

World Champion Lex Gillette: No Need for Sight When You Have a Vision

- Lex Gillette: Doctors said that there was nothing else they can do to help my sight, and they said that I would eventually become blind.
- Jeff Thompson: AT&T and Aira present the #experiencemore campaign showcasing Paralympian world record holder, Lex Gillette.
- Lex Gillette: Just think of what is possible when I go out into the world and take that same energy and mindset, really focusing on a specific area, taking aim, and knocking it down.
- Jeff Thompson: AT&T #experiencemore is an innovative social project that celebrates how blind individuals experience more through their actions, passions, use of technology, and more.
- Lex Gillette: You continue to do what you need to do and go towards that vision of what you seen and eventually it'll come into their visual field as well. Just really go out there and turn that vision into reality.
- Jeff Thompson: Aira, the virtual navigator for the blind, instant access to information, and you can learn more and subscribe to Aira on the web at Aira.io. You can find out more about #experiencemore on the web at expiencemore.att.com.
- Lex Gillette: When I broke the world record, I overslept, I showed up to the track late, I only had maybe 30-40 minutes to get ready ...
- Jeff Thompson: Welcome to Blind Abilities. I'm Jeff Thompson.
- Pete Lane: And I'm Pete Lane.
- Our guest today is Lex Gillette.
- Jeff Thompson: The name Lex Gillette, that has world champion written all over it.
- Pete Lane: Lex is a multi talented individual. Let's see if we can get all of his accomplishments right. Lex is a four time Paralympian.
- Jeff Thompson: Four time world champion.

Pete Lane: A world record holder.

Jeff Thompson: He's also been showcased on Ted Talks with a very inspirational speech.

Pete Lane: A singer, and so much more. Lex, welcome to Blind Abilities. It's great to have you aboard.

Lex Gillette: Thank you so much. Thanks for having me.

Pete Lane: Lex, lets kick it off back in your childhood. Talk a little bit about your background, your blindness, how it affected you in school, which you did to overcome it.

Lex Gillette: Yes. So I am originally from Raleigh, North Carolina. I was born with sight so I've been able to see the world. I can remember one particular day I come home from school, I was seven years old, and went through my regular routine. Played outside with friends, had eaten dinner with my mom, and that night as I was in the bathroom getting cleaned up for bed, I started noticing that the lights in the bathroom, they were kind of blurred. So I rub my eyes thinking that maybe this is going to clear up, but it didn't. It didn't clear any, so I got out of the tub and I knew something was wrong immediately once I had looked into the mirror and the reflection that I thought I would see was kind of like a distorted figure, very faint. That was pretty alarming to me. I told my mom and she thought I had gotten something in my eyes so we got some water, cleaned my eyes out. Made it feel better, but didn't clear my sighting so I went to bed thinking that in the morning everything would be okay. When I woke up nothing had really changed.

I went to school half way through the school day teachers called my mom and said, "We need you to come get Lex because we don't know what's going on. He's acting out of character." I had went to school thinking that maybe this is something that was going to blow over but I was unsuccessful in getting through that day. So my mom had taken me to the doctor and after an examination they said that I needed to have an emergency operation because I was suffering from retina detachments. I had one operation and it was successful. I could see well for about three or four weeks. After that time the same problem happened again. My retinas detached. That was the pattern for the entire time that I was eight years old.

I've had a total of 13 operations on my eyes of which 10 of them occurred the year when I was eight. After the last one doctors said there was

nothing else they could do to help my sight and they said that I would eventually become blind.

Pete Lane: Those aren't the words you really want to hear especially at your age when that happened.

Lex Gillette: I know. It was really difficult time. At that age, I think the first thing I really thought was, "Hey I'm not going to be able to play my video games anymore. I'm not going to be able to play outside with my friends." When that day finally came when I woke up, I couldn't really make out anything anymore it was reality. That started that journey for me of living life without being able to see. Of course, I had to make that adjustment and as a kid in school I had to learn how to read brail. I had to learn how to use a cane so I could navigate on my own. I had to learn how to use accessible technologies so that I would be able to do my class work and do my homework.

My mom kept me in main stream school so I've always interacted with my sight of peers in class. It was a great time once I actually got a hold of living life without sight.

