From Surgery to ADCC Trials: How Alex Enriquez Trains, Recovers, and Wins Transcript

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Introduction and athlete background

This is Dr. Jiu Jitsu, your go-to podcast for combat sports, military performance, injury prevention, and treatment. Now here's your badass host, Dr Megan Jimenez.

Bow to your sensei. Hey guys, I'm Dr Jiménez. I am an orthopedic surgeon and Jujitsu brown belt. in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu under Professor Bruno Fresado here at Atos Atlanta, which we have Professor Bruno's stuff up here for show.

She is a very decorated Brazilian jiu jitsu athlete. she won IBJJF Nogi Pans at Black Belt in 2022. 2023 was IBjjf World's Nogy Champ. And then in 2023, towards the end of last year, ADCC East Coast Trials, Which was awesome.

I loved watching that one. and then she also wrestled throughout high school and college, All-American wrestler. which has really helped, and probably why you like Nogi so much.

Yeah, it definitely has a role in it. Thanks for being here and thanks for taking the time out to come chat. No, thank you. I always love it whenever you're in town visiting.

It's always a great time. We're gonna train the next couple days, because of course I got an Airbnb just to train. Yes. Cool. All right, so you started jiu-jitsu really young.

You were 11. yeah 11 yes which i'm super jealous of because i didn't start i was like 24 25 already you know residency and uh definitely harder to commit the time but at 11 you found love for it what brought you from just coming in going through the motions to competitor um actually it was just like a day one thing and it wasn't it just happened on accident.

I just started doing jiu-jitsu that summer of sixth grade. My parents were just trying to get me into a hobby and then… Keep you off the streets? Yeah, right?

No, hard streets of Alpharetta. And at the time my parents were working two, three jobs.

Starting jiu-jitsu and early competition

We just immigrated from the Philippines. And Steve, my coach at that time, and Brian, both of my coaches, they kind of became close family friends pretty quickly.

They'll pick me up from school and take me to the gym. So it just became a regular routine. Within less than a month of uh training i was just training almost every day just because it just became part of the schedule and then steve was like let's go compete and i Was like okay, whatever and Then i did my first naga with like less than a month of experience and I was able to win those samurai swords and this is the coolest thing ever You still have that samurai sword?

Oh, I have so many. So it's like it became like, all right, we're going to collect this many I was like I want that design. I don't want this. You didn't care about you just wanted the sword.

It was all about the swords. This is what Naga does to kids. They disarm little kids with dull samurai swords Alright, so tell me about where you started and then how you kind of ended up at Atos.

Yeah, I started Jiu-Jitsu at Knuckle Up Fitness at the age of 11 in Alpharetta, Georgia under Professor Steve

Mitchell. I went through the kids system all the way to my brown belt and that was about the COVID year of 2020 was when things were getting difficult at that gym that I was at and we weren't sure if my my professor Steve Mitchell was gonna stay teaching because he was starting a family had other jobs and we know we didn't know what was going to happen with the world and it's just so happened that we lived already in Marietta because of school at Life University and so we were driving by like the street and then all of a sudden we saw an auto sign over here.

And we already knew who Bruno Frazado was. I've known him. I've taken a seminar from him and I just love the way he teach. So over COVID we chatted. We started taking private like secret privates.

Yeah. And so it kind of just happened like that. but we always kept the open line of communication with Steve. Like Steve's like my jujitsu dad, even till this day, like he's definitely like a second father to me.

Gym transition to Atos Atlanta

And so we all kind of agreed like with the next steps of my career where I was still wanting to become a professional athlete or at least like looking towards that path that it would have been a good choice for me What advice do you have to people who are in that kind They just want to step up their game or want change gyms.

Maybe there's more females in another gym, right? But you don't want hurt anybody's feelings. And how do you recommend people navigate that? Because the other option sometimes is people quit jiu-jitsu.

They're just not as happy or they're not being… It's just the environment, because one gym doesn't fit everyone. So how you do recommend that people do that.

