

Transcript- Episode 59 – The Blind Sport Podcast

The Adventurer Miles Hilton-Barber

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Introduction

This is episode 59 of The Blind Sport Podcast entitled The Adventurer Miles Hilton-Barber.

Hi I'm Mike, and this is The Blind Sport Podcast. The sports show for the blind, the partially sighted and the supportive sighty. Thanks for joining me for episode 59.

On the show we'll be talking with Miles Hilton-Barber from England about his amazing adventures.

Miles has achieved more than many others would even dare consider. Despite being blind for over 25 years, Miles has still lived his dreams, (and man, does this guy dream big), encouraging us to realise that "The only limits in our lives are those we accept ourselves."

Buckle up for this one and please keep your hands and feet inside the ride at all times. Wahoo! Let's go!

Hi there, I hope this episode finds you fit and well.

Before we chat to Miles, I would like to thank you for the feedback received re episode 58, where we spoke with David from San Diego about mixed martial arts. .

Some of the comments that I received included:

From Dean. I am very impressed. Great show. David nailed it. Mixed martial arts is the best.

From Bret, MMA is easy. If you want a real fight, try taking on my Mother in law.

Please email me with any comments

Contact Jingle - To contact Mike or comment on The Blind Sport Podcast, submit a feedback form from the website www.theblindsportpodcast.com, email Mike@theblindsportpodcast.com, send us a tweet or follow us on Twitter @blindsportmike, or visit The Blind Sport Podcast page on Facebook.

Interview

Mike - My guest is Mr Miles Hilton-Barber and I must say that this is a conversation that I have very much been looking forward to.

For a look at his impressive list of achievements and adventures, I recommend that you check out his website <http://www.milleshilton-barber.com>

He's done so much, but I'll just mention a few things: Running Ultra marathons, mountain climbing and trekking in Antarctica. Driving supercharged drag-racing cars, speed boats and setting a grand prix track record. Piloting a microlight from London to Sydney and being the first blind person to break the sound barrier in a fighter jet. And the list goes on.

Miles, welcome to the show.

Miles – Pleasure Mike. Great honour to be chatting all the way over to Kiwiland from Pommyland over here in the UK.

Mike - That's right. Can you start off by telling us about your story of vision loss and how you got started on this crazy path of adventure.

Miles - Yes Mike. I grew up in Rhodesia, now called Zimbabwe. As a little boy growing up, nothing wrong with my eyesight. When I was 18 I joined the Rhodesian Airforce. My dad was a World War 2 Fighter Pilot. Failed my eyesight medical. Three years later, was told I had Retinitis Pigmentosa. I was going to go totally blind. So that was almost my 21st birthday present.

Right up until the age of 50, I think I lived a very mediocre life as my eyesight dropped and by the time I was 30, probably no useful vision. I'm now 68, blind as a bat but a very happy bat. And I think what put me off, Mike, I'd never met any other blind or visually impaired people so I had no idea. I didn't want to use a white stick. Everyone said use a stick and I said if I use a stick everyone will think I'm brain damaged. They said you've been brain damaged for years, use the stick. So I went through that whole depression, loss of confidence, feeling stupid trying to get around mobility.

I then moved over to the UK in my early 40s. My wife is English, Zimbabwe was going down the tube with Robert Mugabe so I live in the UK now. I was working for a while for the Royal National Institute for the Blind as an employment consultant. Living a fairly normal life but still within the confines, I'm blind, there are limits to what you can do.

My life turned around in terms of doing adventures when I was 50. My brother Geoffrey also totally blind with RP. He lives in Durban in South Africa. Built a yacht by feel in his back garden. Pretty stupid hobby for a blind man. I don't know if he thought he was Noah or something. Launches it and everyone says Geoffrey, oh bless you built a boat and you're blind. What are you going to do? He says I'm going to sail it from South Africa to Australia all by myself. No one else on board. And everyone said it's impossible. No blind person can sail across an ocean totally alone but he did it Mike. 51 days, reached Fremantle and that was the kick up my backside to stop being a victim and get out there and live life to the full.

Mike - Wow. So what was the first event that you entered in? How did you recruit this famous guide of yours, John?

Miles –First event, I thought well I better get fit. I was now 50. I'd done no running since I was 17. So I entered a thing called the Marathon de Sables which is, they call it the toughest foot race in the world. But you got to start somewhere. And anyway my brother said it would be a good bit of a laugh so.....

Mike - A good starting point you reckon?

Miles - Yeah, they give you water but otherwise over the 6 days you've got to have a rucksack front and back with all of your food and provisions so I needed a guide. I was actually, I'd entered the London Marathon before that, just a bit of training. I was using my guide dog running around the block and John, my ugly friend as I refer to him, he met me going around the block. We live in the same village. What are you doing blind man? Preparing, running around the block, blah, blah. If you want to have a guide, go joggy logs, I'll go joggy logs with you. He gave me his phone number. The next week I signed him up to the Marathon de Sables without asking him so he got a bit upset that he'd been booked in to the toughest footrace in the world. And I said you promised to go joggy logs with me. And he said this isn't round the block. And I said, well its geography, you know. So that's how we began and we've been firm friends for the last fifteen years Mike.

Mike - Good grief, that's amazing. So this run, for those people that don't know about it, is to run across the Sahara Desert which is what, 150 odd miles?

