

# Transcript- Episode 65 – The Blind Sport Podcast

## Ultra-Runner – Rhonda-Marie Avery

Published: 10 September 2016 at <http://www.theblindsportpodcast.com> where you can download or listen to the audio podcast version.

### Introduction

This is episode 65 of The Blind Sport Podcast entitled Ultra-Runner Rhonda-Marie Avery.

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

In episode 65 we chat with vision impaired ultra-runner Rhonda-Marie Avery from Canada.

This lady has taken on some amazing challenges, including running Canada's 885km Bruce Trail in 20 days. She was also the first vision impaired person to enter the Barkley Marathons in Tennessee, which is an almost impossible to finish 100-mile challenge. And if that wasn't enough, she is now training to do a double Ironman in Florida. Great stuff.

Hi there. Some great news. Lex Gillette who we spoke with in episode 63, won the long jump silver medal at the 2016 Paralympics in Rio. Wahoo! Go Lex. Fantastic!

I would like to thank you for the feedback received re episode 64, where we spoke with US Paralympic sprinter David Brown. some of the comments that I received included:

From Judy. Love David's words. Anything is possible, "the greatest limitation is in your head".

From Adam. It's great to hear about someone who is living their sporting dreams. I wish David all the best.

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](http://www.theblindsportpodcast.com), email [Mike@theblindsportpodcast.com](mailto:Mike@theblindsportpodcast.com), send us a tweet or follow us on Twitter @blindsportmike, or visit The Blind Sport Podcast page on Facebook.

### Interview

We are chatting with vision impaired ultra-runner Rhonda-Marie Avery from Canada.

Rhonda-Marie has taken on some amazing challenges including running Canada's 885km Bruce Trail in 20 days.

She was also the first vision impaired person to enter the Barkley Marathons in Tennessee, which is an almost impossible to finish 100-mile challenge.

And if that wasn't enough, she is now training to do a double Ironman in Florida.

Mike - Rhonda-Marie, Welcome.

Rhonda-Marie - Thanks for having me on.

Mike – Brilliant. Can you start by telling us your personal story of vision loss?

Rhonda-Marie - I didn't actually lose my vision. I guess I was born with 8 percent vision. So the funny part about that is nobody actually sits you down as a toddler and says, by the way you're legally blind. And you don't really know you're any different until someone does so that takes a while to sink in.

Mike – For sure.

Rhonda-Marie – I have Achromatopsia Complete so no cones at the back of my eye, only rods. So daytime vision, colour vision, that sort of detail I'm missing all of that. I do much better at night time and in the dark, relying on rod vision is how I get things done.

Mike – Cool. And how functional is that at night?

Rhonda-Marie – Very functional in the dark. That's what everybody uses in the dark. So I'm pretty well off when it comes to being able to get to where I need to go when the sun's hiding. I can't see colour at all but it does pretty well for what I need it for.

Mike - And from the sporting side of things, were you sporty as a child?

Rhonda-Marie – I would say no. Maybe that's because I was in a mainstream education for a long time and they didn't really know how to make that accessible.

I remember being in public school writing essays on how to play soccer instead of playing soccer because that was easier for everyone.

And I was grateful because I didn't have sunglasses at the time, prescription sunglasses, so being out on a bright field kicking a ball I couldn't see around was not my idea of fun either.

Mike - Yeah, for sure.

Rhonda-Marie - But in High School I went to a school for the vision impaired and then they opened up this whole new world of you can play that, we'll just change the rules a little bit, or change the ball, or have it make sound or make it a different colour so definitely then I started swimming and playing goal ball and floor hockey, that sort of thing. So I had lots of fun but never took anything very seriously, certainly not running.

Mike - What made you do the transition to running? What kicked that off?

Rhonda-Marie – When my youngest son was born, he was particularly, I don't want to use the term high needs, I don't want to label him that but definitely needed more of my time and attention and I felt like in order to best parent, I needed to make sure I took care of myself too.