Jeff Thompson: So Lex, you started to accept your blindness. At what point was it that you started to accept the challenges that you put upon yourself that was probably what other people didn't expect for you to do, or even yourself not to do? For example, the basketball net that you bought.

Lex Gillette: It was probably around those preteen years, maybe 11, 12 years old. About two years, three years in. Not being able to see. I was blind and I was trying to figure out life. My mom always encouraged me to try many different things. She always pushed me to the max. I've always had that mentality. I love challenges and I love trying to excel in the sense of new heights.

For me, what you're referring to is, yeah I went to the store and I bought one of the plastic basketball rims that are designed for the top of a closet door. I always loved sports. My mom side of the family, they're pretty athletic. They played everything from baseball softball to basketball volleyball just everything. That has been something that was a big part of my life and I wanted to be athletic as well. So I bought this basketball rim and figured that I would be able to shoot baskets and make it. The only problem was I had to figure out a method that would inform me when the ball would actually go into the net. Because I could shoot all day but I would never know if it actually went in. So I took a safety pin and I tied the bottom of the net together so now when I would shoot the ball, if it

was successful basket the ball would stay inside of the net instead of falling through to the ground.

So that was the basis around my Ted Talk that I did last year and that was taking shots in the dark literally and figuratively, because once I figured out that if I envisioned where that rim was I found out that I could dream the shot all day long. I could stand anywhere in my room, shoot the ball, make it. It would go into the net. I just felt like if I have the ability to tap into this power within me inside the home, then just think of what is possible when I go out into the world and take that same energy and mind set. Just really focusing on a specific area, taking aim and knocking in down, making that shot count.

Pete Lane: What types of accommodations did they make to enable you to get through that kind of ordeal?

Lex Gillette: They had ... All of the schools that I went to they had a teacher of the visually impaired that would ... Well the schools that I attended there was an actual visually impaired program that was a part of ... It was a separate department within the school. So even though I was in main stream ... We had about ... All of the schools I attended we had about maybe five to ten blind or visually impaired kids in the school. So that visually impaired department did wonders for us. Being able to get our assignments in brail, put our assignments in large print so that we can still interact and be a part of a class room environment. For me, I would go to the [VI 00:09:04] room and get my assignments in brail. They had all of my text books in brail. They had the brailist so all of the worksheets and physical sheets of paper that teachers would hand out I could take those to the brailist and they would type those up or scan them in and have those printed out in brail as well. All of my assignments were made available in a format that I could use so that I could participate in class alongside my peers.

Jeff Thompson: That's great Lex. So is that when you met up with your coach/teacher that got you interested in tack and field?

Lex Gillette: Yes. The head of our VI program, he was an assistant basketball coach for the high school. He also would go with us to P.E. class. It was my freshman year we had to go through this physical fitness test where you would do as many push ups as you could, as many pull ups as you could, sit ups. One of the events just standing long jump. I was really good at standing long jump. In fact, I could stand and long jump in one location I could jump nearly ten feet. Being in main stream school everyone else

can see and that was exciting to them, "Like oh my gosh. He's blind. He's jumping further than we are."

My teacher/eventual coach had taught me about the running long jump. He told me about the Paralympic games and being able to potentially be able to travel the world and win medals and represent the United States of America and that vision was so glaring to me and it was something that I wanted to pursue.

Jeff Thompson: You use the words "vision" and "sight" quite differently, can you explain that?

Lex Gillette: I've done a lot of reading, I think that a lot of it revolves around sight showing us what is. That's what you see, it's a function of the eyes. Vision reveals what can be. That's your mind. That's your heart. They are two totally different things. Sight, it can only carry you so far. Vision can carry you to the end of time. Myself when I roll out of the bed each morning it's that vision that really keeps me going. Thinking about winning gold in 2020 or thinking about what I want my life to look like 15-20 years down the road and how I want to impact the world. That's what really keeps that fire lit internally.

Jeff Thompson: Excellent. So Lex, you excelled at the standing broad jump and you saw potential. How did you transition into sports in high school? Did you participate in mainstream sports?

