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## Episode #449

Sporting legend turned entrepreneur Matthew Pavlich is disrupting a very antiquated industry



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## **Matthew Pavlich Interview Transcription**

### **Tim**

I start off by asking Matthew what life was like after leaving such a coveted football career.

### **Matthew**

I guess my whole philosophy throughout my 17 years in the AFL was to have a balance and to keep really occupied off the field so I was fortunate to study and discipline to study two degrees while I was playing and have various other interests which no doubt will get into. But from that perspective I think I was always preparing for life after football and having a number of things to keep me occupied. But it's still a tricky a tricky time to traverse and get through.

### **Tim**

You've always had. From what I can tell them and what I've read an interest in business to the point of going ahead and getting your MBA. What do you love about business?

### **Matthew**

In many ways it's not dissimilar to being involved in a sporting team in that you have. Generally speaking you have a common purpose in mind. You have a team that are working towards that you're dealing with people that have plenty of issues and problems that you need to help and assist and guide with and it's invigorating you get up each day with a purpose in mind. The general purpose of getting up and being degraded by trying to achieve. I think all human beings have that in them.

### **Tim**

Did did you have an idea Matthew upon leaving the AFL of a business you want to start? I know we're going to talk about Pickstar which is your big focus now but did you have a sense of what you wanted to do?

### **Matthew**

I wanted to have variety. Having done the same thing every day for the last 17 years. I wanted to have a little bit of variety in my life I wanted to do something different although I had no interests outside of football. It was my singular focus for 17 years and probably three or four years before I got drafted so call let's call it in excess of 20 years of a passion and it was my passion and largely having a passion is entirely positive for people. But as I said in my exiting the game I wanted to have a number of different things to invigorate me to inspire me and yeah that's what business and a number of different things at the moment have allowed me to do.

**Tim**

What's it like going from footy where you have a singular focus you know exactly what needs to be done every single day to now and by the sounds of it you have a number of different business interests is that a challenge? Do you love allocating your time to different things? How do you manage that mentally?

**Matthew**

It's a challenge definitely. I think at times it's a frustration for those around me be it family or business partners because they know I've got other other commitments and and I'm constantly on my toes which I think is great. The time management aspect or at least compartmentalize in the day even just like I'm going to get to spend the next two hours smashing out some work for Pickstar and I know I've got to get an interview for Channel Nine a bit later this afternoon and then I've got a meeting for pny group another time so it's I think some people find that disturbing I actually I think I'm the opposite I really thrive off of those challenges.

**Tim**

It's interesting I was interviewing a lady only last week in Bali and her name's Janet DeNeefe and Janet is similar she has about 10 different businesses. She's building an empire in Ubud she's got a beautiful hotel she's got cafes restaurants she's got a homeware store a travel business you know a cooking school and she too she's actually a highly creative person and for her who has a very limited attention span. It's her way of keeping things interesting. I don't imagine you would have a limited attention span you'd be a very focused person so you sort of like you're doing the same thing as Janet but in a different way.

**Matthew**

Yeah yeah. I think this is something that all human beings go through or people go through as they get you know I'm 37 now you know a couple of years out of playing the AFL when I left home at 17 and got drafted from Adelaide across to Perth. So you know the vast experiences and the lessons of I had to learn the failures the successes individually and as a team and all those different things you know yourself a lot better when you're my age you know you still have a lot to work out. But I was only talking the other day to my wife at 25 you think you've got everything sorted but it's just so incorrect you just got so much to learn.

**Tim**

I reckon whoever put us on this earth they must have considered should I start them off really old and wise or let them grow young or smart young and stupid. Let them grow wise and clearly they made the second decision. But you use your personal brand to grow other people's businesses I guess for many years while you're playing for Freo listening right now a whole lot of small business owners who first of all could use a build their own personal brand but secondly use a personality like yourself. Could you give us an example of how you worked with a business and successfully provided them with a return on investment and you got a return on investment. And I'd tell you the undercurrent to that question is that I see a lot of businesses go down the path of using other people's personal brands and not getting anything from it.

**Matthew**

During and even post my playing career I had some great sponsors and associations with the likes of home loans Woodside and a number of others and I think where we're at. This is going to sound a bit cliché but where it's authentic where I was engaged with them both market facing in an advertising campaign but also internally engaged with their with their team doing some things with their group high performance teams leadership aspects of the lessons I've learned. I think it really helps where it's okay we need a sports star where we want to promote this and it's kind of an ad hoc really quickly put together piece of advertising or marketing. Yeah I think people see through that pretty quickly. But both on the marketplace side but also internally and it won't be an ongoing and ongoing relationship.

**Tim**

So there must have been one sponsor company or person within that company that really got the most out of you is there a particular trait that you could kind of identify that other business owners could use to get the best out of a personality?