So he was about a year old and sleeping in 30 minute increments and had been for his entire life and I spent a time talking to Achilles Canada which is a group here that teaches blind and vision impaired and their guide runners to run. You know that one run, one-minute walk. So twice a week I'd spent 20 minutes with them, early, early in the morning when I knew he was sleeping.

Mike - So you went through the whole one-minute walk, one-minute run through to marathons and stuff but what made you push through the marathon barrier and go to the ultra-level?

Rhonda-Marie – I think up until the time I was running a marathon it was always this is the chunk of time I've set aside to run in and here is the goal, here is the training program, here is the.... you can run this morning while the dishwasher is running and then you have to go home and step back into your world and your reality and all of that is a very realistic place for a sport or a hobby.

Then I went to Boston in 2013 so that changed my entire perspective on what running meant to me. It wasn't this thing I did to try and keep in shape or to try and be fast at. It was now more about getting off the road and getting on to a trail and just taking part in the world in a totally different way and an unexpected way.

There aren't many vision impaired trail runners around where I'm from. Although that's changing, which is awesome. I stumbled across this race online which was called Dirty Girls and it was 24 hours long and I thought you just give me a day. I could run as much or as little as I wanted but it's my day and I can do with it, I can run, you know.

So that I think was the biggest transition was just to take it out of this box where it becomes part of your life instead of just a hobby and now it's a passion and I definitely prefer the trail.

Mike - Tell us about this Bruce Trail because that's what, 885kms. 20 days of a marathon a day?

Rhonda-Marie – Yeah. And when you say a marathon a day, you kind of think of whole marathon on a road which takes 4-6 hours, right? On a trail, a marathon can take anywhere from 8 to 14 hours so they were long days.

Mike - For sure. That's huge.

Rhonda-Marie - The Bruce Trail is Canada's oldest, longest foot path. It's part of the Niagara escarpment so it runs from Tobermory all the way to Niagara. And you're right, it's 885kms long if you don't get lost.

I arranged for a group, a community I guess to come together. I had 50 different guide runners, we had billets and we had a crew. Like a truck meet us every ten kms or so. We get up at stupid a clock and start running on the trail in the dark with headlamps. And I'd have a guide runner in front of me the entire time and by the time we were finished the day, we'd cover almost 45-50kms but again that was a good 12-14-hour day because some of the rocks were bigger than your couch and some of the ladders were bolted in to the cliff face and we had to climb through some very interesting spots.

Mike - How did you find the difference in guides as far as you're running with 50 different people? How is the calibre and the style of guiding from all of those people?

Rhonda-Marie - I would say some of them definitely went home and realised they don't ever want to guide. But they were all distance runners so I didn't have to worry about whether or not they could cover the distance. That was the biggest issue. There were some of them I hadn't even met until they showed up the night before or the morning of on the trail. Some people actually met us the morning of. And they got the 5 second lesson, right. This is how you describe the trail, this is the things I need you to say. And as we go through the day you get in to a pattern and you adapt this rhythm that kind of carries you through.

And the terrain was very, very different every day so some days were much harder to describe and much slower moving and they took a lot more patience. And most of the ultra-runners that came and went, they'd say I've run hundreds of hundred mile races and I've been fine, no sleep, no issues with my food and nutrition. Nothing like that, at the end of the day they said that was harder than running a hundred miles because you have to talk the entire time whether they feel like it or not, they are still going to tell you about the rock on the ground.

Mike - Just a general preciseness too. You can't afford them to fade or get it wrong.

Rhonda-Marie - That's right. The moment that I got sleepy it was easy for them to sort of die down in their dialogue too because you're not telling stories as much as you're just saying root, rock. Well, that can mean a million different things on the Bruce Trail. There are sections that are pebble beaches. They go on for 45 minutes long traversing across pebbles that are like the size of cabbage patch dolls. What do you say? Rock, rock? You have to say something or I won't know where you are and I won't know where a safe place to put my foot down is.

Mike - What would be some of the worst conditions in different ultras that you've run in? You obviously get very different levels of weather conditions in Canada so what would be the extremes that you've run in?