Lex Gillette: Yes. So the first step was my coach, his name is Brian [Witmer 00:11:43]. Coach Witmer had taken me to a sports education camp in Kalamazoo, Michigan. That camp was under the umbrella of the United States association of blind athletes, USABA. During this camp you would learn about all the Paralympic sports and they would encourage you to try them all. At the end of the week you would participate against other athletes, other individuals who attended the camp, like friendly competition. Up there that's where I found out about running long jump. That's where coach Witmer had taught me about the process by which we would even compete in long jump. What that is the athlete who is blind stands on the track and they run to the sound of someone who is standing at the take off board and the sighted guide or your long jump caller, they're clapping and yelling so that gives you that audible reference as to where you need to run and jump from.

Speaker 4: And he yelled, "Fly, fly, fly, fly, fly, fly, fly, fly, fly, fly,"

Lex Gillette: And your responsibility as the athlete is to remember how many strides you take, running straight as possible towards that sound and once you get to do your appropriate step then you jump and I always tell people when I jump I just pray to God I'm going to land in the sand pit. It was there where I found out that I did have a love for the sport and we would turn back to Raleigh, North Carolina and I joined my high school track team my junior year and my senior year. As you can imagine, I'm on the team. I'm the only blind kid on the team and probably the only one in our conference. There were definitely some interesting moments with going to rival schools and kids asking, "What are you doing here?"

"What do you mean? I came here to compete. I came here to beat you."

It was a lot of fun. It definitely helped build that grit. In a lot of ways it helped thicken my skin as well.

Pete Lane: Did you beat them?

Lex Gillette: You know what I did. I had my fair share of wins. I remember one in particular I had went somewhere on one of our competitions. Before we get out there and compete the kids are like, "Oh man. You jump? You're jumping? You're jumping?" Like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." Kids there asking also, "How far do you jump?" They're trying to size you up.

I would intentionally tell them something super short like, "I only jump like thirteen or fourteen feet." Just so they don't have to worry about me. I'm just a blind kid. Once we actually get on the track and start competing then I would jump and I'm going 17 or 18 feet and that's ...

Pete Lane: You're flying.

Lex Gillette: Yeah. Exactly. So as you could imagine some of their voices turned from excitement to total defeat. I have to admit in a lot of ways it was very satisfying to be able to go out there and get those wins.

Pete Lane: Do you remember what you're high school best was?

Lex Gillette: My best in high school was 19 feet 9 inches I believe. I was good. It helped boost my confidence a lot.

Pete Lane: I am curious Lex, did they give you any leeway or concession if you missed the board if you step an inch or two over the board?

Lex Gillette: No. The rule is, once you step over the board it's considered a foul. They wouldn't give me any leeway on that which, that also helped out as well, too. You gotta follow the rules and you gotta put yourself in the best position and that means you have to train hard.

Pete Lane: That served you much later didn't it?

Lex Gillette: Yes.

Jeff Thompson: So at what point did you bridge from high school into college and how did you end up headed toward the Paralympics.?

Lex Gillette: My senior year I had gotten pretty good in track and field and that very next year was the Athens games. That was something that was on my radar. There was the world championships in 2002 I had just missed out on the standard for that so I didn't go to that competition. Then I had turned my Athens in 2004. Coach Witmore and I had continued to work and train. He got me to the point where I was able to make the games team in 2004. I was going into my sophomore year at East Carolina University. So as you could imagine I had just finished my freshman year and that summer I was going to Athens. I felt good. I had my first year of college under my belt but at the same time the games were in September so that mean I was going to miss the first month and a half of school. That was a really tough time for me trying to balance the athletic piece and the academic piece, but it was really important to me for my academics stand point. I had to go to my professors and make sure that I would be able to get those assignments and be able to follow along so once I return I wouldn't be too far behind.

Going to that first games, that was crazy. In a lot of ways I had just gone from high school to college and in a lot of ways it was the same way athletically I had just gone from competing in conference meets in high school to the games. It was just a huge jump and a huge transition. I'll never forget standing on the track in Athens in front of thousands and thousands of spectators and everybody is cheering. There's so much chaos. So many noises and it's just crazy inside of there. At that time you come to the realization it's like man, going back to that basketball rim and taking that shot in the dark. You take that shot and you realize that man, I nailed it.