**Matthew**

Been really driven in the sense of okay we've engaged this personality let's call it an athlete you've engaged an athlete to help promote your product your services. And being really clear on the objectives our objectives here are to get X whatever X may be and then that's up to the business owners to understand that here is our clear objectives and then to really drive that and don't have to be sitting a game plan in a game of football or any spoiler here's our game plan we don't want to move away from that too much. This is our strategy.

**Tim**

Matthew let's talk about Pickstar what is it and why did you start it?

**Matthew**

Well it's a commercial marketplace connecting brands and fans to athletes. So it's an online marketplace platform that James Begley and I founded he is an ex AFL player as well. We grew up Bleiberg in Adelaide together in a roundabout way and both went our separate ways. He got drafted over to St Kilda and I got drafted to Freo we met up sort of about 10 or so years later and amongst other things James was involved with working with brands in the leadership sort of high performing teams holding each other accountable creating a value set all those things and what he found was that there was a huge demand from people from brands and fans to engage with athletes to hear their inspiring stories to get a sense of what a high performing team how they operate. And so he was just emailing texting a few of his contacts a few of his network and asking could they come to a session that he was running and provide some insight and what he found was there was demand on both sides there was demand on from the brands and fans and clearly there was a demand from the athletes to be paid for these opportunities so it was his idea. We then went about raising a small amount of money creating the platform. And the last 12 or so months has been really strong.

**Tim**

Or what's different is and what's disruptive about it? Having looked at and I do a lot of keynote speaking myself and I'm always dealing with Speaker bureaus face to face some experiences are really good. A lot of them aren't that good was what you've done I think is disrupt that by putting the whole thing online. Is that right? It's basically Pickstar a technology company.

**Matthew**

Yeah that's our ambition that's our aspiration. We want to be a tech company and fundamentally we know there's there's about 72 steps in the process of searching for a star booking your star to getting them paid whether it's a speaker like you just talking about yourself an athlete or whoever. So fundamentally the new platform provides the ability to process manage the whole transaction not only at a lower cost but more efficiently and automate all of those interactions.

**Tim**

So essentially it's a bit like an upwork or design crowd. If you're talking from a graphic design point of view or web design you put a brief on these websites somewhere people are designers or web developers who have you wanting from all over the world reply to your brief with a pitch with a proposal you shortlist them you have a bit of a discussion online chat with them about oh can you do this. Can you do that and then you choose one.

**Matthew**

Spot on. A client be an individual fan or a big brand which would put a brief in. They've got a function coming up they want athletes to attend you out of the thousand athletes we have on our platform. You can shortlist the talent that you want and then that goes direct to them so that they'll get notified on the athlete app that we have. And you can interact with those athletes as well as our team back at headquarters. And what we're now doing is turnaround opportunities just like that. Call it a cocktail party at a corporate function in front of 120 people we're turning around in 24 hours now because the automation because of the way the platform works which used to be a long and convoluted process of back and forth.

**Tim**

Could take weeks.

**Matthew**

Yeah correct. So it's really exciting about what we're hoping to do. There's a number of these booking platforms for talent. So there's not many of the platforms at all and we're the only one really doing this effectively and efficiently.

**Tim**

So what I also find amazing is that you talk about brands and individuals so correct me if I'm wrong and maybe give us an example if I'm right but little johnny down the street who's turning 10 his old man could get on to Pickstar and put a brief I'm now making up an amount he's got 200 bucks and he'd love a sporting personality to come to his 10th birthday party helping cut the cake can that be possible?

**Matthew**

Yeah absolutely we've done opportunities in our system from as little as 200 dollars all the way through to 30 40 thousand dollar a brand ambassador role. So completely for individual fans we've done a number of birthday parties coffees lunches for individual fans. You know we had three West Coast Eagles players go to a birthday party and so what we found is that clearly there's a demand from individual fans but also from the corporate network to to get these high profile talent in. But what we found from the athletes side is it's not necessarily the budget that the athletes have their paramount focus on. Budgets are important and being commercial is important but they have other passions and availability the location of the opportunity what their passion about. You know there's been some great not for profit opportunities that athletes have said they would do as well. So it really is opening up what I think's been quite a fragmented market for a long time.

**Tim**

Matthew I've got listeners from ranging from plumbers and masseuses to lawyers and people who own large law knowing franchises and everything in between. Can we just focus for a minute on. I think it's quite exciting how all of a sudden they could start embracing this kind of ambassador strategy within their business using Pickstar.



**Matthew**

Well I guess for a long time either you needed to know the individual athlete or talent you had to know their management or you had to bring the club or industry body that they represented. Now that would take if you were lucky to.

**Tim**

Find those diamonds.