Miles - That's right Mike. You run one section, one marathon in one day over the second highest dunes in the world. 600 feet high, height of a sixty storey building. The main thing is the heat and your feet get pretty blistered. Well mine did for various reasons. But a wonderful experience and any blind person could go and do it. I think the big thing is mental. Other blind people listening who are runners, 80 percent is attitude and 20 percent is training and fitness I reckon. So that was the first extreme event I did and it made me realise actually that blind people can do almost anything they set their hearts on.

Mike - Had you prepared for that the way you wanted to?

Miles - Not really Mike. I spent a bit of time in saunas. Guys in the states can go run in deserts but I spent quite a lot of time in saunas getting used to the heat. And I made a bit of a mess. Someone told me to put surgical spirit rubbing alcohol on the soles of my feet to toughen the skin. I went to the chemist and ended up with acetone instead and put that on my feet so I burnt a few layers of skin off my feet. At the start of the race they were worse than most of the runners at the end.

It was like running on molten lead with chopped up razor blades. It was uncomfortable. Any of you guys who know about blisters it was uncomfortable. But I chewed a lot of painkillers and a lot of it is just mental Mike. You can't run the next mile but can you run ten yards? Do it and stop belly aching. It really opened my eyes to realise that, well a quote I use all the time is that the only limits in our lives are those we accept ourselves. And I had made the big mistake of believing that happiness and quality of life was based on good things happening around you, rather than attitude, your response. And when I went blind everyone said well if

you're blind you'll have a very limited life now. Now I start with what I want to do. Skydive, scuba dive, motor race, mountaineering, flying whatever. And then work backwards. You silly idiot, how the heck can you do it if you're blind. Before that I used to think I'm a victim. I'm blind, can't do anything, not my fault. And my brother was the one who said start with your dreams, start with what you want to do and other people say well that's stupid. Alright, you say you can't run 150 miles across the desert. If you're loved one, a child, was desperately ill and the only medicine was 75 miles out in the desert, would you run there to get that lifesaving medicine and run back again. Yes of course. Well, don't tell me you can't do it. You just haven't had the desire or the need to do something so I think T Elliot, the poet said, only those willing to risk going too far will discover how far it's possible to go. And I'm just now on a journey, what about this, what about that and I haven't found too many problems yet Mike.

Mike – Most awesome. Now obviously one key part to your success is your partnership with your guide, John. What forms of guiding have worked or how has he had to change or amend the way that he guides to suit the various types of events that you've done?

Miles – Good question Mike. With standard things like a marathon, I've done Shanghai Marathon, London Marathon, New York Marathon, I've done a few. If you're just running on a flat smooth surface, if it's very crowded, I start holding his elbow. I have a small piece of rope less than a metre long attached to his elbow and if it spreads out a bit, you can then move away and just run free. In the Sahara Desert, if it was very rocky, again I'd be on his elbow but if it was a bit smoother, there would be a rope coming off the back of his rucksack about 6 foot long. I'd hold on to that and just keep behind him which worked well. The last ultra desert thing I did was Death Valley where it was very hot and we found a good system. I was using a trekking pole, same thing as a white stick. We both held it in our left hand. I was behind him. I would then say three, two, one, run and as we started running, of course you'd be pumping your stick and running in step just like an old steam engine with a piston. Brilliant way to do it. John is my guide. If there was a pot hole coming up he could just twist the stick a bit to the right or the left and I'd follow it so he could guide me without saying anything. Very good way you stay the same distance behind the runner in front. In retrospect I should have used that on some of the marathons where you have got thousands of people around you. At least you're behind so very good system.

Mountaineering, going up mountains, any of you blind people know is a lot easier than coming down. So often it's me feeling for hand holds and rock holds. Coming down, if it was pretty steep, I'd likely hold on to the back of John's rucksack and just feel whether his left or right shoulder were dropping first and then just put your foot there. Figure out how far down you have to drop. Coming down Kilimanjaro, Mt Blanc, if you wait till you can physically feel that foot hold with your trekking pole which I also had when I was climbing, you'd never get down the mountain so you have got to just trust that there is a ledge or something where that shoulder has gone to. And that worked well, those are the main things. Antarctica I was trying to be the first blind man to man-haul a sledge to the pole from the coast. That was more a bit of using sound, I was listening to the sound of Johns sledge next to me as I was man-hauling my sledge. Got a bit dodgy with high winds, blizzards and things but

basically it worked ok. I've only got lost twice, once in the Sahara and once in Antarctica.

Mike - Now you've run in some pretty extreme heats like Death Valley and you've run in some extreme cold from the Ice Marathon, what's better hot or cold or do they just both suck?

Miles - One of the key things is safety controlling your body temperature. In the extreme heat it's more difficult to control your temperature than in the cold because even if you've got liquid, you can't cool down if you're water, the one ultra-marathon was through the Qatar Desert in Saudi Arabia. It was not that hot, 40-45 centigrade.

Mike - Not that hot?