It's definitely a super sensitive topic. Even for myself, that whole gym switch, even though I feel like it was as amicable as possible, I struggled with it emotionally for about like two to three months.

Like in secret, Faye and I were both struggling with them, but we didn't talk about it because we were like, oh, we felt like we made the right decision.

But like. We were, like crying in the shower. That's the best place to cry. In the car driving or in the shower? 100% I think. All the time. And so it was tough but I always went with the thought of I didn't want to burn any bridges.

Everything that Knuckle Up has done for me since I was very young was always, it helped me become the young adult I am now. And I've always been very thankful for that.

I just kept the open line of communication with them. Regardless, of course it's gonna hurt feelings, but I was very honest and open about everything.

It made the switch easier, because I wasn't trying to hide anything. So I was just honest about them. And luckily, unfortunately, I had support from both sides in terms of my old gym and then the new gym I coming from.

They were all very supportive. Even Bruno was very understanding about the whole switch. I think I in limbo of searching for a gym for about two months or so.

So it wasn't an immediate switch and whatnot. It was me figuring. figuring it out, figuring out what I wanted out of the gym I want to be at in terms of, you know, training partners, the way I wanting to do my trainings and what i was looking for out a coach going forward in my personal career, so there's a lot of factors about it.

Well, it's good advice and it is good for people to consider and have adult conversations. A hundred percent, yeah. And not just, you know, switch without saying anything.

Exactly. Yeah. It's a tough conversation. The jujitsu community is very small and no matter where you go, is it very, small every state is, very. Small.

So it was just if you decide to burn your bridges there, It is going to easily catch up to you at the new gym that you are at, for sure. Alright, so you compete a lot.

And one of the big things that I talk about is like mind and body that connection. I think for so long, I was a culprit of just going physical body and it was like you hurt, you are stressed, it doesn't matter, just bury your head in the ground.

And you can't really live that way. You can do life that, let alone try to compete that. So what mindset tips do you have for people? What do do to prepare for competition with all the anxiety?

I mean, I guess I'm assuming, but I think most people probably have anxiety.

Competition mindset and pre-match routine

I've met a couple people that say they don't there's got to be so there has got be a little bit at least like even for those people that they say that I predict that their competition schedule is very very like when I was in the wrestling season collegiate wrestling or high school is probably when i experienced the least amount of anxiety because it was Other than it was so physically draining, we were having meets, tournaments, whatever it, was every like Wednesday and weekend.

So it so consistent that it just became part of the schedule and it doesn't seem like there's this whole buildup towards it. So even with jujitsu, like I compete maybe once to twice a month, if that.

And the more often I did it, the less nerves I felt during. So it just became part of routine. But even if I take like a like, a one or two off of competition, I go back to it.

I definitely feel nervous. Now I've gone to the point where I have been able to control, not so much control my nerves, but direct them in the way that I just know that the nerves are, it's my body just priming itself for war, essentially.

Do you have a routine or anything that you do that people can do before they compete? Um, it's more so I don't really do a lot I've been asked a lie like you listen to music or do you have any like mantras or whatnot?

I actually don's and when I go to tournaments, I like to Fully involve myself in the environment I'd go there like maybe two hours before one and a half to two Hours before because I have a really long warm-up I soak in The sound so that like my body is just like okay.

It's used to the loudness or whatever a Lot of my calmness comes from the pre-tournament of the preparation. I feel confident through the studying I've done, the training, and knowing that I'm already as prepared as I can be so that there's nothing else to worry about.

You've all the work, so there is no reason to be nervous. Wins and losses, I have gotten to the point where Yes, now it's about like the wins and losses do matter at that high level, you know, in terms of rankings.

But I also try to look at competition now as like a feedback mechanism of like, okay, I, do this well, or I needed to work on that, what could I have done better, stuff like that.

But in about like 45 minutes before competition, 45 to 30 minutes, I start warming up. I do a lot of dynamic mobility and then I go with, you know, my training partner and I just start moving around.