Rhonda-Marie - I think in Canada, the Bruce had one day that we were on the top of a ski hill. I had two guides with me and all three of us had hiking poles and there

were thunder storms. And it's very, very exposed on this hill with poles so that made me laugh.

But I had to run the Barkley Marathon in Tennessee so that was definitely an interesting weather condition on the side of the mountain with the wind, so, I don't know, strong and howling. You almost get ripped off the side of the mountain and it got so cold that night. It's not that it was any colder than a Canadian winter but it definitely was cold for what we were doing.

And I've actually put on a race here in Canada in Ontario in the middle of the winter in February. We call it the Oracle Race and we had a minus 42 day for that race.

Mike - So getting to the Barkley, for those people that don't know about Barkley, it's got to be for the insane really surely, isn't it?

Rhonda-Marie - I would say it was my most fun event I've ever done. You have no safety net. If you go to any ultra right now you'd show up and they'd have you sign this waiver and you'd know you'd have food at particular points in the race and people would be watching for you and checking your bid number, making sure you're alive and on course. The Barkley there is none of that.

You don't even know what the course is, it's not marked. You get a map you can draw so my guide was taking his map and tracing. And then six pages of written directions and those things are different every year so it's not like you can even pass down that knowledge. You just have to go and trust your instincts. And the directions are not written in a "turn left at this rock" kind of way. They are like riddles so you have to decipher.

You get a bid with a number that changes every time you loop around, if you're lucky enough to make it in one loop. And your bib number, you have to tear out that page in every book on the course. They have checkpoints. They aren't manned, just a book and usually it's some sarcastic wonderful title in the middle of the bush that you have to find under a rock or in a hollow tree. Because you could have done the course perfectly fine but if you can't find that book and you don't tear out your page, you haven't been there. So you're supposed to circle around this marathon distance course, rip your pages out and come back to the start / finish and do it again. That's why they call it the Barkley Marathons, you do it for 100 miles.

Mike - That's right because it's 100 miles, a maximum of 60 hours but you have to do a loop in 12 hours, is it?

Rhonda-Marie - Yes. I think 13 if you want to do a fun run which is three loops.

Mike - Fun run? Anyone who's interested, look it up. It's an insane, crazy thing but it's awesome. So it's Barkley in Tennessee. Like you said it's pretty rugged terrain, there's no roads, no tracks, no nothing. It's just through the wilderness.

Rhonda-Marie - That's how we knew we were lost. We were on a road.

Mike - Yeah right.

Rhonda-Marie - That can't be right, there's no trails here. Yes.

Mike - And tell us about Christian because I believe you only met your guide the night before?

Rhonda-Marie - That's correct. Yeah, so that was fun. I'd had one phone conversation with him before race start. But he just was brave enough to step up and say we'll figure it out. I've done lots of challenging things, I know that I'm capable of helping this girl so he just came. And it worked out well.

Mike - How did he adapt? Did he pick it up pretty quickly? Well I suppose he had to but how did you find the fact that it was just rugged terrain and no road?

Rhonda-Marie - There was this little single track beside our campsite. It was maybe 100 feet, sort of led off the side. So we did a trial run. My partner Steven was there and he's my typical everyday guide runner so he showed Christian this is how you guide, this is the things that I would say. So we were running this 100 feet of trail just for the sake of illustration and Christian is laughing the whole time. So we finish and he does it and is adapting to the fact that he is going to have to speak every five seconds right. Because it was a basic trail but it was still a single track and there are still roots and rocks and things to call out. I said yeah, you're going to lose your voice like you've been at a concert all night.

So we finish and I said how did that feel and he said fine but where we are going there isn't a trail, there is no way for us to even begin to call things like that but now I know what you kind of need to know each step and we came up with our rhythm. It worked out ok. He had hiking poles as well so that helps in times when you need to be more specific. We're going to cross this creek and here is the rock, tapping it at the same time, that sort of thing.

Mike - I was going to say so you're getting obviously vocal queues and audible queues from his foot placement and his trekking poles?

Rhonda-Marie - That's right, that's right.

Mike - What about the weather conditions because you said they were pretty full on at times. Did that play a part as far as listening to those prompts?