Miles - Yeah, well yes but high humidity. I was drinking up to, between 50 and 60 litres of energy drink per 24 hours. I was in a harness pulling a stupid cart that weighed 200 kilograms, about 400 pounds, through deep sand so a very stupid thing to do. But the scary thing is that I was actually sweating and losing liquid faster than I could drink it so my tummy was sloshing full of energy drink but that energy drink couldn't get via osmosis through my stomach lining into my body. Leaning forward, my face, I had sweat running almost like a shower. Between 6 o'clock one morning and midday, I lost 4 kilograms in weight. Which is 4 litres of liquid that you've lost, but by nightfall when things cool, you can rehydrate. Heat is more dangerous in some ways. I got a bit of heat stroke.

Antarctica or the Siberian Ice Marathon, you're burning up a lot of energy generating heat and as long as you have the right clothing. As you know, there is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing so if you have the right gear, anything is ok. Antarctica, the bad thing is that if you were getting thirsty, you've got to carry thermos flasks in your sledge with hot liquid because you try putting snow or ice in to your mouth at minus 40 you just burn your mouth so lack of water, despite having all that snow and ice was a problem in Antarctic. But cold, they both got their dangers but both a lot of fun and I'd encourage anyone to.....Antarctica is twice as big as Australia and is something like 5000 feet of ice stuck on top. It's a beautiful, lonely desolate place. Wonderful place to visit Mike.

Mike - Brilliant. Now as well as your obviously high intensity physical adventures, you've done some pretty wild motor sports and things in planes and motor boats and all sorts of things. Can you tell us about breaking the sound barrier because that sounded pretty awesome.

Miles - Yes. I started just doing some aerobatics in a Hawker Hunter which is a 1960s frontline fighter. I would have flown that in the Rhodesian Airforce if they had passed me for training. I then decided to fly a thing called an English Electric Lightning which is again a 1960s frontline fighter. Small little aircraft, tiny little cockpit. Just room for two people side by side. Unless you're very, I'm pretty claustrophobic Mike so I don't enjoy being strapped in a five point harness into a small ejector seat in your flying suit and helmet and oxygen mask so that was a bit of getting used to but amazing. Going straight, just backing up, how does a blind man go straight for example in drag racing. What I did, I always start as I said earlier,

what do I want to do. Ok I'm going to do some drag racing. Alright, make that decision. Step 3, you idiot if you're blind how can you go straight. So I said to my friend in the car with me I said, ok let's imagine. We went to a disused airport runway. Ok, imagine the runway is a 100 metre athletics track. As long as I'm going down the middle, lane 5, you sit next to me. Just keep shouting 5, 5, 5 and if I go a bit to the left say 6. 9, 9, 9 if I get right near the edge. So that's easy and you do the same thing down an airport runway when you're taking off. The Lightning, amazing, it's got two engines. A lot of you guys have possibly listened to Top Gun or watched Top Gun. If you haven't watched Top Gun you should be ashamed of yourself, it's my favourite. I've listened to it about 30 times. But this baby climbs vertically at 50,000 feet a minute.

Mike - Good grief.

Miles - So from sea level, you can reach the altitude of Everest in just over half a minute. So went down the runway, South Africa, Cape Town International Airport. Went vertical and in about a minute I was at just over 50,000 feet doing mark 1.4 in a vertical climb. Going through the sound barrier, it's a bit like being in a motor car going over cobbles or a slightly rough road. Just a bit of sort of vibration in the aircraft and as you go through, a lot of technical things happening but then smooth as a baby's bottom, just incredible. But the cockpit, armour-plated glass canopy over the top of me. I was getting so hot in my flying suit. We're now at 50,000 feet. It is minus 60 centigrade outside. I said to the test pilot next to me, why is it so hot? He said feel the cockpit canopy. The canopy was hot to the touch, nearly burnt my fingers. He says baby, that's friction. So to give you an idea of speed, we were travelling, Mike if you know what the size of a football or a rugby field is, I was flying straight up at the equivalent speed of flying from one goal post to the other in .2 of a second so flying over five football fields a second. An amazing experience. I became the first blind pilot in world history to vomit at supersonic speed.

Mike - Brilliant.

Miles - So that was just amazing and there is none of them flying now. I don't think any of the modern Euro fighters makes, mirages, tornados, nothing has that climb rate. It would only fly for about 30 minutes before it ran out of fuel but beautiful baby to fly.

Mike - Wow, that would be very impressive. Now, slowing the flying pace down a little, you've been involved with a lot of piloting of microlights including an altitude record and flying from London to Sydney? How did that work?

Miles - Mike, yes, you remember my dream was to be a pilot. My dad was also head of civil aviation in the country when I was a little boy, so I figured when my brother sailed to Australia, he said listen, stop being a victim, stop complaining about your blindness. Start with what you want to do and of course I wanted to fly so I said right I am going to be a pilot. Then I thought alright, you idiot, you're blind, how can you fly?

And then I learnt of course that all commercial pilots have to learn to fly on instrument without being able to see anything. And I thought phew I'm half qualified,

I'm blind. So you think about it, what does pilot need to fly? He needs a brain, he needs hands, he needs legs. I thought well I've got all of that. My problem is I can't see those flight instruments, angle of bank, altitude, airspeed, blah, blah. So I thought all I need is someone to design speech output on my flight instruments. My eyes don't work but another way to get in to my brain, my command centre is my ears. So I started googling any companies designing speech output for technology for blind pilots and of course, "Please redefine your search". Nobody was making flight instruments for blind pilots because blind people didn't fly. Yes, it took me four years Mike just trying to persuade people to end up with speech output on the essential flight instruments, which I did.