Moving around like kind of regular role stuff or if there's a specific super fight that I train for, it's going to be those specific things that we've been working on during the camp.

And I just try to build a really good sweat to where I'm almost in like my second win so that I don't have like an adrenaline dump. Yep. Yeah. And i'm not eating a lot.

I probably eat in the morning. i do eat a lots more than i feel other competitors that i've talked to, other female competitors i have talked leading up to the tournaments.

Im always kind of snacking. But i take simple carbs like fruit leathers, honey sticks, Something that, you know, will give my body the energy it needs, but I'm not sitting there like digesting food.

Yeah. Quick hits that are going to get you. Exactly. All right. Awesome. You said that or I read in your bio that you went from training like five to six times a week, or a couple times just once, to like two to three times per day.

But we've also talked about injuries, overtraining, overuse, and how have you balanced that when you are training so much? Oh, man. So I feel like I did everything that I wasn't supposed to do or like supposed do, or wrong in the beginning.

And then I got injured and I had to get surgery, whether it was my shoulder in high school or my knee in college. It was all from overtraining. I ended up having to have surgery and also cutting weight in like highschool wrestling.

Like I didn't know what I was doing. Just eating bananas and protein bars. Like dangerous weight cuts, dehydration. Yeah, it was just lack of knowledge, lack education, you know.

And once I did everything wrong, then I was able to, I had the right support system and I could educate myself. I learned that after, Honestly, after my second surgery on my knee in college, my freshman season of college at Life University was when I realized, okay, I really need to be on top of my active recovery.

Training load, recovery, and injury prevention

And so the biggest thing that allowed me to train from one time a day to like multiple times a date and still feel at the peak level, like how a 24 year old should feel, you know, is that I realize and Bruno, Professor Bruno attached to this too, because when I switched gyms, it was before I was really like, Burning myself to the ground every training session.

It was like super intense every train session now my training sessions. The intensity is not it's probably moderate most of them are 70% exactly it will go light to moderate and a lot of it is about developing new skills were all about like developing your skills being very technical being as well rounded as you can and Our job as a professional athlete is doing our strength and conditioning outside the gym and you're responsible for that.

So, you know, my strength conditioning coach is Moe Travis and I knew her from Knuckle Up My Old Gym and she's a CrossFit Level 2 instructor. She was a Muay Thai IKF World Champ.

she is a Jiu Jitsu black belt so she knows what's going on. what my body is going through when I'm training all the time. She programs everything for us and it's so built in like even though I am saying I train two to three times a day, part of those training sessions is already active recovery.

It's like built-in during my week and I notice that Even though I'm training more, I feel like I am training smarter, like, the amount of sleep I get, my diet, and my nutrition is so much better than it was, of course, when I was in high school.

But you're still so young to be knowing this, because I started around your age, right? I got 10 years on you, so, but I had that mentality of, just beat the shit out of yourself.

if you're not training 100%, you are not in training, right? And it was not the right mentality. Cause I'd wake up and I would be like, Oh, here's how I look left.

So you super lucky. And like that's awesome that you doing it now, you know, figuring that out now. Oh yeah. I feel really fortunate to just, I started young enough so that I made all the mistakes, but I'm still young to where I can learn from those mistakes and really benefit and use it to my advantage.

Yeah. Older. But yeah, no, it's, so much goes into it. I feel like I found a really great support team of, you know, I have a PT, a Cairo, strength and conditioning coach, nutritionist.

All the things that you're supposed to have as a professional athlete, in any sport. As a person, right? Just walking around. everybody should be doing a little bit of training, not just professional athletes.

People don't realize how much all this catches up to them. Oh yeah, I work at a restaurant part-time on the weekends and I just talk to my co-workers who live normal lives and then I'm just like, oh my gosh.

No wonder your body always hurts. You don't do anything for your buddy. Just even just the simple working out like maybe 20, 30 minutes a day. Sleeping.

Yeah, sleeping. And then the way they eat, of course, and being at a restaurant is like, you know, they're always just eating all the junk food. Fried and vegetable oil.