Rhonda-Marie – Oh, for sure. The wind was so loud. I would lose him completely in the mountain climbs. We had one in the middle of the night that took us an hour and a half just to move a few miles right. And the wind was so loud and it was pitch black and not the kind of dark that's the low light and you can see in but just black. Just kept thinking ok I can't hear you, I can't see you but I know we're going up so I'll just aim that way.

Mike - And with Barkley, it's a strange one because you've only got one to two percent people that have ever, ever finished the dam thing so how did you find your outcome because obviously you've joined the ranks of many people that attempted it and didn't get to complete it but how did you find that factor where you couldn't

complete it? Did that drag you down or were you just happy to be able to participate in it or how did you feel?

Rhonda-Marie - It's funny even if I'd finish a race I always tend to feel at the end of it that I could have done better, I should have done better. There is this sort of what could I do to improve that feeling and I think that all ultra runners feel that way and maybe other sport too but definitely in our sport we think if the weather had been different, if I trained differently I could have handled this and for myself I always think if I'd talked to my guide more about what I needed at this time because that's a tough thing. If someone is going to put in 30 hours with you, you want to be very kind to them right. But no, at Barkley when we rolled in to the gate and I had known from two hours in to the race that we weren't going to finish and I knew that it was very unlikely we get a loop but at two hours in a knew we were so lost, there was no way that. I was just laughing. It was the best race I've ever done.

The goal always is.....people joke because they say what's your goal for this 100 mile and I'd say not to die. And they think it's funny because you're going 6 miles to the next aid station where they are going to feed you cupcakes and chicken noodle soup and make sure your water is filled and send you off again on a flagged course to follow along. But at the Barkley it was very, very distinct and humbling that the goal of not dying was legitimately the goal. No safety net.

Mike - It's not like they send out search parties is it?

Rhonda-Marie - No, no. You're on your own.

Mike - So how long would have you had to have been out there before they did?

Rhonda-Marie - So we were back in at 30 hours. They waited another 2 for a group to come in that had just finished one loop. I don't think they would have worried for another maybe 5 or 6 hours after that. And their intense amount of worrying would have been to go and check the books, right, to see if you'd ripped out a page so they could track how far you'd gone by going to the books to see oh yeah, she's been here. Nope, she hasn't been here so she's somewhere between book 4 and book 5, which is hundreds of miles of mountainside.

Mike - What do you think is the balance between physical and mental discipline through these ultras?

Rhonda-Marie - Oh, it's way more mental, way more mental. I would say you can train for anything. Training for an ultra is not like training for a marathon where you increase 10 percent very week and you just keep going. Training for an ultra is much more about knowing you can pick yourself back up when you really just want to crawl in a ball and fade away in to nothing. Stop looking at me, I'm not doing anything cool here. Because you'll talk yourself out of it twenty million times. I think the biggest thing is that you have to just wait because things are going to change. Everything is going to shift and that happens ten minutes at a time. You have to just refocus. You don't make permanent decisions on a temporary feeling. You're going to feel like crap because it's a hundred miles. You just are.

Mike - So what does an average training week consist of for you?

Rhonda-Marie - Usually two or three weeks of higher numbers and then one week of more stretching and more core work and rehab to make sure everything is in check.

So I think last week I might have hit 140kms which it should have been 100 miles so this weekend I'm doing 100 miles. I have three kids and I have work and I have family and life and time gets away from you. But that's not all running, there was two bike rides in there too. I'll swim as well because it's less impact and that also really helps with the breathing in the running. You just get in what you can but I would say that the trick is to run. I always do this various times of day. I like to get up in the dark and run but I always make sure there are other times when I'm running in the middle of the night because you need to be prepared to be tired and go anyways. You run before work, you run after work even if it's just 5kms at each end of the day, you need to know what it feels like. Ok, I've put in my 8 hours of on my feet at work, now go back out again. And yes, it's 30 degrees outside and no I don't care. I'll run when my kids are biking beside me and they're having fun because they are getting out thinking it's active and just engaging and I'm thinking slow down, I can't run that fast.

