



## RIP ESSELSTYN INTERVIEW *The Engine 2 Diet & Plant-Strong*

By Chris Wark

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## RIP ESSELSTYN INTERVIEW

### *The Engine 2 Diet & Plant-Strong*

What's up, everybody? It's Chris, from Chris Beat Cancer. And today I'm sitting with the legend, Rip Esselstyn. He doesn't like being called a legend clearly. But he is an amazing fellow. And I'm going to tell you a little bit about him because I memorized his bio. So, you can give me an A, B, C, D...

Rip: I'll do that.

Chris: F-minus. Let's see how we do. He was a world-class triathlete. He became a firefighter in Austin and helped his firehouse convert to a plant-based diet. And helped guys on your fire squad lose weight and reverse some chronic disease. And as a result of that experience, wrote a bestselling book called *The Engine 2 Diet*. Engine 2 was your firehouse. Yes. And from there, I think your world kind of exploded, right? And you've written multiple bestselling books since then?

Rip: Yup.

Chris: A book called *Plant-Strong, Engine 2 Diet Recipe Book, Engine 2 Diet Seven-Day Rescue*. And was an executive producer for *The Game Changers*. Some of you have seen it. If you haven't, you've got to see *The Game Changers*. Amazing movie. And you recently became a world record holder in the 200-meter backstroke in your age group – 50 to 59.

Rip: 55 to 59.

Chris: Ah! So close. Alright. So what do I get? A-minus?

Rip: Oh, well, no, actually I'll give you a B on that. So, as far as the books... So the first book was called *The Engine 2 Diet*. That came out in 2009. And then in 2013, came out with, it was first called *My Beef with Meat*. That was the initial title. And then, we changed it in 2016 to *Plant-Strong*. I felt *My Beef with Meat* was a little too edgy. And who wants to be seen on an airplane with a book called *My Beef with Meat*? Right? Especially in a culture that is going to kind of frown upon that currently. And so, yeah. So, *My Beef with Meat / Plant-Strong*. Third book, *The Engine 2 Seven-Day Rescue Diet*. And then the last book is called *The Engine 2 Cookbook*, that I did with my sister.

Chris: That's the most recent. And you have a new podcast.

Rip: And I have a new podcast called *The Plant-Strong Podcast*.

Chris: So, I get bonus points for that.

Rip: That takes you from a B to an A.

Chris: Okay. Awesome. And the podcast has done really well. New and noteworthy. I mean, how many... 600,000+ downloads.

Rip: In season one. And now, we're about eight episodes into season two. And we'd like to have each... Each season has a theme. And in season one, there was a Bronx firefighter named Joe Inga who reached out to me because he was about 80 or 90 pounds overweight. He was pre-diabetic. He had tried eating plant-based and failed for like four years in a row. He just said, "Rip, I don't know where else to go. I'm also a recovering alcoholic." And so, we just took Joe. And we had Joe kind of be the theme throughout the season. And everybody I brought on, it was like, "Hey, we're helping Joe Inga." But by helping Joe, we're also helping every Joe and Jane that's out there.

And so, whether it was my father, whether it was Dr. Klaper, Dr. Lyle, you name it, we're all talking about how we're going to save Joe Inga so he can keep his job as a Bronx firefighter. And the good news is, over the course of the first season, he lost almost 60 pounds. And all of his blood work is just phenomenal now. And when I first talked to him, he said, "Other than firefighting, I can't remember the last time I did anything resembling exercise in almost like 12 years." So I said, "Alright, you're going to do a triathlon at the end of the season." He was like, "No, I can't. I can't do that." And he did. He did a triathlon. It's all videoed. It's one of the last episodes where we actually captured the video of it.

And so, the second season, the theme is around the heart of a hero. And we went into the city of Pittsburgh, who was interested in doing this for a lot of their police and fire, doing the seven-day rescue challenge. And so, they did this. And now we're reaching out to just people that have the heart of a hero, that are changing the game and really doing amazing things to move the needle in the plant-based movement.

Chris: That's awesome.

Rip: Which is why I'd love to obviously have you on the podcast.

Chris: We'll do it. Yes. So how did you discover nutrition? I mean, you're the son of Caldwell Esselstyn, who a lot of my audience knows. I interviewed your dad a couple of years ago. And he wrote a book called *How to Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease*. But how did that happen? Like, did you get into nutrition before him? Did he get into it before you? Who influenced who? How did it happen? Cause usually, you know, fathers and sons don't typically follow the same life path. Right? And obviously you didn't go into medicine. But you're both pretty healthy eaters.

Rip: Well, it's interesting you say that because I did not go into medicine. Right? On career day I would go with my dad and go into the operating

room and wear the scrub gear. And I'd sometimes go when he saw patients. And I just was like, "You know what? This isn't for me. I don't have a real passion for it." So medicine was never on my radar. But as far as the nutrition is concerned, yeah 100% it was my father that got me interested in nutrition. I mean, before my father, the whole family, up until 1984, ate the standard American diet. We ate roast beef, bacon and eggs, all the junk. And then, that all changed when he started his research in 1984 at the Cleveland Clinic. I was away at college. So, I continued to eat just God awful until I graduated. And once I graduated in 1986-ish, my dad already had proof of concept that he was able to reverse heart disease in some of his patients. And I wasn't so arrogant, even at the age of 23, to think that I was bulletproof. My grandfather, my father's father, had his first heart attack at 42.

Chris: Yeah, that's my age...