Exactly. So what kind of active recovery do you do? I have something like yoga. I go to the sauna a lot. Sauna slash ice bath. And I do contrasts of that in the same sessions.

That was like a love-hate relationship in beginning and now I love it. Oh, I still have love hate with the ice. The sauna I loved. But the Ice is where there's the love and hate.

Why do we say you're not supposed to love? No, yeah. I feel that, yeah, that's correct. But afterwards. Afterwards, you feel like you fork and that is when you love it, but not during.

Yeah, I always have like good music on after. I'm like dancing around and having a great time. No, it's amazing. It's like a natural high. And then part of my PT and stuff, uh, actually just did it today.

went over to one-on-one physical therapy with Lance Cross. He's my physical therapist and he's had decades of experience with trigger point dry needling and that's something that I found earlier last year that has been a game changer.

I mean like literally a Game Changer that we've added almost weekly and it'll be insane. i'll have like a injury a severe injury too where I'm like, I don't know if I'll be able to compete in like the end of this weekend, something like I got hurt that week and you're like.

I messed up and then I will go see him and it's, it is crazy how trigger point dry kneeling works. It's just the amount of. relief the range of motion I get back and it's just like oh I felt like I wasn't even injured after the 12 hours after being sore from all the dry needling and on top of that I mean Faye herself is a licensed massage therapist that's why I had to you know as soon as we started dating I was like have to keep you because Oh, that's why you guys got engaged?

I was like, who's trapping who? But she specializes in MFR myofascial release. And I feel like that modality of massages really helped me. So it's just like all of it.

All of that. Have you ever had times where you didn't have your cross training, your PT, and you were just training jiu jitsu since you started? yeah since i started uh yeah maybe if we're like on vacation or you might have noticed a difference oh 100% because then it's like if i don't have like my trigger pointer i need like or if I don' t do like especially stretching if if don t stretch if my weekly yeah stuff if i'm not doing my active recovery i feel like i''m in college and i' m just like hurting all the time my quality of sleep just tanks like I can't sleep good it was such a game changer for me after uh my second year of college when i really got on top of my acting recovery that i was like oh Doing more doesn't always have to be like intensive doing more, but I'm like recovering so much better and I feel like I my energy levels are so Much better.

And I just feel overall like healthy all the way around. I Feel so strong in terms of, you know, my strength and conditioning with Mo, we're doing our correct strength cycles and I'm always peaking when I need to for

competitions and then I can recover and we are deloading and doing all the stuff that we were supposed to do.

Nice. To date now, what's been your worst injury and how did you come back from it? I'd say actually I've had some neck injuries, but when I actually had to get surgery on my meniscus, I had a bucket handle tear in 20 or 20, 21.

Meniscus injury, surgery, and comeback

And the bucket handles like a, you know, kind of what a people listening. your meniscus like that little disc that's in the side inside of your knee it kind of flips and your knees get stuck so a lot of people people like people will come in and say I can't bend my knee yeah it was just stuck like it's like a right angle and it is because you know it And the coaches were still actually learning like the next season they did not do this, but they were running us into the ground like literally running as like we were having the same practices as the collegiate track team we got to the track before them and we're finishing after them.

And we're like, why are we running more than the actual track team, the collegiate track? And plus we were doing this with weights, like yoga balls, med balls stuff like that.

And it was insane. So I definitely had underdeveloped hamstrings. I actually ended up getting hurt. uh by myself like on the the next day my hamstrings i like woke up and i was like i can't i'm like I can bend my hands like they're so tight and then we went to uh we had the map practice and we were just warming up.

And so we we're having line drills and I was they were asking us to do a bear crawl to a knee slide or so and so I bear crawled and as soon as I slid my knee across, it popped really loud and I instinctively dropped to my butt and tried to kick out my leg because I felt like something messed up.

And I dropped and then I looked around because, I guess I was just in shock. I just raised my hands up and looked at my coach and was like, help me. And so they took me downstairs to the ATR, the athletic training room.