Jeff Thompson: Now, you said that your mom was a big advocate for you. What was it like for her that you were in Greece there?

Lex Gillette: It was amazing. My mom was actually in the crowd. My grandmother was in the crowd. Our coach Witmer and his wife were in the crowd. The very people you engineered that success I was so glad that they were there because they invested so much time into me. They helped me out so much. Those days were I felt like I couldn't do it or I was just hard on myself or I needed that little push. They were there and for them to see that vision unravel in front of their own eyes, I think that absolutely meant the world to them.

Jeff Thompson: Lex, going back to after your 2004 experience, from then on it was world games, world competition the game was on.

Lex Gillette: Yes. From there, I was fully involved in college and I was definitely trying to make sure I satisfied that piece not only because academics are definitely important. I knew that. The athletic life at some point that's going to have to come to an end. You can't be an athlete forever. At least an elite level athlete forever. I also knew that if I didn't get good grade my mom would have my head. College was going great and playing American games and all these competitions started coming one after another and they become something that I would look to these things and mentally prepare and physically prepare on the basis of going out there and getting on the podium and being able to travel to all these places and winning medals, wearing that red white and blue and have the flag on my chest. That's amazing and it's still amazing at this particular time. But again it just all goes back to that seed that coach Witmer planted in my mind at an early age and he talked about all of those things and I began to live out that vision.

Jeff Thompson: So Lex, with all the experience you have with the sports and you're still going to the 2020, looking forward to that, what was the one moment that you remember that best?

Lex Gillette: One of my most memorable moments was we were in London I was on the track and London just to give you an idea, they're huge in track and field. They hear about a track and field competition and they're going to pack out the stadium. Mind you, it was a game so of course it would be packed anyway. They make you feel at home. The facilities were great. The coacher is great. The food was pretty good. The weather was good. We were in a country where they speak English so I was going to be able to understand everything. It's not like going to Beijing or Brazil or Spain.

But I remember standing on the track and I was getting ready for one of my final jumps. I was trying to get myself pumped up so I started clapping my hands in this rhythm. The next thing I know all 80-85,000 people in

the stands started clapping their hands the exact rhythm I was clapping mine and it just gives you chills in your body and just that unity. It was awesome. That's all I can say. It was something I'll never ever forget.

Jeff Thompson: You talked about the Ted Talk earlier, how did that come about?

Lex Gillette: The Ted Talk came about, I want to say a few years ago. I started speaking more and I told myself I want to have some more opportunities to speak and not being in front of people and necessarily telling my story as an autobiographical type of speech but more so using the story to ignite something within others. So I said I need to find out how can I do this. Someone was telling me, "Oh well you should try to do a Ted Talk."

"Okay. Alright." But I didn't know how I was going to pull that off but fortunately one of my friends had a connection to Ted in San Diego which of course is here in San Diego where I train. I went and talked to the gentleman just to find out about the organization and when they were having their next event and it just so happened that the Ted speech was going to be in October and they had one more spot for the event.

They're asking me, "If we give you the theme the age of magic I believe, how would you formulate a speech around that theme for the event?" That's when I really just started spilling out it's just a magical experience when A, when you have that vision and when you can really tap into that ability to take that shot in the dark and when you gain that type of confidence when you throw up you're going to make the mark. I mean it's such a magical experience when you have that happen and everything starts to unravel the way you sort of envision it.

In a lot of ways I felt that was an interview for me. They told me, "Hey. We want you to take the last spot for the show." From there it was just a long process of trying to get everything the way I wanted and get my thoughts down. Make an outline. At the same time I was training for Brazil. So there was a lot going on I had to really buckle down and get it all together.

Pete Lane: You did a fantastic job. We'll have a link to that Ted Talk in our show notes. It's very inspiring and really great presentation, Lex. Your notoriety and achievements in sports has offered you a unique platform from which you can provide help to other people and other individuals. Talk a little bit about your advocacy efforts, for starters maybe start off with Classroom Champions?

