 100 miles, I felt like that was my best route to doing well. Yeah, fortunately it panned out. Like I just kind of started out like a pace I felt like I could hold all day. Got to mile 50 and I'm in second place at that point, but really hadn't thought about racing. And it wasn't until mile 55 there's this big aid station. It's called Michigan Bluff. But I get to Michigan Bluff and my crew is like, hey, you're only 2 minutes behind the winner here, like the guy leading the race. And at that point, then it was like, game on.

Justin Angle: Yeah, yeah. Particularly coming in with that amount of confidence. Yeah.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, totally. But I think that really played to my favor in that race because I spent the first 50 miles just kind of chilling and it wasn't too hard. And so, to get to 55 and be like, all right, now it's time to race, I think that was like, perfect.

Justin Angle: We'll be back to our conversation with Adam Peterman after this short break.

Justin Angle: Welcome back to A New Angle. I'm speaking with Adam Peterman about the life of a professional ultra-runner.

Justin Angle: So, winning a race like that for listeners that don't really know, like the Western States 100 is the premier, certainly 100-mile race in the United States, if not the world. But it's also maybe the best known. And so, winning a race like that, particularly now that trail running and ultrarunning is kind of become a pursuit where you can make a living like that sort of achievement, I presume, is life changing in a way, has it? And if so, how has it transformed your life?

Adam Peterman: I would definitely say it changed my life. It was just totally crazy. Something that I thought maybe I could achieve someday would be winning Western States, but I really wasn't certain it would happen like on the first shot. I mean, it was unreal. I definitely, I guess I got a lot of new followers on Instagram, but that doesn't really matter. But yeah, in terms of

like, I'm a sponsored athlete with Hoka the shoe company. And so, like, I was on a two-year contract with them, and I just signed a four year contract with them now.

Justin Angle: Congratulations.

Adam Peterman: Yeah. Thank you. I'm able to support myself through running. Yeah, which is really cool. Something I didn't think that I may achieve. Yeah, like, I'm really grateful that I'm with Hoka and that I feel like I'm in the sport at a kind of neat time. There is a lot more money for the athletes in the sport right now. So yeah, winning Western States definitely helped with that. Fortunately, like Missoula and the running community, Missoula is like pretty tight knit. And so, I felt like running around town I wasn't, like getting bombarded with people I didn't know. I feel like I've kind of known the running community my whole life. Fortunately, like, nothing's really changed in town. The weird thing that happens now is like, when I'm traveling to these other races, especially now in like, different countries, I guess people are like, starting to recognize me. And so that's been kind of weird. But everyone's really, really friendly. You know, it's the people who see you they're excited to see you because they're also just runners.

Justin Angle: Sure. I mean, talk about what that feels like. You say kind of weird. Like, what's the emotion? Is it uncomfortable or are you excited by it?

Adam Peterman: Oh, usually I'm excited by it. I guess it hasn't become like too overwhelming. You know, I'm not the most extroverted person, but I wouldn't say I'm an introvert either. So, I

enjoy, like, these interactions. But like, for example, I was just in Thailand for the World Championships of trail running. A lot of people recognize me now who I wouldn't have expected like other runners or after the race or like trying to get my signature. And I'm like, well, we just raced each other like, why do you want my signature if you're also at Worlds?

Justin Angle: Yeah, I think at your level they start to call it an autograph rather than a signature. So yeah, get the vocabulary right. And maybe we should mention also that you won that race. So, you are world champion. And that might have had something to do with some of the attention as well.

Adam Peterman: Oh, gosh. Yeah, I guess so. Yeah. I'm trying to take it in stride, but it is. Yeah, it has been kind of weird.

Justin Angle: For sure. I think the attention piece is one thing, but the kind of realization that, oh my gosh, this can be my job, that's got to be fulfilling in a way. This activity that has brought you so much of kind of your self-conception. Now it can be your job. That's got to feel pretty good.