They put some stem on me and some heat packs and they're like, okay, just wait for it to relax. And throughout the rest of the day, I still couldn't move my leg.

My leg was just stuck. I got home and I was like I can't sleep. Faye actually gave me some muscle relaxers and whatnot, but it was so painful. The next two, three days, really bad knee injuries.

So I was talking to Faye, I think my knee is really messed up. I don't know why, but I still can't bear weight on it. Fortunately, her massage therapist at the time, Ray Long, is also, uh, specializes in MFR.

She has over like a thousand, actually, I'm not exaggerating this, she has documented over a 1,000 plus hours of continuing education in mfr, in myofascial release.

she teaches some of the courses now too and so that's who actually got stay involved in starting to study Mfr. Bay's like you need to go see Ray and whatnot and I was terrified because I don't think anybody could touch my leg.

I can't even move my and then so and it was crazy she took my uh she went to see me she, took, my leg and she was just guiding it it wasn't hurting and, she, was guiding, it through the motion that i heard it and i was like i didn't explain to her how i hurt my, leg, and and I was, like how did you what how'd you know like that was and, she was, just like your body was.just guiding me through it, And after that weekend, after time of that, uh, that session, my leg was starting to release.

I was able to start walking. Then I. Running and I hadn't gotten the MRI back yet from the school. They had to wait, they had a protocol, I think it was like a week or two weeks.

And so I got back to weight bearing and all of. That and then I, was basically running, jumping. like and range of motions, like I couldn't fully extend it, I couldnt fully bend it and then they got back and they're like oh you have a

bucket handle Terry, you had to do surgery and I was like what?

But it was crazy how much that MFR helped me in that time to go from not being able to move my leg or be weight bearing to okay I'm actually almost pretty much normal.

you know, didn't have whatever was stuck. After surgery, you went back to wrestling. Yes. How did you so I recently had ACL surgery. And now thinking about competition.

It's, it's a little bit like nerve wrecking. What did You do? What tools did I want to know what tools you used to get you back to competing. Yeah. And feel safe and feel confident with your new knee or with what had been repaired.

Honestly, like I probably went I did actually the ATR trainers at the time and I feel like a lot of collegiate it's the downfall of Collegiate Sports is like you have such just a short timeline to do everything and you know, eligibility.

But I did go back early. I think it was eight months, even for just some meniscus repair. Like at six months I was already like back on the mat, but it still was taking me like an hour or like 30 minutes to warm up and like actually being able to squat fully and get that range of motion back and then I was moving well.

They kind of pushed me back into, I think that was my first competition back with Collegiate Nationals and I didn't do well there but I able do it and my knee held up.

Luckily the school was covering everything, paying for everything and You know, I was still on the same schedule as all the athletes, so I going to the strength training room, all of the, same as they were.

And then after that nationals, we went back to Jiu Jitsu because it was off season. It took me about another, like, couple months to actually start feeling more normal.

I started training again, strength-training with Mo. So that helped your confidence? Yes. I feel like, you know, when you have a personal trainer that you can trust, she knows it because she's been through injuries too.

Return to competition and future plans

And so she is like okay, I've had something similar. This is what we're going to do. We're gonna take our time. Okay, I started gaining the muscles back in my legs.

My emotion was starting to come back. And before I knew it, and we just continued that strength training. So now I even feel bulletproof with my leg. I feel like the surgery helped me in a way.

If I was doing everything right now, my lungs are pretty bullet proof. Like my surgery knee does get sore sometimes when I overdo it. But I never had a scare where I think I'm gonna hurt myself again.

So what's next for you? What's the next West Coast trials? Nice. Yeah, the one that actually counts to get into ADCC. So we'll have that in March. Cool.

And where can people find you on Instagram at A Enriquez218 here out to South Atlanta. Come through, come train, please. Super welcoming here. I always love having training.

All right. Well, thanks so much for all the info. No, thank you. Thank you for having me. Excited to train during the week. Oh, yeah. in ironic media production.

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