Lex Gillette: Yes. Classroom Champions is an organization that pairs Olympians and Paralympians to students who are in underserved schools across the United States and Canada. I'm a mentor. This year I had five class rooms and this is all done virtually. We send video lessons each month to our class room via the Google community and that lesson may range from goal setting to diversity, team work, community, perseverance. So each month is dedicated to a specific skill. We teach the kids in that video what that skill is, how we incorporate it to our lives as athletes or just individually. Then at the end of each video we give the kids a challenge so they can implement that skill into their own lives. The kids will then send a video back or maybe they'll make a power point, or write essays, they'll let you know, "This is what I did to implement goal setting. These are the long term and short term goals that I have and this is how I'm going to achieve them."

You really get an opportunity to see the kids working. See their minds working. See them going out and trying to incorporate these things into their lives. It lasts for the entire year. You work with them from the beginning of school until the end of that school year. So you really start to develop a bond with these kids. Although we do exchange videos each month, we do have a live session, a live video call with them during the fall and during the spring. For me I told the team from Classroom Champions, "Hey, if at all possible I have to visit my kids in person." You can't help but to want to go be with them in persons after building such a strong bond and such a strong relationship with them.

For the past, I've been in the program for four years now. I want to say that I've visited the majority of my classrooms. I will say they do have a classroom contest. Classroom Champions do have a contest at the end of the year were they pull names and there's a sponsor who will sponsor athletes' visits to go see their classrooms, but of course you have to be one of the lucky ones that wins that drawing. Since I travel a lot for either competition or speeches, if I'm in the vicinity with in my classrooms within that year that we're working together, I'll try to hit Classroom Champions up and say, "Hey, I'm going to be up in the area. Let's see if we can make this happen." So I get to hang out with the kids for a little bit and again have that in person interaction instead of that just being videos and live chats.

Jeff Thompson: That's really cool.

Lex Gillette: Yeah. It's amazing.

I also want to talk about ... Then you also have there's a company called Aira and Aira is a company who gives the blind and vision impaired the ability to explore the world and experience life in a different way. Aira uses the smart glass technology to give access to information for those who are blind and visually impaired. Then you have an agent, which is a human being in a remote area. They have a dashboard on their computer. When you link up your smart glass to the app on your phone that gives the agent the ability to see where you are in real time.

I can talk to an agent and say, "Hey. I ran out of groceries. I need to go to the grocery store and pick up a few things." So you would log in they would track your route from your home to the store and they will give you audible directions as to where you need to walk.

So if you're on Jones Street for example and they're saying, "Hey. Continue walking straight. You're coming up to 31st. I need you to make a left hand turn. Okay there's a fire hydrant to your left hand side so make sure you step to the left a little bit. Continue to walk. Okay. I see someone that's coming up on your left hand side. Maybe you should stay a little bit to your right." So they're giving you all these directions.

As soon as you walk into the store they're with you as well and they're telling you, "You want Fruit Loops? Alright let's go to aisle four. I see the cereal. Okay keep walking straight."

The cool thing about Aira is they can take screen shots of what you would be seeing if you could see. If you are in a grocery store and there are so many different options on the shelf they'll ask you to step back. They'll take a screen shot so they could sit there and shift through all of the options and then they're able to say, "Okay. I see the Fruit Loops. They're on the fourth shelf from the floor. Alright reach to the right. Reach to the right. Okay. Boom. That box right there. Grab that one. Those are the Fruit Loops."

This is really crazy. I actually learned about Aira through Ted at San Diego because they have innovation alley and innovation alley goes on through the duration of Ted program in South Side. So as people are going in and out of there, they're able to go down innovation alley and see some of the really cool start ups that are going on and Aira is located in La Jolla, California, which is just to the North of San Diego and that's where I was introduced to them. It's really awesome. They're really just forward thinking and I think it's really helping the blind to gain that much more independence.

Jeff Thompson: Instant access to information.

Pete Lane: It is a wonderful technology. In fact, this podcast is brought to you by AT&T. The AT&T experience more campaign and Aira.

Jeff Thompson: So Fruit Loops is the new breakfast of champions huh?

Lex Gillette: You know what? I can't even lie I love cereal. I wouldn't say I eat all of the sugary ones as much as I used to but every once in a while you have to splurge a little bit just to make yourself feel good.

Pete Lane: Even when you're in training? Common man you're in training.