**Matthew**

So the point being open this opportunity up. And you're right whether it's a lawyer whether it's a law firm whether the local cafe down the road the blue chip brands of Australian corporate sphere they have now the opportunity for small one off transactions with talent or ongoing relationships and ambassador ships which often are the ones that's not only a fantastic opportunity for the athletes but get the real cut through for the brands as well.

**Tim**

A couple of things come to mind in terms of getting this idea to market one is how on earth did you get past talent managers who I would have thought would have been protecting that space with an inch of their lives?

**Matthew**

So that's the first question everyone asks including the myriad of managers that we now work with. We don't want to be talent managers that's not our business. We love athletes and we are athletes and we want to tell their stories. We want to show the great side of athletes but we're not talent management athletes talent management agencies we are here providing them commercial opportunities and what we know for a fact is that a lot of these talent managers have a number like a large number of athletes on their books and find it really hard to create opportunities for them. Not everyone can be there. You know if I come from the world that I was involved in the AFL really only the top 10 percent of players are the ones that get the big contracts the big ambassador ships etc. the rest of them that's almost 800 hundred athletes in the AFL at least they're the ones who are sort of scrapping around for other opportunities that we know there's a market for. So what we say to the managers is that look what we're going to do well we're providing a platform for you and your client to have more commercial opportunities. And so when is put in those terms they're a bit more approachable.

**Tim**

Okay. So the other one it strikes me is how do you get around this one I suppose the answer is that the talent can say no. But what if I go in pickstar and I reach out to some athletes and I want them to say hey if you love business then you should be listening to the small business big marketing show and I want them to record that on their iPhone and send me a video. I mean of course they can say no to that but how do you manage that side of things?



**Matthew**

So our system is I guess savvy enough for the athletes to as straightforward as saying no decline where we won't accept that opportunity and the client in this case you Tim would understand that think about Gary Ablett says no I'm not interested in that opportunity. But the other one is obviously there's the last couple of checks for athletes to have got any conflicting sponsor issues and other sort of aspects that could put them in trouble. The last thing we want to do is have an athlete come under scrutiny from their club from their industry body saying hey you did a gig for Samsung but we're sponsored by Apple. So yeah there's some checks and balances that we've put in place in the background in the system that tries to alleviate any of those issues going forward. Tim if you want some athletes to promote your business put an opportunity in the system.

**Tim**

Well I might do that send me through a few credits just to try it out. Tell me I'm interested Matthew in getting pickstar a market. I understand its four years old and in the early days like any small business you grounded out just trying to get the thing live and to market and understood I mean there's a whole educational process around disrupting industry and doing and booking talent in a whole new way. How do you reflect back on that first sort of six months?

**Matthew**

The grind. Yeah an absolute grind. I'm going to name drop here for a minute Timbo but I got to spend a bit of time with Roger Federer when he was in Perth for the Hopman Cup and I asked him at 37. So I love it. I actually love the grind and it is sort of a nice moment for me. I was like in reflecting on pickstar that there's been this huge challenge particularly for James and the team I think who are living it daily that's trying to explain as you said disruptor who can work hand in glove with management with athletes and with brands. And yes so we scraped together some Mum and Dad's funding and family and friends sort of as you said three or four years ago.

**Tim**

Your one of those blokes knocking on your mates doors guy I think got a good idea.

**Matthew**

That was it. That was James. So we did that and then and literally scraping away for three years and then the last 12 months we got some extra funding and and yeah our growth has been I guess you know running concurrently with us going to market it and getting some more funding and getting the system live. So it's really what we've always dreamt of is really only been live call it eight months.

**Tim**

In its current form. Tell me was there a moment then I'm always interested to see understand that moment where you might have looked each other like James in the eye and gone. I think we're on to something I think we've hit a tipping point where this thing is going to work or you're not there yet?

**Matthew**

Yeah. No I think we're pretty close to having that moment I'm not sure we're quite there that this thing will work. We had a moment of can this thing work. We had a moment of looking at each other going oh gee whiz what have we got ourselves into. We saw this thing growing our revenue was growing but our runway of cash was just running out. And so like any other small business the cash flow is so critical. But we could see the automation and the system really start to work. So on one hand we'll pump. Hey look this thing can actually generate revenue. This is great but on the other side was okay we need to really do it if we're believing in this and I think we're affirming that we are. We do believe in it then we're going to have to go back and recharge ourselves.

**Tim**

It is a new idea. Pickstar it is a disruptive idea. How have you gone about marketing it and getting the name out there?

**Matthew**

I guess most fables and most companies strategy particularly those trying to get to the demographic that sits call 15 through to 250 really the best way to target them isn't the traditional advertising method it's to go digital. And so our in-house marketing team led by Andrew is really driven and driven that way for a long time just doing Google AdWords and that seem to be relatively effective but we've done a number of initiatives now using our athletes using the examples of the transactions using clients and brands and hear from them about their experiences but really it is based around the digital aspects of marketing and pushing that hard.

