

Something Extra EP 088 – Jayson Wells

[00:01:29] Lisa Nichols: I'm very thrilled to have Jayson Wells on the show today. Jayson is a retired professional basketball player, author, and the founder of the Jayson Wells Experience. Jayson, I am so delighted to have you on the show today. You and I recently met, but for years, people have told us we needed to meet. [chuckles]

[00:01:52] Jayson Wells: Yes. We still haven't officially met in as far as actual contact, but yes, at least we got this part out of the way.

[00:02:00] Nichols: Absolutely. Well, I cannot wait for our listeners to hear your story. You are just chock full of wisdom and I just know that our conversation today is going to be really rich. Let's go on and dive in. Tell me a little bit about the way you grew up and then I want to jump into some other things.

[00:02:18] Wells: Sure. Inner-city boy from Cleveland, Ohio, I spent the first 17 years of my life pretty much not leaving Northeast Ohio unless it was in some type of athletic capacity, basketball capacity. We had RA nationals in Winston Salem or Orlando one year. For the most part, I was rooted in Cleveland, Ohio, Northeast, Ohio. I don't say that as a good or a bad thing. We'll talk about that throughout the course of our time today, even then being a youngster, I never looked at it as bad or good, it just was. I really didn't even know the difference between bad or good. It just was.

Now, I'm at a point where I'm able to look back at that and say, for 17 years, I pretty much didn't see anything else. However, what's happened after those 17 years definitely made up for not being able to see a whole lot in those first 17 years. When I say inner-city, I like to say it's a people, whatever you've experienced on your own, if you've had that opportunity or whatever you've seen in a movie or read in a book, I am pretty much from that. I am from not the best place in the world. A lot of negative activity, a lot of negative comments, drugs, guns, gangs, all of those types of things.

Just look back and I'm super fortunate just about the opportunity to be able to be somewhat sheltered from that because of basketball. Just a super quick story, not even really a story, but I

was sheltered by the people who were doing a lot of the negative things, which as I look back was probably one of the most foundational things of my upbringing is, I lived two houses from the drug house. Once I got of age, I remember vividly having a conversation with them who were, 5-10 years older than me with them saying, "Hey, if we ever catch you doing anywhere close to what we do, we're going to beat you down before we give you back to your dad and your grandma, so they could beat you down."

I look back at that and I just see they saw something in me that for sure, I didn't see in myself, but they saw that there was something different about this kid. He had a way out.

[00:04:38] Nichols: Aw, I love that. That's a powerful story because they could have influenced you to come along right beside them. Jayson, you and I have talked about this. Your dad was so influential. Donald Edward Wells, I want to read something really quickly from your book here. You said, "I've been playing basketball and in organized basketball teams at seventh grade. There would have been no high school basketball, no college basketball, no professional basketball if it were up to me. I wanted to quit the team not because I wasn't good but because I did not like playing for my dad." [laughter] Your dad was your coach, right?

[00:05:17] Wells: Yes, for one year.

[00:05:19] Nichols: I think for you, you had such a great foundation of principles and we're going to talk about that a lot. Can you dig into your dad a little bit and just tell us the good things about your dad?

[00:05:32] Wells: Sure. He is everything. My mom and dad split when I was five and I went with him, which is probably a little bit-

[00:05:41] Nichols: Unusual?

[00:05:42] Wells: Yes, for sure, but my mom was the breadwinner. My mom was the one who worked. My dad was Mr. Mom and so when I went with him as a five-year-old and through my young teenage years and pretty much off until I went into college and even after that, but he taught me what I refer to as authentic manhood, as real manhood. He taught me, I know how to cook, I'm domestic. I know how to clean. I know how to communicate, which is obviously something that men struggle with just across the board and it's something that, of course, I can

get better at and continue to get better at, but love for myself, love for my family. He taught me all those things.

Unlike some young men who may have a jaded vision of what masculinity and manhood looks like, I was raised by him through these principles that we'll discuss. Then also I have between mom's dad and dad's side. I have 10 uncles as well. I had a very dominant masculine influence of which I got to see a variety of different things. As I got older and more mature and started to experience some different things, I got to see what to do, what not to do, how to act, how not to act, and just different things, but that was definitely all rooted by my dad.