Then I decided, ok I'll start with a microlight or an ultralight. A small little fixed wing aircraft. It's only as wide as the average dining room chair, very small, about 10 foot long, 32 foot wing span. Flies at 70 miles an hour, a little engine at the back. If people haven't seen one, it pushes you along at about 70 miles an hour. Decided to fly from London to Sydney in Australia so big thing, flying I had to have a sighted co-pilot with me, even though I'm now fully qualified they didn't recognise me as a pilot as I can't see but I can. People say is there technology today for blind people listening, yes. With all the drones now you can buy a drone kit and of course that uses the technology to fly. In America there is now a small little bit of kit that any blind person. I think it cost me just under \$1000 US dollars. All the essential instruments to fly, angle of bank, altitude, GPS, track, it's all there, everything you need to fly in a small little box.

I now use, there is a small little computer made in the UK called a Raspberry Pi. It's about the dimensions of a credit card and about half an inch thick and I plug my flight instrument box in to that, it goes in to headphones, tiny little kit. And the main difficulty flying for a blind person Mike, flying level so you use your angle of bank. So in to my headphones I've got a voice telling me, 2 left, 3 right, port or starboard, my compass heading is telling me 335 for left whatever, so that's basically when I'm flying, compass and angle of bank is on. Every now and then I can keep track of the ground, distance to the next way-point. On my flying suit I've got a little set of switches like a numpad for a computer keyboard with settings and I just choose all the information I need coming in to my headphones so that's how I fly. A lot of people are now starting to use kit. In France there is nearly 200 blind or visually impaired people flying microlights so that's something to get in to. It's a growing sport and in a number of areas, Mike I was possibly the first blind person to try this or that but what's amazing as soon as it gets on the telegraph pole, blind person can do this or that, then it gives us encouragement to do it ourselves. Yes I flew to Australia. I had a sighted co-pilot with me. Took me 55 days, a few big storms and problems with technology and nearly died a few times but made it there just 70 miles an hour. Even though I'm blind as a bat, my co-pilot would describe the scenery. I've flown at over 20,000 feet in that minus 55 centigrade but on the way to Australia we only flew at about 10 to 13 thousand feet maximum. Often only 5 or 6 thousand. Wonderful, wonderful experience Mike and microlight very easy. It's totally open. You're simply holding the bar or the wing above you and you use pushing the bar away or towards you to climb or drop down, angle it left or right to bank. Very simple, very primitive but what an experience and I encourage any blind person, give it a go, it's not hard.

Mike - Brilliant. What about the important stuff like taking off and landing.

Miles - Yeah, taking off isn't so hard as long as you're staying straight down the runway which you can do same as with drag racing. Landing is a lot more complicated. If I know in advance it's a commercial runway I'd know the heading. It might be 210 degrees is the heading and I'm coming in on finals, there might be a five or eight mile an hour crosswind so as I'm coming in on finals I have my compass on which is giving me, instead of saying 210 degrees if I'm flying straight towards the runway, I've actually got to have the nose flying in to the wind a bit so I'll have my track on and your track is your imaginary dotted line of the actual travel across the ground so that the nose is pointing, so my compass is saying 195 degrees, my track is saying 210 so as long as my track tells me I'm heading towards the runway, my altimeter is giving me 150 feet, 135. Your altimeter, unless it's a digital one is working in millibars, air pressure so it drops your altitude every 15 feet. So 115 feet, 100 feet, 85 so that's quite interesting. Then I've got my GPS giving me my distance to that weigh point. It might say .6 of a mile, .5, .4 so I'm working out my altitude dropping. Make sure that my track is still 210. Compass saying still 185, 195 so I know there's a bit of a crosswind and then in theory you come down and flair. The difficulty with the altimeter is that it's telling you 30 feet, 15 feet, 0 but you're still flying this stupid thing so it varies very slightly so your co-pilot can have his hands on the controls as well in case of sudden gusts. But in theory that's how you do it. You land with your nose pointing a bit in to the wind as long as your two back wheels hit first, it then automatically knocks your nose down to down the runway. Put the nose down, put the brakes on and you're only landing at about 60 mile an hour depending on what you're flying. So not a problem. Well, it's exciting at times but it's doable and I'd simply say to anyone interested in flying, give it a try. The technology is there. There will be lots of microlight airfields around that would love to have a blind person and help you how to fly. It's not a big deal.

Mike - Excellent. Now one of your feats of adventure which is quite impressive is your circumnavigation of the world covering 38,000miles in eighty different forms of transport. Of those eighty, what would be the most strange?

Miles - Yeah, that was a fun thing. There was myself, a chap called Robin Dunseith, a retired Scottish entrepreneur whatever and PR man decided instead of reading the Jules Verne book "Around the world in eighty days in eighty ways". Make it interesting, have some people with disabilities. Had another chap called Mike in a wheelchair, paralysed, no legs. Gorgeous blond blind Irish girl, Caroline Casey, told everyone she had three disabilities, not only blind but she was blond and Irish which caused people to cringe. But we had so much fun.