Mike - Yeah, for sure. So how much training can you do by yourself?

Rhonda-Marie - Well that depends on the time of year. Right now the sun is coming out by 5.30 I need my sunglasses on so usually I'm up by 3.30 and then out the door by 4am – 4.15am.

Otherwise a few of my friends, maybe 2 or 3, that I can rotate through a week and they will come and meet me so if I need the long runs, I'll leave early, do an hour by myself and then they'll meet me to do another hour and then again they go back after work. But I'd say maybe I can get through 20 percent of my training on my own, the running part of my training on my own.

If I'm swimming or biking on the trainer in the basement, all of that I can do on my own. It's just boring. A tandem bike is much more fun.

Mike - Are you naturally a competitive person?

Rhonda-Marie - No, not even, no. I would say I'm far better at if you tell me I can't do something then I'll make sure I do. But if you put me in a start line and say "I can run faster than you", I'd say you're very true, you're bang on. I can't run that fast. But I promise you at the finish line I could still go another 5kms. It's all I've got going for me. No, not competitive. I'm just here to make waves.

Mike - So what's the motivator for you?

Rhonda-Marie - I think when I started trail running there was five blind trail runners in North America. There are way more now, easily ten or fifteen of us that I know the names of and they are doing wonderful things and I think my push, my goal is always the same. Just people need to see disability in mainstream. It can't be something as an afterthought. It can't be this marginalised to this little pocket of.....yeah, look



what you can do. It needs to be something that's expected and accepted and given space. I wish that I was a faster, stronger runner, biker, swimmer whatever because I would be a better example for these things but I'm definitely just a plod along and get it done eventually but I think as the numbers of trail running community, the ultra-running community are growing of vision impaired or disabled in general, that you're getting more of that. You're getting the competition. And you see the elites in the Para sports, right in the actual Paralympics but beyond that we are just weekend warriors all the time but people don't even see that. My goal is to make it seen.

Mike - Very cool. Have you ever been in an event where you've thought I've might have bitten off a little more than I should have?

Rhonda-Marie - Oh, if you haven't then you shouldn't be there.

Mike - Good answer.

Rhonda-Marie - I would say I seek them out for that reason. So in March I'm going to Orlando to do a double ANVIL. The organisers there tell me that no vision impaired athlete has ever attempted this event, the double Ironman. They asked me my kind of training. I've gone for long rides, I've done 24-hour tandem bike races, that kind of thing and I've gone for long open water swims. I've done 13kms in the water, tethered to someone else. I run lots but usually taking breaks in the middle. Like the Bruce Trail, I got to go to bed every day. Even if it was only for four hours, I still got to go to bed. But I've never done an Ironman. I've never even done an Olympic Triathlon. I'm definitely biting off more than I can chew.

Mike - So that's a double full Ironman, yeah?

Rhonda-Marie - Yeah, 36 hours to do 4.8 miles of swimming, 224 miles of biking and 53 miles of running.

Mike - And do you do each discipline in one chunk?

Rhonda-Marie - Yes. I definitely have a training plan. This is the first time that I've distinctly printed out this day I'm supposed to do these things and it's not my strong suit to follow these because life is so busy you fit stuff where you can.

And the pool doesn't tend to be open at 3am in the morning unfortunately. So I've done one open water swim race just to get that feeling of being tangled up with other people. You're tied to your swimmer so you need to make sure the crowd knows don't swim between us and you have to strategize with your guide swimmer about how you're going to do the turns, how you're going to handle different things and I've run with this girl once, she just showed up at the beach and said yeah I'm ready, we'll go. And we did fine. It wasn't fast, it wasn't fantastic but we didn't die and had fun and could have kept swimming if we had wanted to.

And then I've got a tandem bike so just been putting around on that whenever I get someone that's convinced to try.

Mike - What can you remember as far as one of your more comical or funny moments?

Rhonda-Marie - There have been tons. I've had the most interesting things come out of guide runner's dialect when they are talking. I was running with two girls one day on roads and the one girl runs ahead. She says you guys just keep going. I'm going to run ahead and pick up the pick axe.