With that coaching story that you started off reading, the rest of that is I asked him because he's not a basketball guy. One of the things that I tell my audiences early is I fell in love with basketball because my dad was a musician and people after they scratch their head and try to figure out what that means, what it means is my dad wasn't an basketball person, so he wasn't vicariously living through me. He wasn't putting any unnecessary pressures or tensions on me. He literally coached me through just being a dad.

That year that he was my coach, I remember asking him, "How are you going to be our coach? You don't even know anything about basketball." He told me something as a 12-year-old, 13-year-old that has just now started to really sit in and propelled me into who I am and what I do right now. In that moment, he told me that a coach is just somebody who takes people to places that they wouldn't be able to go on their own. That is when I use the word coach, I call everybody coach to this day, whether it's in an athletic space or not, and it's that. It's guiding someone, coaching people through places that they wouldn't be able to necessarily go on their own. Even as a 12-year-old, he was dropping nuggets. [chuckles]

[00:08:20] Nichols: Well, I do want to get into your basketball career a little bit, but you even like his initials, DEW, you even use that to say, develop, what is it? Extraordinary winners.

[00:08:34] Wells: Yes. It's funny. Since writing the book, I've actually changed it and morphed it a little bit. It's been that since 2012. Yes, when people use the phrase, do you, do you, in some way, shape or form, but it's actually very personal for me. When my dad passed away in 2003, literally, in the middle of my professional career, I used to call him do man, that was one of the little nicknames that I will call him. It was something that divinely came to me and through me through inspiration and a attribute to him. I took that and I ran with it and it was right around the time when rubber bands were coming out.

Lance Armstrong had the LiveStrong bands and wristbands were popular. I literally got them made and people would ask for them and I would hesitantly give them to them. It's really personal for me. Not until I retired did I come up with that acronym that is foundationally rooted in his initials, which is as close to me as you can get, but applicable for everyone else. Yes, in the book it says, develop extraordinary winners. Since then, I've changed it to develop and empower winners. Still DEW and you mentioned Simon Sinek before we started recording. What I got out of studying Simon, studying purpose is your purpose statement or your why statement should be an action item and then an impact item. Develop and empower winners is the action, so they can inspire and impact the world is the impact. I've taken somethings very close to me and literally used it as my North star.

[00:10:12] Nichols: Right. Well, you've mentioned Simon Sinek and of course, every business person out there knows who Simon Sinek is, and you'd said, "Oh, Simon's my business coach." You said, no, because I've him enough. You bring up an interesting point, the why and you have got a Y in your name. J-A-Y-S-O-N. Then you went on to name your kids, Jaylin and Jayden, and they have Ys in their names.

[00:10:42] Wells: They do.

[00:10:43] Nichols: Do you think that was on purpose that you were J-A-Y-S-O-N or did you figure that out later and go, "Oh wow. I have a Y"?

[00:10:51] Wells: I just moved to St. Louis. I moved here in September of 2016 and I know this because my 40th birthday was in December of 2016. In that three months, three and a half months that I was here, I remember vividly having a conversation, calling my mom and telling her, thank you for whatever inspired her to put that Y in my name back in 1976 because obviously, it's not the traditional spelling of Jayson, but I told her, "Thank you," because it gave total validation and just legitimacy to who I am, what I believe in.

That universal question of why are we here and what are we here for started what I refer to as my journey of purpose right around just before that time, and it was just total clarity and she's on the phone crying, and saying, oh son, this and that. It was really that and so even when naming my sons who were born in 2007, and 2010, I hadn't officially started that journey yet.

Where Simon plays into that is, I remember it was earlier this morning. I was in my condo in Atlanta cleaning it, and you know how YouTube will have the algorithms of what it suggests that you play next or what videos should play next. I was just cleaning my house. It was on a random shuffle and Simon's Ted Talk, *Start With Why*, came on. It just immediately intrigued me and from that moment, I studied Simon, I listened to every podcast he was on, I watched every video that I could get my hands on.