One of my most exciting or fun forms of transport around the world was pushing Mike in his wheelchair along the bottom of the Red Sea. On the bottom of the Red Sea so only 30-40 foot down, chose some nice sand, no damage to anything and I have a lovely photograph on my business card showing me holding my breath with the regulator out of my mouth for scuba divers and just me using my white stick feeling my way along the bottom of the Red Sea. Everyone said why did you do that as a form of transport? Well Moses did this thing with a stick over the Red Sea and it parted and they went off on dry land. Didn't work for me so I thought find another way, don't give up buddy. So was just a silly stage thing. That was fun.

Another thing was not distance travel but I set the lap record on the Malaysian Grand Prix circuit driving a little Lotus having a race against Caroline. She was in another car. It was great fun. My highlight there was we were in the Ferrari pit lane. We had the whole circuit totally manned. About 57 different media people, TV, radio, magazines. It was the first race in the world on a fully manned Grand Prix circuit between two blind drivers. And we had to have this pre-race meeting. The marshal was there and he said ok pay attention. Flag marshals, you know, red flag, black flag, yellow flag. Someone said the drivers are blind, don't need those stupid flags. A lot of confusion. But that was absolutely great fun. Going around, spun it a few times, but John was yelling pretty good directions and it was brilliant fun. So that was another strange form.

Elephant. We went across part of Indian by elephant and going down into the streets of Delhi - Delhi on an Ele. That was lovely fun. Loads of things, just about any form of transport. Flying helicopters, camels, camelback, old trains. I was hoping to drive a steam engine across part of South Africa. Lots of things, so great fun indeed.

Mike - Now, some of these environments you've done some of these things in have been rather loud. Drag car racing and other sorts of forms of especially motor vehicles like boats and whatnot are pretty loud. So do you find that environment unnerving when you can't hear what's around you?

Miles - Yeah Mike. I suppose for all of us blind people noise can be a big enemy. I hate very, very loud noise. Now I actually make my living speaking at corporate events around the world and often after dinner they'll have a very loud band, sort of disco. As a blind person you can't hear anything, you can't lip-read. One of the hardest things, one of the vehicles they raced was a Mustang 5.6 litre V8 race tuned Mustang around the Killarney Race circuit outside Cape Town. Beautiful cars, they do 0 to 60 miles an hour in 2.8 seconds.

Mike - Whoa.

Miles - Loud, great big V8 with exhaust coming out underneath. Eight exhausts like Formula One used to be. And I should have had microphones and headphones but I didn't so going around the track was very noisy. I thought my co-pilot was telling me we were entering the back straight but we were exiting the back straight so nearly a spectacular crash and lots of yelling and miscommunication. But a lot of fun. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Probably the funniest thing recently, my son drives a Mitsubishi Evo which looks like a fairly standard car but very potent. We had a track day for the Evo Club owners and my son was there racing and I was there with my wife watching. During the lunch break, my son said my dad also can drive. And they said ah bless, a blind man. Let's get the blind man to go around the track. So put me in a car, strapped me in a five-point harness and fire suits and helmets. Chap next to me. And they all thought I'd go nice and slow around the track, 30 / 40 mile an hour. All the chaps are eating their lunch, boxes of sandwiches, sitting on the bank watching the blind man go down the straight to start the lap, a few laps. Apparently when I got to the first

corner, I was doing 135 miles an hour and everyone said we've been tricked. We thought it was a blind man but it's Adrian that other chap, they've swapped places. But when I finally got around the track down the straight for a second time, they said, bloody hell, it's that silly blind idiot, so that was quite exciting. And at the end Adrian who'd been my co-pilot, he'd stopped smoking about six months ago. He was shaking like a leaf at the end. He got out, grabbed someone's pack of cigarettes, went and stood on the hill and smoked three or four cigarettes nonstop with that sort of thousand mile gaze in his eyes. I feel a bit bad I've got him smoking again. And I'm hoping, Mike he has now got back to me and he works for a corporate track day people and they have a McLaren F1 Road car, 650 horsepower, so I'm hoping to attempt a new land speed record for blind driver before too long.

Mike - Amazing. Have there been any other times like that when you've been driving when you've actually scared the crowd?

Miles - Yeah, even going back to the Malaysian Grand Prix circuit, I was just driving this little Lotus but it was a race tuned brand new Lotus and apparently the Lotus agent, was a big risk letting a blind man loose on his brand new car. When I was going down the back straight because he was expecting 30-40 mile an hour and he could hear me howling down the back straight, it was all coming through on the video stuff. All the cameras were going. And I was told afterwards he actually had his hands between his legs like he'd been kicked between his legs. And he was bending over just groaning, listening to me going down the back straight waiting for the crash. So that was a lot of fun. And when I got out I was drunk. I'd never been drunk on adrenaline before but I was literally like ants in my pants. Absolutely. I've never had quite that extreme adrenaline rush before but a wonderful experience.

Mike - Brilliant. Now, have you had times over the years where you have been more of a support to your guide John then he has been to you?

Miles – Yes. Mike, you know all of us blind people, we can feel pretty useless sometimes - can you read this for me, what about that, where's that?

One time when I felt quite good I was climbing in Scotland. I wanted to be the first blind man to climb Everest a few years ago and I made that decision. I'd done no mountaineering when I could see, so thought well, got to start somewhere. And people said there are other mountains, Cho Oyu and Shishapangma and I could never remember those so let's do Everest. Everest by the way is not a difficult mountain. It kills a lot of people but it's more the weather and things.