**Tim**

I worked with the late Jim Styne's Matthew for a couple of years on a project a passion project of his to bring it to life and one of the things Styne's he was very good at was opening boardroom doors which as you would be a man for those who don't know Jim Styne's was AFL legend a much loved player of the AFL. So Jim would use his personal brand to open the boardroom door and then you know the sales blokes had run in after him have you been doing that with Pickstar?

**Matthew**

Yeah absolutely. And I guess with all my business roles that I have that's largely a large part of my role. So yeah fortunate to have met and networked strongly over the 17 years that I played particularly here in WA in Perth but down in Melbourne and where I grew up in Adelaide as well.

**Tim**

What do you do there? Where is your a name and a face in definitely WA?

**Matthew**

Yeah. The southern states I guess you could tell that. So for us it's been from a marketing particularly from an athlete you know getting athletes engaged and activated it on the site is to go to the talent manager and it's amazing. Australia is so small because it doesn't take much to pull the phone out and give someone a call and say I have to speak to this person they know X Y and Z and that could be corporately. As you said the boardroom but it could also be getting in front of an athlete so that's why we've been able to build organically the athletes we haven't done one piece of marketing or spend a dollar on any of those athletes jumping onto our platform.

**Tim**

What's the hardest thing you find about business?

**Matthew**

People. People are the best thing in life and they can also be the most challenging in the sense that they're the ones that sometimes force you to make to get up and work and help and assistance you get so much satisfaction and enjoyment out of that but also they can be the hardest aspect staffing dealing with issues that bob up here and there so.

**Tim**

You've stayed fit for many many years now in business are you one of these football players that stacked on the kegs in the last years since retirement or if not how are you staying fit?

**Matthew**

I've tried not to. It's a battle. It's an ongoing battle I've put on a few. I put on a couple of kilos definitely happy to admit that but I've tried to. It's funny I didn't do anything for about and when I say anything I didn't go for a run. I've got three young children so you know I was playing around with them but I literally didn't do any proper form of exercise for six weeks once I retired and I started feeling a bit uneasy. I didn't really know what it was but I decided to go for a run. Finally and I felt so much better after it and it was a gentle jog along the beach. Basically it wasn't anything.

**Tim**

What's a gentle jog along the beach for Matthew Pavlich look like?

**Matthew**

When I say on the beach not actually on the sand but along the foreshore. Probably about a five k slow jog. Yeah nothing too serious and then I felt so much better and then I realised psychologically it's so beneficial to get moving and exercising so I try to. It was a bit of a penny dropped because I did it you know it was my job I did for 17 years I didn't realise how important it was for me psychologically to exercise so yeah from a minimum of three times a week if I can something whether to run in the gym or something.

**Tim**

As the captain of the Fremantle Football Club you would have been a mentor to many as a football player. You would have had mentors in coaches and other people in your life. Do you now have mentors in your business life?

**Matthew**

Yeah I do. So I've been pretty fortunate to meet some great business people. Richard Goyder springs to mind immediately who is actually a good family friend of my wife's. He's been great. Peter Coleman from Woodside I've had a bit to do with over the years and then a really good man on Paul Yeomans who is the founder and managing director of my group. The other sort of business I'm involved with. Yeah his sort of shyness hid the appetite and the desire to grow and really found a business and get it moving so there's a few that spring to mind.

**Tim**

That relationship is a formal relationship where you meet with your mentor once a month and have a coffee and bleed your heart out? Or do you just call them when you're trying to nudge something out. What's it look like?

**Matthew**

It's not formal. I say it's not formal it's not like I go out every month on this day we catch up but you know every couple of months I would catch up with one of those guys just to bounce off a few ideas and thoughts and really just touch base. And I've always found that initially so obviously were sports psychologist while I was playing in the AFL and I knew MacLane who I worked with larger here's another I guess a mentor or someone I like catching up with because he just gives a really different perspective towards your way of thinking and I think that's what mentors are therefore they're not there to tell you what to do. But to challenge you ask a lot of questions and to help you find the solutions and those people certainly do that.

**Tim**

Last question and a fleeting mentor I'm guessing was Roger Federer. What else did he teach you besides enjoy the game?

**Matthew**

I mean all the things that everyone say is how to handle yourself in public life for a long period of time. It is quite remarkable he is Polish and his gravitise something that most people aspire to the way he speaks to everyone the way he goes about his business in every walk of life. Pretty inspiring.

**Tim**

Yeah. Incredible athlete. And as were you. Matthew thank you mate for sharing post football journey your new business journey and I wish you all the luck with Pickstar.

**Matthew**

Thank you very much. It's been great chatting.