If we pan just a little bit to my right, I got a picture of Simon *Start With Why* cover, my *The Things We Know But Do Not Do* book cover, and then in between it is my first \$15-residual check that I got from selling books. It was just one of those a business that puts up that first dollar bill. I never sat down to write a book and to know that I've written a book, I'm ready to write book number two, and it was all inspired by him. I just figured I would give him that credit.

[00:13:03] Nichols: Jayson, now the principles that you learned were your foundation. I think what you've done, Jayson, is you said the same principles that I learned to win in basketball, you can actually apply to business and you can apply to the rest of your life.

[00:13:20] Wells: Without a doubt.

[00:13:21] Nichols: If there are young people that are listening right now, what are some of those tools even as a young man, Jayson, that you put in your tool belt?

[00:13:31] Wells: I have this activity that I do with parents in one of my workshops where one of the first questions that we'll ask is, hypothetically, let's fast forward to the end of your child's athletic experience, whatever that is. Whether it's high school, whether they've had the opportunity to play in college, or whether they've had the opportunity to play pro, fast forward to the end of their athletic career. As a parent, what would you have wanted them to get out of their athletic experience?

Obviously, with the statistics and the numbers, we all know that very few will ever make it pro. Very few will ever even play in college, most athletic careers competitively come to an end in high school. It's just the way the numbers go. The things that they'll throw out are integrity, work ethic, attitude, how to overcome adversity, how to be a part of a team, how to lead, how to be led.

Those are principles. For me, those are the things that organically were instilled in me through phenomenal coaches that I had, phenomenal experiences playing that I had, teammates, different scenarios like my life, when I use the phrase, the journey of purpose, my life just like everybody else's life has all of those things intertwined and they're so intricately intertwined, but I feel like people do one of two things. I feel like people either try to separate them and isolate them, or they don't realize the strength that comes with all of those things being intertwined. I cannot braid hair at all, but I do know that the power of three gives a strength to that braid that now it makes it more difficult and rope is the same way.

When we asked that universal question of why am I here, my big thing, Lisa, that I talked about is, I feel like that the biggest reason people struggle with that question of, why am I here, is because they don't know who they are. I feel like it's impossible to know why you're here if you don't know who you are, and I do feel like that who you are is rooted in those principles. We can talk about it as we continue to move on the seven principles of purpose that really anchor everything, but yes, it started on the athletic field and court and just an athletic experience, and being able to tap back into those things is where it got started.

[00:15:55] Nichols: That is so awesome. I want to dive in to another question that I really believe will help our listeners, but we need to take a quick break and come back with Jayson Wells.

[music]

[00:16:07] AD: Hi, everybody. I just wanted to take a second and tell you about something our team at Technology Partners can do for your business. We have spent over two decades partnering with organizations and helping them solve their IT needs from a 360-degree perspective. A huge part of how we solve those needs is by developing customer applications of all shapes and sizes.

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[00:16:43] Nichols: Jayson, thank you so much for passing me the ball. You said something in the first half, you totally set me up for my next question. You played professional ball for 13 seasons.

[00:16:56] Wells: Correct.

[00:16:57] Nichols: Then you decided to retire. What I see a lot is people oftentimes will have identity crises. They'll say, "Well, I was a professional basketball player, now who am I?" It's dangerous to root your identity and what you do. Because I'm sure you had that moment, too. It's like, okay, who am I now?

[00:17:18] Wells: Guys, it comes back to those principles, and not those principles that I named earlier or the principles that we'll talk about when we dive into purpose, it's the principles that you as an individual are rooted in. Yes, you're correct, I absolutely went through a phase where and I'll still even go through a phase and I'm nine years removed from being retired, I'll still go through a phase of who am I?

Three or four years ago, one of my big challenges was, I wanted to be seen for more than an athlete before Lebron coined the phrase and made it as popular as it is today, I wanted to be more than that. I can't avoid being the 6'8 athletic guy that people don't ask me, do I play basketball? They ask me who I play for.