Adam Peterman: It is like a lifelong goal really was to be sponsored, like that was my dream when I was in high school. And yeah, it felt so far away in college. It's cool to achieve it now, but I think I'll still continue to work part time. I think it's good to be with real life, too. You know, I work for Runners Edge events, helping put on races. And so, I think it's good for me to still

have a job where I, you know, I order porta potties and working on the website and I'm like lifting things around day of the race. I think it's still important to have that, even though I could, I guess, I could right now just support myself from running.

Justin Angle: Sure. You know, I've known some runners that have kind of been faced with that opportunity. And for some it's been fantastic. For others actually having the gift of not having to work a day job had a negative effect on their running in that they just felt like, okay, it's my job to run and train all the time rather than what probably the reality was. Actually, it's my job to do the same running and training that I've always done and just rest instead of go to work. So, how's it like, give us kind of a day in the life of Adam Peterman as a professional athlete?

Adam Peterman: Yeah, like a lot of guys who get sponsored and quit their other job, like they end up doing too much. So that's like definitely a worry of mine. But yeah, a day in the life. So, gosh, I guess get up, I try to get up like somewhat early, like right around six and then, you know, head out for a run around eight. It depends on the day, but I'll run somewhere between like, ten would just be like an easy run, around ten miles. Sometimes I'll go like 3 hours, especially when I'm like really training for a race be about 3 hours. And then I usually have a little bit of work to do in the middle of the day. So that's, you know, we're getting ready for a race. It might mean going out to our storage unit, getting some stuff together might mean I'm just working on our website or emailing some communication stuff with other vendors. And then in the afternoon I usually go out for another session. I don't usually run twice in a day, but I'll either lift weights at the gym, but not very heavy, pretty easy stuff. But yeah, I do some

physical therapy at the gym. I'll go for a bike ride, or I'll ski. So, I usually try to work out twice a day, like maybe five days a week. But yeah, it's pretty simple life and then just cook dinner and hang out. And I like to go fishing with my dad when I have the free time. We hunt as well. So yeah, just kind of living like a Montana lifestyle.

Justin Angle: So, you know, you're kind of, you can make a living in the sport. And with that potential, with the amount of money that has come into the sport, it's allowing careers to be made. There's prize money. The stakes in some ways are high. That introduces the need for regulation in the sport, like, you know, doping control, policies, stuff like that. What's been your experience of coming up into that aspect of the sport and what would you, how would you describe the sort of state of the game with regard to the health of the sport?

Adam Peterman: Yeah, it seems like it's just growing really quickly. I think I came into it like while it's growing really quickly, I don't like a lot of my friends who may have run ultras five years ago talk about these ultras that they did that were like really chill. But, you know, everyone's like camping at the start. And yeah, I love that. Unfortunately, like, that hasn't necessarily been my experience. I think I just came into it while it was like pretty high on the rise. But yeah, there's a lot of different things, issues in the sport like the biggest race in the world right now for ultra is UTMB and which it's a great race, great race to do, but it's like really hard and confusing of how you get into it as an elite athlete or even as a non-elite athlete. And so, like, I think that's something the organization's going to have to work out. Or another example, like I just ran the World Championships of Trail Running in Thailand and that

was awesome. And I ended up winning. I was like the world champion. But it wasn't the most competitive race that I'd ever been in. Like all the top dogs weren't necessarily in that race. And so even though I was like, coined a world champion, like, I don't know. I don't necessarily feel like I am the world champion.

Justin Angle: That didn't feel like as big a deal as Western States or winning Speedgoat or JFK.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, I would say yeah. I would say it didn't feel as big of a deal as winning Western States. So, I think the sport definitely has to iron out some issues with that. Like if they want to have a world championship, then they should try to make it be like the actual world champion. Doping is a big issue. Like I got tested after Worlds, but only the top three got tested and so there could have been other guys who may have been like not clean athletes who just weren't on the podium. And same with Western States like the top ten get tested for doping, but no one else beyond that. So, I think there's a lot of like growing pains with what's happening, but I'm sure that all this is a good thing in general, that the sport's growing because we're getting like more people out there. It's becoming a career, like a viable career for elite athletes, which will just make it more competitive and just fair for everyone. So, like we do complain like, yeah, we wish that the World Championships was like truly the world championships or that UTMB wasn't so confusing to get into. But I think this is just like growing pains that the sport will experience.