Lex Gillette: But you know what the thing is when you're satisfying yourself, the enables you to go out there and train that much harder. I will tell you this though; We were in Rio. A lot of the athletes realized that the food that we were giving served in the athletes village, it could've been better. So we just like, when you're not getting satisfied and your appetite isn't just 100% satisfied, it could just put you in a bad mood. That term 'hangry'.

You [inaudible 00:29:59] and it's like man I gotta get some good food because I just don't feel right. So as soon as you get that good piece of chicken or that good bowl of Fruit Loops or you know what ever it is.

Pete Lane: Comfort food right?

Lex Gillette: Yeah. Exactly.

Jeff Thompson: Lex, you made a comment on one of your films that I was watching and it really stuck with me. You said that while you're in the games and you're participating at the Olympics and stuff, your blindness, that's not part of it.

Lex Gillette: Yeah I like to think of it as ... So growing up in the environment that I did, my mom, my teacher/coach, they gave me access to so many resources, so much information that it got to the point where they made me forget that I was blind. I say that because I had so many other things to worry about. I had no time to think about not being able to see. I needed to get through school. I needed to train. I needed to lift weights. I needed to do all of these things that would help me become an independent individual in the world and I was so focused on those things that the blindness just didn't even matter anymore. This has nothing to do with whether or not I will succeeded. It's all about having access to these opportunities and again just circling back to having that vision and seeing something that

isn't quite in existence yet knowing that you have the ability to set those goals and work hard to bring whatever that vision is into coalition.

Jeff Thompson: So Lex, what advice would you give to someone whose in high school today transitioning to college, to the work place or into sports? What advice would you have for them?

Lex Gillette: I would say at that age I was just trying to learn as much as possible, reading as much as possible. Talking to people, learning as much as you can because I feel like what that does is the more that you learn and the more that you're exposed to, that allows you to expand your reach. When you're able to have all of that knowledge and to have all of those resources available to you, it increases your opportunities and I think it points to a phrase I like to say that, "Further that you can see, the more you can be."

I can't express how important it is to really just go out there and try different things. Sometimes it's going to be, you're going to feel a little uncomfortable but the one thing that I do know when you have those moments where you feel a little discomfort or things are out of your comfort zone. You're on the cusp of something amazing when you have those moments because you're really expanding your reach.

Pete Lane: Well said. Lex, you're a singer. I've heard a couple of instances on your videos where you have done a little bit of singing. How's that going for you? Are you considering that maybe as an alternation profession?

Lex Gillette: The singing ... I would say I wanted to be a singer as a profession solely but what I do want to do is I want to record some albums. I want to fuse the singing piece into some of my speeches. Of course I sang a little bit in the Ted Talk and I'm singing other speeches, but really just trying to utilize that musical aspect to kind of reinforce some of the points I talk about in my speeches. If it does spiral off into something that's a little bigger then I wouldn't steer away from that.

Jeff Thompson: You'll knock them out at the Olympic village karaoke.

Lex Gillette: Exactly. I'd like to put on a little concert for the athletes' village.

Jeff Thompson: There you go.

Pete Lane: Well Lex, we have an audience that's dying to hear some music. You got a little diddy for us here to close us out?

Lex Gillette: You know what, of course being an athlete I'm always ... Let's see.

Oh say can you see, by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed
at the twilight's last gleaming, whose broad stripes and bright stars
through the perilous fight, over the ramparts we watched, were so
gallantly streaming. And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
gave proof through the night that our flag was still there. Oh say does
that star-spangled banner yet wave over the land of the free and the
home of the brave.

Speaker 5: Lex Gillette with our national anthem.

Pete Lane: Out standing. Good job.

Jeff Thompson: That's a first on blind abilities.

Lex Gillette: I appreciate it.

Jeff Thompson: Lex, I have a question for you. What was the feeling when you achieved
the world record?