[00:18:08] Nichols: Of course.

[00:18:08] Wells: When you're talking about identity, and this is exactly where I'm at right now, one of the biggest things that breaks my heart tying in something that I talked about before, and this question here is there is a pressure and attention that is put on young athletes that exceeds their capacity. Their physical capacity, their mental capacity, their emotional capacity, at 12 years old, 13 years old, and I'm just throwing those ages out just to throw some ages out because it really doesn't matter whether it's eight or whether it's 18, there's a pressure that's put on athletes to perform, to excel, to win, to have these results, and it starts in the house, for the most part, it's his parents.

Those questions that we talked about earlier of hypothetically, let's fast forward to the end of your child's career. What do you want, those principles. No one ever says, I want my child to win the AU National Championship or I want my child to get a Division 1 scholarship. Those are results that if they happen are great, but no one says those things.

As an athlete, I feel like it is absolutely imperative that you know who you are outside of the sports you play, the simplest way not the easiest way. If you remember the book, there's a

chapter in the book *Simple Versus Easy*. The simplest way to identify your identity is to again, know who you are. Knowing who you are looks different when you're 8, 9, 10 years old and when you're 18, 19 and 20 years old.

What am I passionate about? What sets me apart from everybody else? How do I overcome adversity? Asking yourself those questions and now being rooted in self-awareness and now, whenever proverbial ball, it doesn't matter what sport, mine was basketball, doesn't matter whether it's football, or volleyball, or lacrosse or whatever. When that ball stops bouncing, it's still going to be a transition, but what I found is if you're rooted in self-awareness and rooted in who you are and what your identity is outside of the game you play, it makes that transition smoother.

Lisa, I'll finish with this. There's no difference between talking athletics and being attached to your identity than it is being military being attached to your identity or business and being attached to your identity. Because there are so many C-suite executives, senior leadership team members that are attached to the title and attached to what comes with that, and then all of a sudden, they're not in that title anymore and they have the same struggles as an athlete would outside of the athletic space. Being an athlete is just a platform, but it's applicable across the board.

[00:20:50] Nichols: Right. Well, let's dig in because you talk a lot about purpose, knowing your purpose, knowing your why, why are you here? Who you are. You use purpose as an acronym. Can you just say what the purpose is an acronym that stands for different things?

[00:21:06] Wells: Sure. The first P is passion. The U is uncommon. The R is resilience. The second P is preparation. The O is opportunity. The S is service, and the E is experience. I jokingly say I'm not smart enough to come up with that so I say that that was divinely given to me, mixed with the combination of the spelling of my name. I refer to myself as a person of purpose. That universal question that I've mentioned before of, why are we here? Why am I here? What am I here for? However, you phrase it. As I mentioned, I feel like the root of that why people have a challenge with that is because they don't know who they are, truly know who they are.

The acronym I pose it when I guide people on their own personal journeys of purpose, I pose those things as questions. What are you passionate about? What makes you uncommon? How are you resilient? How is that showing up in your life? How do you prepare to capitalize on the

opportunities? Because as you mentioned, and this is what I've found is, specifically with opportunities, it's a mindset thing of do you see obstacle or do you see opportunity? It's also a preparation thing because if you're not prepared for the opportunity, what I've found is one or two things are going to happen.

Either you're not going to see it or you're not going to know what to do with it. Either one of those things, you automatically overlooked the opportunity. Opportunity is a two-fold thing with the mindset and tying back into preparation. Who are you serving? Because at the end of the day it's never about you. When you get to a point where you understand that me putting my feet on the floor is going to drastically change or transform or enhance someone else's life, on those days where you don't feel like putting your feet on the floor. It gives you a different drive and purpose.

E is experience. My grandma used to tell me I'll give you the PG-13 version but my grandma used to tell me, "If you ain't been through nothing, you can't tell me nothing." It's really simple. She used to tell me things like, "You get knowledge from books and teachers but you get wisdom from time and experience." You can read a book and you can get knowledge, you can have a teacher and you can get knowledge but it takes-- I was on the phone with one of my guys yesterday. He's 69 years old and if there's one thing that I've learned is it takes 69 years to be 69 years old, you can't fast forward that.