And I've been in the middle of races, road races and I've been told with one step warning you need to jump now because there is road kill in your step, you have to jump, right now. And I've been on the Bruce Trail, I would say we'd have a pit stop and I'd say ok I'm going to go on the trail just a few feet because I have to water a tree and then I'd call my crew back in and then I'd realised two feet from where I'd sort of sat to pee on the side of the trail there was there was this big snake curled up and I didn't see it. I had no idea it was there.

Mike - How do you think endurance sports have helped you grow as a person?

Rhonda-Marie - It's definitely increased my patience about 100 times. That's for sure. I think with disability, again right back to the beginning, you don't know that you're disabled until someone makes a point of telling you. And then all of a sudden your immersed in this different, you're different, you're other, you can't, you don't fit. There is this distinct, I don't know. And I have very little patience for someone painting me in a corner and saying that I can't and I don't just because maybe they think that's my limit or my boundary.

So ultra running, you're spending a great time of deal in your head. These races are 30 hours long so you have time to really examine what does that mean to me and how am I going to try and break free of that and if this is how I'm feeling with one "disability", everybody has their own stuff. Whether it's, you know, a family issue or a mental health concern or work related or money related. Everybody has their own thing, their own block, whatever is holding them back and you get to decide how much time and effort you want to spend in that place versus working your way out of that place and now I think I have a great deal more patience for things will change and as long as you're working towards a good strategy, that's all you can do.

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

Rhonda-Marie - I never ever once thought that I could run 900kms. That definitely was surprising. I knew that I needed to. I knew that everyone that was coming to help me needed to. But never once did I think, oh yeah, 1000kms, let's do that.

I think that the most surprising thing is just that you can train for just about anything but that doesn't mean that when you show up for an event you're at a particular level of endurance or strength or speed. It just means that you're still you. You can change your attitude. You can change your physique in terms of this where I'm capable of enduring for this length of time. You can do all of these mental preps and checks but at the beginning of the day of the event, the start line, you're still just you.

All the bits and pieces you've rearranged to make it possible, you had them all along. And the idea that, when I give talks that is usually one of the first things that I say. Every tool that you need to accomplish your next big thing, you already have. Even if one of those tools is asking someone else for their help and input, you still have it. You just haven't figured out how to access it yet.

So that's probably been the most surprising - belief, self-belief.

Mike - Now, do you have a favourite quotation or saying that you like to use or like to pull out when things get tough?

Rhonda-Marie - I have a couple of them. The first one I alluded to already. Wait ten minutes. Because in the middle of an ultra-run you go through this up and down and honestly, you have to wait because things are going to change. So at the beginning you think I'm running great, this is fantastic. It's cool so far. Not super-hot out. Nothing is chaffing yet, no blisters yet, feeling great. I could run for hours. Just wait for ten minutes, you're about to start feeling awful.

And then your right leg will start complaining because you've been doing all these right hand down hills and can't imagine how you're going to keep doing this for another 90 miles and you get stuck in that "It hurts, it hurts, it hurts" mentality so tell yourself wait ten minutes because you know, your stomach is going to go and you're not going to be able to eat anything and then when that happens you forget about your legs. And now you're stuck in this "I really want to eat. But I can't, I can't digest anything. I don't know how I'm going to keep going if I can't maintain my nutrition".

Well wait ten minutes because you're going to get a blister on your left baby toe and that will start rubbing and it will feel awful and that's all you'll be able to think about. But while that's all you're able to think about, you'll start eating again and that will settle down.

And then, you know, if that gets too overwhelming, you remind yourself again, just wait ten minutes when you're at 90 miles and you think, only 10 miles to go, almost done. Well wait ten minutes because that last 10 miles takes the longest that you've ever expected, it's so long. Yeah I think that's probably the big one. Wait ten minutes.