So anyway I was in Scotland doing some grade three technical ice climbing. So middle of winter, you've got ice axes. Minus 30, 70 mile an hour wind, howling around. I was climbing, I was roped up with John my guide and part way up this climb, I don't know what happened, but he slipped and began to fall. Didn't yell or anything and I just heard him tumbling away from my left down below me. I had my ice axe and I quickly went in to a protective thing with my ice axe firmly in, crampons held in against the ice. John pendulumed below me, like a big cuckoo clock, grandfather clock. Came climbing up slowly. Gave me a big hug and said thanks buddy. And I thought, just a joke, I thought if we'd fallen I thought there was a nice run out to smooth snow a bit below and he said actually it's rocks, we would have

both been killed. I felt quite good, you know we often feel that we are a passenger. John also has very bad hearing. He is actually got to have two hearing aids, it's often the deaf leading the blind which has been difficult at times. Other times in Antarctica, trying to use the radio back to base, John couldn't hear what was happening, what people were saying. So he'd have to dial in the frequency but I'd listen to the frequency we needed and I'd do the talking. So we've been a good couple of mates. The important thing, any of you lovely people listening will need to try something new, just make sure you have good people with you that you can trust. If there are things you've never done before, go to the local club and say look, anyone willing to give it a go with me. There have been total trust between John and I all along the way and you can't risk your life with people that you don't know or you're not sure of their competency. The sad thing about John is he is very, very ugly. The good thing is it doesn't worry me as I can't see. Not good for your street cred to be walking around with a very ugly person but we still get along fine, Mike.

Mike - Brilliant. I suppose with the mountain climbing, do you ever get sick of people saying to you how was the view at the top?

Miles - You know, I suppose for a lot of people they wonder what is the point in doing mountaineering. As I said I've done Kilimanjaro, Mt Blanc. Didn't reach the summit on Mt Blanc, we got caught in a big blizzard. Funny story, we wanted a disabled person on the highest point of view at Mt Blanc and the lowest point of view at 3000 feet underground in a cave in France called the Gouffre Berger Cave. So there was a chap with a missing ankle who actually climbed Everest. He was going down the cave, I was going up Mt Blanc but we got caught in a massive storm. We had four and a half feet of snow in five hours which translated to flooding in the cave for my friend so he nearly drowned, we didn't reach the summit. Five climbers actually died in the storm at Mt Blanc. It was a bit dodgy.

But why does a blind man want to climb? I was speaking at a primary school a while ago and one of the questions a little boy asked was how do you know when you've reached the top because if you don't know you'll fall over the other side. So that was lovely. But why do it? For me climbing Kilimanjaro. Maybe some of your listeners have done it. Lovely mountain to climb. I couldn't see the view at the top but you know we've got a choice we can have a pink pity party, sitting on the sofa feeling sorry for ourselves listening to 800 TV programmes. But for me having the feel of that cold wind blowing off the ice fields nearby and even though I couldn't see the view, we're looking 20,000 feet over Africa. It's just the sense of achievement. I'm sure for a lot of your listeners, blind or visually impaired, there is a sense of satisfaction doing things that other sighted people haven't done and you know Mike, we've only got one life and I've failed at lots of things but if we don't try doing new things, we've failed already. You've got to be in the race to win. And I guess at the end of my life, I'd be more concerned about the things I haven't attempted rather than those that I have. So I'd say to anyone listening, give it a try. It's never as hard as you think.

Mike - Excellent. So with challenges, what do you believe is your favourite mechanism for overcoming challenges?

Miles - Mike, I've always been surprised when somebody reads through some of the things that I've done. I'm actually as surprised as everyone else. I wasn't a very adventurous, outgoing person as a kid and my blindness. I think sometimes you have a crisis in your life and it's the end of your quality of life but for me it was the start. So I've realised that if I just do one little thing I've never done before, it gives me a bit of confidence to do the next thing and I'd say to anyone, when was the last time you did something for the first time in your life. When was the last time you grew as a person. So a lot of challenges, Mike, yes. Have I ever regretted anything I've started? Probably most of them. Every time I start another marathon or pulling a sledge across Antarctica. Usually takes a few hours, maybe a day to think "You stupid idiot, why are you doing this?" But I've met a lot of sighted, world famous adventurers. And nearly all of them have said the same thing. Miles, we've had serious regrets, can't do it but it's never as hard as you think. You might think often with marathons, I'd do a half marathon and think I can't do the other half. The last one I did in fact, I'd done a half marathon six days before a full marathon. Both of them with no training at all and with a damaged knee. Stupid but I was doing it raising money for blind children. I thought, give it a go. I thought I can't do the second half of the marathon. You know, I'm exhausted. But I can run 100 double paces, then walk 100 double paces so I said to John, my friend, I can't run the other half but I'll run 200 footsteps, then we'll walk. So I did the second half at the same speed, the same time as the first half but in my head I'd finished. I was only running 100/ 200 pace and then walking. A lot of it is just attitude. So often we say we can't do this, we can't do that but we haven't tried and even if you fail, failures a temporary condition. It's giving up that makes it permanent. So just get out there. It's a psychological fact that you and I use up to three times the emotional energy worrying about crossing our bridges before we come to them than the amount of emotional energy it takes to do it. All of you people listening, how many times have you worried about something coming up in your life? When you've done that thing, it nearly always a lot easier than you thought. If that's the case, it's less stress doing new things rather than writing a long list of all the reasons why you can't do it. I'm always amazed Mike that everything I've done has been easier than I thought. Not more difficult.