Justin Angle: And in your estimation, is doping a problem in sport?

Adam Peterman: Gosh, I feel like from my experience in the races I've done, I would guess it is not like at least in the U.S., I would be very surprised if the people that I'm racing against are doping. In general, all the guys, men and women, I've met through trail running have been just like amazing people. And I would just, I would be really surprised if any of them were dirty.

Justin Angle: Yeah, that's heartening to hear. So, in our remaining time, Adam, talk about what's next. I mean, you sort of at 27 years old, you've achieved some life goals already and you have a lot of life left. Talk about kind of what's next and what you're looking at in the future.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, it's been a really good last year. And then yeah, now I'm just looking forward to kind of a winter of a little less running, more skiing. It's kind of funny, like I've just done this like these two really big races, but now I'm looking forward to a Nordic skiing race in Seeley Lake. So yeah, I'm going to do the Oscar 50K skate skiing race then, and then maybe another 50K skate ski race in West Yellowstone. So that's just kind of for fun, like something to make me run less through the winter. But yeah, man, I'm all set up. I'm signed up for Western States again next year and really looking to try to run maybe even a faster time. Depending on how Western States goes and if I'm able to recover, I would like to do one of the races at UTMB in Europe.

Justin Angle: There are a variety of distances, 100 mile and you know, like 120K, which sort of seems strange that they have that distance as well. But there's a variety of events there.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, they have the main one, which is 106 miles, but then they have 100K and a 55K, so depending on how recovery is after Western States, I would try to do one of those.

Justin Angle: Fantastic.

Adam Peterman: Yeah. And then just looking to 2024, I'd love to try to qualify for the U.S. Marathon trials and so that be actually quite a bit different for me. Kind of go back to running fast, but I need to run a 2:18 in the marathon to qualify for that, which is in Florida in February 2024.

Justin Angle: So, a big gear shift. Awesome.

Adam Peterman: Yeah, but I think that's, I think that's good. I think it's good to mix it up.

Justin Angle: Yeah. And so, for a listener who's here listening to this and, you know, thinking I get this question, well, I used to when I used to just kind of do some running, like how on earth did run 100 miles? I don't even like to drive that far is the common thing. Like whether you're going fast or not fast. Like, how do you do it? How do you, I mean, one foot in front of the other,

obviously. But like you're standing on the starting line at one of these things, as you said before, the distance is daunting. How do you approach it mentally?

Adam Peterman: Oh, man. Having only done one 100-mile race, I still feel like the distance is pretty daunting to me how I did it at Western States and how I'll try to do it in the future is I just thought about like going to the next aid station and that really broke it up. You know, that's you got an aid station every five miles. So even during Western States, no matter how bad I felt, I was like, all right, well, I can go to the next aid station. I think that mindset and then, you know, we're from Montana. We're kind of used to being outside all day, maybe not running all day outside. But, you know, you go hiking all day or you might go hunting all day and Western States like takes all day. So that was kind of my mindset going in was like, all right, I don't know if I can run 100 miles, but I can probably run all day long. And fortunately, that yeah, that got me through.

Justin Angle: Yeah. For some people, it's more than all day. It's all day and night and then some day. But Adam, it's been a pleasure learning more about your approach to your work, the sort of transformation this year has had in your life. And I am excited, as I think a lot of this community are, to see what comes next. So, thanks for joining us today.

Adam Peterman: Thank you so much for having me on. Yeah, it's been a pleasure.

Justin Angle: Thanks for listening to A New Angle. We really appreciate it. And we're coming to you from Studio 49, a generous gift from UM Alums, Michele and Loren Hansen.

Justin Angle: A New Angle is presented by First Security Bank, Blackfoot Communications and the University of Montana College of Business, with additional support from Consolidated Electrical Distributors, Drum Coffee in Montana Public Radio. Keely Larson is our producer. VTO, Jeff Amentt and John Wicks made our music. Editing by Nick Mott, Social Media by Aj Williams, and Jeff Meese is our master of All Things Sound. Thanks a lot, and see you next time.