Lex Gillette: When I broke the world record, I will tell you, I overslept, I showed up to
the track late. I only had, I'm not even sure, maybe like 30-40 minutes
before the competition and usually I arrive to the track probably like an
hour and a half before. I was already in a bad spot. I had to rush go
through a quicker warm up routine than normal. I just remember being
on the track and I felt really relaxed. I was more relaxed than normal. So
when I ran and I jumped and I landed the mark and they said what it was
I was like, "What do you mean. That really just happened right now." But
I think one of the things that my current coach talks about now is staying
relaxed. Having that physical exertion and trying hard but at the same
time being relaxed.

The one thing that I remember is that I felt like I was moving pretty good
but it just felt like it was really just seamless and it was very easy. I will
tell you I have been trying to match that feeling for the longest. I had
actually tied the world record again in 2015 and it was the same thing. It
felt like everything had slowed down. Mentally I was able to really feel
every aspect of the run, every aspect of the jump, and when I landed ... I
don't know what it is but I'm still trying to tap into that realm so I can find
it again because I know I have some more world records inside of me.

Pete Lane: What was that mark?

Lex Gillette: That mark is 6.73 meters. That's 22 feet 1 inch.

Pete Lane: 22 feet 1 inch. Fly, fly, fly and hit the mark on your 16th step.

Lex Gillette: Yeah. That's it.

Pete Lane: Lex, is there anything else you would like to share with our listeners?

Lex Gillette: You know what, I think we've hit on it the entire time. You really do have something inside of you. You have what it takes. I think that it is seeing it within yourself and having the courage to step out there, put yourself out there try new things learn as much as possible so that you can expand your reach. I always like to say as well sometimes you're going to have moments where you see things within yourself and maybe people looking from the outside in are just like, "You sure you want to do this?" They may question what your dreams and aspirations are, but you stay confident and grounded in what you believe and what you see. You set those goals and you work hard to bring that into coalition. They may not see in that particular time but if you continue to do what you need to do and go towards that vision of what you see then eventually it'll come into their visual field as well. Really go out there and turn that vision into a reality.

Jeff Thompson: That's very well put. It was very nice talking to you, Lex, and hearing your story. You're true to yourself and true to what you believe in, your vision. You set your sights on it and you go for it. Good for you and good luck in 2020 in Tokyo.

Pete Lane: Right on.

Lex Gillette: Thanks guys.

Pete Lane: We've been speaking with Lex Gillette, Paralympian, world champion, world record holder, Ted Talker, outstanding singer, and inspirational, and motivational speaker. Thanks so much Lex for inspiring us today.

Lex Gillette: Thank you. Thanks so much and good bye from blind abilities. One take Jake that's what they call me around here. One take Jake.

Jeff Thompson: One take Jake.

Pete Lane: One take Jake.

Lex Gillette: One take Jake.

Jeff Thompson: Pete and I really enjoyed talking to Lex Gillette. He's bringing so much awareness to blindness and doing so much for the Paralympic sports. Helping those in less fortunate situations with his community service. That's Gillette. Thank you for coming on the blind abilities and thank you very much for what you're doing to make this place a better world. Thank you.

And thank you very much AT&T for your #experiencemore campaign and helping bring awareness to the possibilities and Aira the virtual navigator for the blind. Instant access to information. You can find more information at the experience more campaign at experiencemore.att.com. And you can sign up and subscribe to Aira on the web at aira.io. Aira.

And as always thank chico for your beautiful music. That's El [chichow 00:39:45]. Thanks Chichow.

Lex Gillette: When I think of having courage this quote comes to mind, "For those determined to fly, having no wings is just a little detail." I'm asking you to take a shot in the dark. To fly. And this song by the beetles illustrates my side, my flight.

Black birds singing in the dead of night. Take these broken wings and learn to fly. All this time you were only waiting for this moment to arise. Black birds signing in the dead of night. Take these second eyes and learn to see all this time you were only waiting for this moment to be free. Black bird fly. Black bird fly into the light of the dark black night.

Jeff Thompson: This has been a Blind Abilities production. We hope you enjoyed and until next time, bye-bye.

Speaker 6: What we share and what we see through each others' eyes we can then begin to bridge the gap between limited expectations and the reality of blind abilities.

Jeff Thompson: For more podcasts for the blindness perspective check us out on the web at www.blindabilities.com. On Twitter @blindabilities. Download our app from the app store Blind Abilities or send us an email at info@blindabilities.com. Thanks for listening.