Mike - Brilliant. What do you believe is the most surprising thing that you've learnt about yourself?

Miles - Mike, I guess as an ordinary person, all of us can do extraordinary things. Again, when I first went blind, I'd never met another blind person. When I came to live in the UK, what amazed me there were other blind people using a white stick or a guide dog living professional, confident, independent lives. I couldn't walk down the street 200 yards to the local shop to buy a loaf of bread on my own, even using my white stick. I thought how the heck can you guys live on your own? Cook, get dressed, use a computer, mobility, getting around but the amazing thing I realised is that if there are other blind people doing it then I can do it. So many things, I guess what surprised me Mike is that I've often said I could never do that. But then when I ask another person or I tried thinking of ways to do it, it's always possible. So my biggest surprise, I've now had the privilege of speaking at over 1000 corporate events in 69 different countries over the last few years. Big global corporate events all over the place and I think well why do people invite a silly blind twit who can't even find his way to the front. But I guess I've realised Mike, this thing called life, we

just have to get on with it. And you and I know as blind people, we can sit back and be a victim, feel sorry for ourselves like I did until the age of 50 or think, ok it may not be fair but there is a lovely Danish proverb that says that life does not consist in holding a good hand of cards, but in playing a poor hand well. And when I went blind I thought God, what have I done to deserve going blind. My brother, with the same hand of cards as me, set an amazing world record, still standing, sailing across the ocean solo. And I was a victim. And I suddenly thought. You know my brother was my big helper to say Miles, start with what you want to achieve. Stop feeling sorry for yourself and thinking it's not my fault. You know Mike, life at its most basic level has only got two components. One is the world going on around us which we can't control but the other part of our world in our head, is in our brains and we've got total control in our heads to our response and attitude. We can't change our blindness, but we can change our attitude to our blindness. And that's what turned me from a victim to being more happy, more fulfilled and more successful now than I've ever been in my life. I'm happier now Mike as a blind man than when I could see. And as the Americans say "Go figure". I don't know how that works but I've never been as fulfilled or contented as I am now.

Mike - That's brilliant. What would be the most ultimate adventure for you Miles? If you could choose one to do, time and money was of no issue, what would be the ultimate adventure?

Miles - I used to tell people maybe going in to space, doing a spacewalk but Mike I'm very claustrophobic so I'd struggle. I'd love to land my microlight on an aircraft carrier. No one's ever landed on an aircraft carrier. That would be a lot of fun. In the UK we haven't got any aircraft carriers at the moment. It would be fun.

I've thought about rowing the Atlantic. They do a race every two years with two to a boat. But you can be away from home 60 or 80 days and for me my two biggest goals in life is trying to succeed as a father and as a husband. They are my two biggest goals. I've been married for 40 years this year and probably 20 times more in love with my wife Stephanie than when we got married. My kids said, dad, thanks for marrying mum. Best mum we could have had in the whole world. I hear them saying to their mum, why did you marry dad? Did you have a bad hair day? But there's a lot of challenges. I'm 68, my last marathon was just a year ago. Age is also just an attitude in our head and as blind people no matter where we are, age wise, there is still a lot to do and the more we keep active, the longer we live and the more fulfilled we are.

Mike - Awesome. What advice would you give to anybody who is considering taking on the adventure lifestyle?

Miles - With my corporate events around the world I guess I'm sharing what I call basic life principles, life lessons that have turned my life around which I'd love to share with your beautiful people listening.

Number 1. Huge thing, remember your quality of life isn't dependent on your circumstances but on your response to them. Your quality of life need not decrease because of your blindness or visual impairment. You have just got to change the way you live. It's just as exciting.

Number 2. Remember nothing in life is impossible. You may just not have done it yet. When my brother wanted to sail to Australia, everyone said Geoffrey it's impossible for a blind person to sail solo to Australia. You're not just a blind man, you're a stupid blind man. But my brother said, no, not impossible, just never been done before. So for you people listening to me now, many things in your life, not impossible, you just haven't done them yet.

Step 3. Start with your dreams, not your circumstances. Stop focusing on your blindness, I'm a blind man, I'm a blind girl. With my blindness what can I expect to do? I start with what I want to do -fly, skydive, scuba dive, forget about the fact that I'm blind. Once I've made the decision, then I figure out what do I have to do differently because I'm blind. It makes a big difference.

Step 4. Face your fears. Don't be afraid of doing things that frighten you. The word for fear in English, FEAR, it stands for false evidence appearing real. Wrong thinking beautiful people in your head, appearing real, I could never do that, oh blind people can't do this. It's false evidence. It may not be a fear in your life Mike, but it can be an attitude, I'm blind therefore I can't do it. It's the wrong attitude. The only way I've done these things is I've had to stop listening to society, friends, family. Oh if you're blind you're not expected to do this or that. So false evidence, change that.