She used to tell me to sit at the feet of elders because elders give you that wisdom and experience that you can't get without being there.

[00:23:43] Nichols: I think I see another book in your future. [laughs]

[00:23:46] Wells: Yes. Potentially. [laughs]

[00:23:48] Nichols: Well, I want to talk about something that's difficult for a lot of us right now. We are in the middle, Jayson, of some really tough times, the killing of George Floyd. I'm sure you have some thoughts around this.

[00:24:03] Wells: Sure.

[00:24:03] Nichols: I'd love for you just to share your heart. Anything you want to share about that.

[00:24:06] Wells: Lisa, simple and easy. We use those words as synonyms and I don't believe that they're antonyms but I don't believe that they mean the same thing. Although, when we hear them in context, we usually go that same route. Simple is actually the more difficult thing to do. Which is why I believe people choose to do the easy thing. I'll come back to your question, but I'll set it up by throwing out another analogy and another visual for people.

Everyone knows how to lose 20 pounds, consistent diet, consistent workout, consistent rest. Everyone knows. It's really simple. It's just not easy. [chuckles] It's not easy when your friends come out, and it's time to go for ice cream or time to go for buffalo wings, or whatever it is, or workout time rolls around and it's so easy to do something else. It's simple, but it's not easy. I set that up by saying and in no way shape or form comparing what we're going through now to losing weight, but I do feel like the answers to these things can be more simple than we're making them to be.

The simplicity to me, Lisa, lies in number one, compassion and empathy, which are common buzzwords now in many industries, even in the business industries. These words are buzzwords now but compassion and empathy of seeing people as people. Of course, this is stemmed around racial inequalities and indifferent things, but this is a people thing. I feel like compassion and empathy are rooted in listening, which is another foundational principle that if people just got to a point where you listened, but in order to listen, you have to also see the source of where the conversation is coming from as worthy of being listened to.

There are so many different things to this and so my very smart better half said something one time that made total sense. In order for education to happen, someone must be listening. Right now, I just feel like we're in a place and think about what we have at its most common core. You have people, a group of people, black people who feel unheard, feel unvalued, feel unworthy, or feel like how energy is being projected back to them as if we are unworthy.

If we do something quietly, whisper, it's frowned upon. If we do something at a moderate level is frowned upon. Well, anybody, it doesn't matter race, creed, color, nationality, gender, nothing matters if you have a consistent frustration, a consistent feeling of being devalued, and that just builds up, then what you have is an explosion of all of that coming out. That's natural. You're talking about centuries of feeling unvalued unworthy, in no way shape or form condoning especially the things that are harming other people. I feel like what you're seeing is an explosion of not being heard and the consequences from that.

[00:27:23] Nichols: It starts one by one. I really do believe that Jayson, it's each of us starting where we can, where we are. Thank you for sharing your heart on that.

[00:27:35] Wells: Sure. Can I throw one more thing in, Lisa? Just because I've had my friends who don't look like me reach out in various forms and the one thing that I can say to, especially white people who care about the cause, who care about black people, who care about equality across the board, I do feel like silence is no longer acceptable. The biggest thing that you can do as a non-black person because you'll never know what it's like for me to walk around, you'll never be able to experience that.

I feel like us as friends and for your other friends, I feel like the biggest thing that you can do is in the way that's most comfortable for you, not be silent, not be comfortable in your silence anymore. Whether it's a social networking post, whatever that is to make you comfortable in that, I feel like that's the most important thing because knowing that you'll never truly feel how I feel and see through my lens, knowing that we have that support, again, my much smarter than me better half said something just the other day as we were in a conversation.

People are comfortable in their racism because people are comfortable in their silence. No longer is, "Hey, I don't really know what to say. I just don't think that's acceptable anymore." Give me a wave, give me a stand. Give me a something, give me a something to let me know that you're there and that I support it.