And then the other one I've pulled out before is "It doesn't get easier". Like it doesn't. You run five kms, you think I'm going to warm up, I'm going to get in to this pace, I'm comfortable, I'm content, I'm happy, oh look a star. That's my race because I don't sprint things. But to run 100 miles, it doesn't get easier. Every time you hit another mile marker, you've run that much your legs have accumulated that much distance already, they've already been through 60, 70, 80 miles. It doesn't get easier. But it does get done.

And if you can remind yourself that there is an end, there is a finish to this, then you can look back on it and maybe tweak a few things in your training for the next time. Yeah, it doesn't get easier but it definitely does get done.

Mike - Can you tell us about your Envisions Project?

Rhonda-Marie - That was an interesting turn of events. Once I finished the Bruce Trail, people were in-boxing me and saying you know I'm vision impaired and I'd like to try and obstacle race or I'd like to train for this or go through the Grand Canyon. What should I do? I don't know where to start? And I kept thinking I have no idea. All I did was stand up one day and say who would run 45kms with me for no good reason.

So I thought if I got a community together that was empowering other communities to embrace making things accessible in sport then we could work together to create some type of optimistic change and open doors and make these things happen, make it more mainstream to have disability and sport in the same sentence.

I mean my dream is when you turn on Sportsnet and five of the top ten stories have an athlete with a disability and they haven't told you at the beginning of the story that this is a disabled athlete. It's just mainstream, we're just talking about it like its sport. And I don't think it needs to be so hidden and marginalised.

So Envisions Project has, this is the race I was telling you about in the winter. We hosted this trail race that had an almost accessible.....I say that lovingly.....we had an all-terrain wheelchair on our 5km course but it still was minus 40 and it still was snowy but that definitely managed to get through. We had two or three vision impaired on course, and then we had three elective blindfolded runners just to see what that was like on our 15km course.

Everything that could have gone wrong went wrong because I've never race directed before in my life and its minus 40. So, but nobody died. And we learned lots. I think the idea was to bring together all disabilities and abilities in to one event and did not separate them, just to give people what they needed, right, to get through the course and let them experience the race for what it was.

We were trying to do that with a bunch of other projects, so Envisions is trying to take blind runners through the Grand Canyon. We're organising, trying to make that happen. We are trying to get guides to help with that and training techniques and it's not a particularly easy thing to go up to a company and say we'd really like to use your poles but can we adapt them a little bit, that sort of thing has been interesting.

Mike - Cool.

Rhonda-Marie: So Envisions has tried to make different projects work for all abilities.

Mike - Excellent. And for anybody who wants to follow Envisions or follow what you're up to as well, Rhonda-Marie, can you share a few contact details with us?

Rhonda-Marie - Envisions Project has a website [envisionsproject.com](http://envisionsproject.com). I'm on Twitter @ramavery. I'm on Instagram, @batgirl78. The batgirl comes from the seeing at night. I'm on Facebook, same thing, up to fiascos there. And I think you could email me just as easy through the Envisions website, it comes to me. So if you have any questions, we're connected to a few different countries, different

pockets of how people are dealing with disability in sport so if you're looking to get involved whether it's as a disabled athlete or as a guide, there are definitely people we can connect. I would recommend getting in touch.

Mike - Brilliant. Thank you so much for joining us. This has been awesome.

Rhonda-Marie - Thanks for the time.

**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 65.

"If you are going through hell, keep going."

"It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop."

"It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we must do what is required."

"Continuous effort - not strength or intelligence - is the key to unlocking our potential."

"Dripping water hollows out stone, not through force but through persistence."

"Courage is not having the strength to go on; it is going on when you don't have the strength."

### **Closing**

I hope you enjoyed our chat with Rhonda-Maree That was pretty awesome.

A huge thank you to Rhonda-Marie for sharing her stories and experiences with us. We look forward to following your success.

If you too are into running off-road or ultra-distances, 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 do 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](mailto:mike@theblindsportpodcast.com)

Nice one.

**Contact Jingle** - To contact Mike or comment on The Blind Sport Podcast, submit a feedback form from the website [www.theblindsportpodcast.com](http://www.theblindsportpodcast.com), email [Mike@theblindsportpodcast.com](mailto: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](http://theblindsportpodcast.com)

End of transcript