I tell people that Number 5, step outside your circle. If you'd drawn an imaginary circle around where you're standing or sitting now, that represents everything you've done in your life up until now listening to me. When you do something new, like me wanting to go to the South Pole or scuba dive, outside my experience, outside my circle. The only way for that new experience out there to become part of your circle, your circle has to grow, has to expand to make room for it. So the only way I know I'm growing in my life is my circle is growing so for you now, as I said earlier, you've got to do new things. When was the last time you did something for the first time? That gives you more confidence. You know that you're growing. Have a lot of fun of course along the way. Me, at the bottom of the Red Sea with my friend in his wheelchair. Mike, you know we've got to have a sense of humour. If you enjoy what you do for a living, you'll never have to work again. And we don't stop having fun because we get old. We get old because we stop having fun. And all of us as blind people, we do stupid things just walking, messing around, getting things mixed up. Keep a sense of humour. I've learnt that's a critical thing. Team work, you want to do something new. Choose good people. I did a canoe race through the Panama Canal, actually with my son. Four of us to a canoe.84 teams from around the world. There's a team from California, four girls, who came sixth, they beat 78 of the 84 teams. They weren't the strongest but they were united. Make sure you've got good people who are wanting to help you expand.

Mike, a quick thing. I sometimes work with young people who have lost their sight and parents sometimes are the most restrictive. Because as parents we want to protect our kids, don't want you to get hurt. Don't do this you might injure yourself. But if we prevent blind people from doing new things, we're actually forbidding them to experience fulfilment through achievement so often have to say to parents, loved ones - let your kids get out there and experience abseiling, doing this or that. It's not going to kill them. You're restricting their potential to be happy. Teamwork, have

good people with you. You want to try different sports, just start experimenting. Know the blind people in your local club. Just go and ask someone. Friendship - John has been a wonderful guide to me over the years and I guess, closing thing remember that the only limits in your life are those you accept yourself. It's the only life we've got Mike. We're not going to come back as Brazilian Tree Frogs in the next life. So this thing called life, it's a once in a lifetime opportunity. Don't waste it just because you're visually impaired or blind, get out there.

Mike - Before we close Miles, can you please share a few contact details for anybody who would like to find out more about you.

Miles - Mike, yes. In fact I'm just about to get a new website but my current website is miles-hilton-barber.com. You can find me on the internet there. With a hyphen between Hilton and Barber. All my contact details are there. Love to hear from you.

A lot of countries, I haven't spoken in New Zealand yet Mike. If anyone would like me to come. If some of you linkedin, business corporate stuff, I'd love to come along and make a deal and come and speak and perhaps get to meet some of you beautiful people listening.

I'm honoured to be on your podcast, Mike. Thank you very much for your perseverance in chasing me. So let's remember that life isn't measured by the number of breaths that we take, but by those moments that take our breath away. We just have to get out there. Life is for living. And I think you're a wonderful example Mike, through your podcasts of encouraging blind people to push the limits. Again if some of you listening are new to this podcast, go through the other ones that Mike has got up there. He has got an amazing library of encouragement for all of us.

Mike - Miles Hilton-Barber, thank you so much.

Miles - Thank you Mike. God bless you all.

Jingle – You're listening to the blind sport podcast with Mike Lloyd. The sports show that's dedicated to blind sport.

Quotations

OK some quotations for episode 59 that include the word "Miles".

Do the difficult things while they are easy and do the great things while they are small. A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.

If you don't have the right people around you and you're moving at a million miles an hour you can lose yourself.

Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from the corn field.

Smell is a potent wizard that transports you across thousands of miles and all the years you have lived. Helen Keller

Those extreme-sports kids today are good, but they have it easy. Try falling off of a motorcycle going 70 or 80 miles per hour on asphalt. Believe me, nothing equals it. Evel Knievel

My grandmother started walking five miles a day when she was sixty. She's ninety-seven now, and we don't know where the hell she is.

Closing

I hope you enjoyed our chat with Miles Hilton-Barber, because that was so cool.

A huge thank you to Miles for sharing his stories and words of inspiration with us.

If you are planning to take on an adventure of your own then do send me an email and tell me what you're up to.

If you have a story or know of a person who you think would be great to feature on a future show, then contact me and let's make it happen.

Likewise, if you have any comments or opinions on the show then please do fire me off an email. mike@theblindsportpodcast.com

That would be cool.

Contact Jingle - To contact Mike or comment on The Blind Sport Podcast, submit a feedback form from the website www.theblindsportpodcast.com, email Mike@theblindsportpodcast.com, send us a tweet or follow us on Twitter @blindsportmike, or visit The Blind Sport Podcast page on Facebook.

Mike - To help me with the growth of The Blind Sport Podcast I need your help.

If you know of others who may get value from listening to this show, then please do tell them about it.

Tell your friends, your family, your club members, your work colleagues, whether it be face-to-face or via social networks, let's get the word out there.

If we do this together, we can promote the awareness of Blind Sports and make a difference.

OK, that's us for another episode, so train hard, play fair, give it your all and most importantly, enjoy your sport.

Thanks for listening. Take care. See ya.

Closing Announcer - Thank you for listening to another edition of The Blind Sport Podcast. The sports show that's dedicated to blind sport. With Mike Lloyd. Visit theblindsportpodcast.com

End of transcript