[00:29:02] Nichols: I love that. Thank you so much for that advice. Thank you. This is Something Extra. What is this something extra that you have seen in a team member or coach, goodness gracious, you've had so many people.

[00:29:15] Wells: Yes. I have a phenomenal team. It's not a large team at this point is we now anchor our footing into the space that we want to be in. I have what I refer to as three people on my team. We make up a team of four. I have Susan, who does my digital website, marketing design. I have Shelby Glebes, she's less than a year married. I have to get used to calling her, her married name now, who I worked with originally when I moved to St. Louis in the athletic space. Then I have Paul, who is one of my close friends from Ohio. The three of them together, they collectively bring challenge to me.

That's the something extra because I've been on teams athletically, and I've witnessed teams and businesses not be able to bring that challenge to the board, especially if you're talking about, I hate org charts and hierarchy, but especially if you're talking about, from an employee to employer type scenario where you're working your way up the org chart, that challenge becomes more difficult.

I heard a story about Michael Jordan being the owner of the Charlotte Hornets. One of the reasons that they haven't had great success or at least the success that people expect of him is because he has very few people if any people in his corner that are willing to challenge him and say, "No, maybe you shouldn't draft him or maybe you shouldn't make that trade." The way that he's come across to me is he has a bunch of yes men.

The thing that I would like to say about my team and something extra that we bring is there is a comfort in the relationship of challenge even if it's me as the "leader", they have a tremendous ability to be able to challenge and at least let their feelings, their thoughts, their emotions be known. I think we do a phenomenal job collectively of embracing that. Shout out to the squad.

[00:31:13] Nichols: There's a lot packed in there with what you just said but as a leader, you have to make it a safe place for people to feel like it's okay. He wants to hear if I have a different view on this. Jayson is open to hearing that. Collectively, you're going to come up with something better.

[00:31:29] Wells: Absolutely.

[00:31:30] Nichols: Is there something that you want to tell our listeners about a curriculum that you've come up with?

[00:31:36] Wells: I have two platforms that are launching, one on Friday, June 5th, and one on June 10th. The one on Friday that launches is specifically what we talked about, it's called Elevate Your Game and it is an athlete-driven workshop curriculum and it's a building block. If you think college, 100 level, 200 level, 300 level, 400 level grad school, it's that kind of building block. It's exactly what you talked about before Lisa, it is identifying your identity beyond the sports you play.

The three pillars that we'll dig into are health, wealth, and relationships, which as athletes, especially the higher level, you move up, you get less and less of true health, mental, and

physical and how those things tie into your performance. True wealth of understanding, finances, financial literacy, from the basics of assets and liabilities, to credit and debt all the way up to investments. Then through relationships, the people that you do life with, whether that's friends and family, whether that becomes your occupational relationships, or whether that is even your romantic relationships. Anyone can go to the website, which is Jayson wells.com, J-A-Y-S-O-N wells.com.

Then the one that launches on Wednesday is called Parenting Athletic Professionals, which is an intentional play on words. As we mentioned, so many of these parents are trying to parent-professional athletes and buy their way, or coach their way or, or groom their way to their young children being professional athletes, when it's very obvious, especially to me on the backside of my career, it's very obvious that the numbers say that probably won't happen, but the things that you can do along the way to make sure that everything that is gained out of your child's athletic experience can be applied into whatever industry they transfer into moving forward as a career, as an occupation.

The three anchors for that are to love, prepare, and challenge. We talk about parents, how to love your child, accept who they are, maybe their idea for their athletic career or their life isn't what you had in mind. Loving them for who they are, accepting them for who they are. Prepare like we talked about, like how to support and care for your children, but then also at the same time, challenge them and let them know there are obstacles. There will be adversities. There will be valleys that understanding the importance of being able to sit in that valley and see sitting on the bench as an opportunity, not just as an obstacle.

[00:34:16] Nichols: Oh gosh. So good. Well, thank you so much. I can't wait to dig into those when those come out, but Jayson, thank you so much for your time today. This has been such a rich conversation.

[00:34:29] Wells: I appreciate it.

[00:34:30] Nichols: You and I'll be having more conversation in the future.