Rip: Yup. And my father grew up on a dairy farm and they were drinking copious amounts of milk and butter and sour cream, and eating steaks. I mean, the farm that my father grew up on was first a dairy farm. And then, it was a black Angus farm.

Chris: Big beef farm, big producers.

Rip: Big beef dairy farm. So, the fact that my father, literally like that, turned the switch and changed the way he and my mother ate, I was inspired. But I didn't follow their lead until I graduated from college and was able to cook for myself. And then, I started a 10-year career as a professional triathlete and fueled myself with this smarter fuel, with this anti-inflammatory fuel.

Chris: So, your entire triathlon career was plant-based?

Rip: All plant-based.

Chris: Yeah. That's awesome.

Rip: Yup. And that started in 1987 and went until 97. And then, that's when I became a firefighter.

Chris: Got it. And why did you go into firefighting?

Rip: So, I had spent 10 years being my own boss and gallivanting around the globe – swimming, biking, and running.

Chris: That's a lot of freedom.

Rip: A lot of freedom. Loved it. And then, the thought of getting a nine-to-five desk job seemed excruciating. It felt like prison, in some ways. And I had some buddies who were firefighters that were also track athletes. And

they're like, "Dude, come on. Be a firefighter. It is like rocking fun. It's like a big sleepover. You cook at the fire station. And you go out."

Chris: "And you keep your trucks super shiny and spotless."

Rip: "And you go out like 10 to 15 times, every 24-hour shift. You do all these good deeds. You fight fires, you're saving people, helping people."

Chris: Were you a paramedic as well?

Rip: I was an EMT. I wasn't a paramedic. I didn't get that level of medical training. And the fact of the matter is, 95% of all of the medical calls that we make, all you need is your basic EMT skills. I can't remember where I was going now.

Chris: Well, your buddies talked you into it, it sounds like.

Rip: Yeah. So, I did a ride out. I was like, "This is like a fun culture." And I loved the fact that no two shifts were ever the same. You're working with a bunch of people where it's a family and it's a team. And I missed that because being a triathlete for 10 years, it was in some ways very isolating and very lonely work. Even though I would train with people, ultimately it was very, very solitary stuff. So, I was fortunate enough, you know... It took me three years to get on board with the Austin fire department.

Chris: Really? A lot of demand? Competition? And plus, I mean, there's a lot of young guys. Right? Going straight into the fire. Like 18 years old.

Rip: Oh yeah.

Chris: You were fit enough to get in.

Rip: I was certainly fit enough, but the cutoff, you couldn't be over 35 years of age. I was 33 and a half when I got on. So, I started trying to get on when I was 31. The first time I applied, there were 4,000 people applying for 12 spots.

Chris: Geez, man, that's a lot of competition.

Rip: Easier to get into Harvard than to become an Austin firefighter. So, I didn't get on the first year. I didn't get on the second year. And then, the third year, they changed the testing procedures a little bit. It wasn't just as a civil service exam – a 100 multiple choice civil service exam. Where if you're ex-military, you get five extra points. This time that I took it, it was a physical agility course. It was an interview. It was a civil service exam.

And then, it was also this other funky test called the B-pad where you're watching a simulated call where you climb up a ladder and there's a little

girl that's screaming, "Help me! Help me!" And then, you have to respond. And you're being videotaped at the same time. You have eight of these scenarios that you have to respond to. So, one's a little girl like yelling from a room where there's flames behind her. Another one, you're driving the fire engine, your buddy's helping you back it up. And all of a sudden this ball rolls, he gets distracted, and then you bump into another car. And then he goes, "Hey, man, don't worry about it. I'm not going to tell anybody." And then, you've got to respond. And of course you don't say, "Cool, man. Nobody's going to know." What you say is, "Now, listen. It was our bad. Obviously you got distracted. So, we've got to let everybody know. Got to be above board on this."

Chris: Yeah. I mean, what idiot is going to be like, "Okay. Yeah. Let's take off."

Rip: Oh no, no. I've talked to some of the people that grade the B-pads. They grade them and they say, "You wouldn't believe how many people go, 'Your secret's safe with me, dude.'" I mean, obviously they're not getting on.

Chris: One of my best friends in the world, his name is Tony Dixon, and he's a firefighter outside of Nashville in Brentwood. And so, I hear a lot of stories from him. And he actually joined the fire department late too, in his late twenties. And yeah, he was not a triathlete going in. And so, he was like, "Dude, I'm trying to keep up with all these 18 and 19 year old guys!" But he did, he did get in. But yeah, there was not nearly as much competition. I mean, that's wild.

Rip: It is wild. But the fact is, you're 24 hours on you're 48 hours off. When I got on, the pay was peanuts. I mean, I got on and as a rookie, I was making like \$18-19,000 a year.

Chris: And that much competition for such a low... I mean, you were making more as a triathlete, I'm sure.

Rip: Yes, I was. Not much, but I was making more. But then, the greater number of years of service you have, and then when you promote... The pay now is like phenomenal. You come in now as a firefighter and starting pay is like \$70k, which is not bad. And the great thing about like Austin and some of these fire departments is, you put in 20+ years and now you've got a really amazing retirement.

Chris: Right. And that's where my buddy's at. He's getting there. Promotions and a lot of certifications. And he's got his eye on retirement. And getting fully vested and all that. Yeah. No, that's a good gig.

Rip: It's a great gig. It's a great profession. And the firefighters are such down to earth, big hearted, wonderful human beings. A lot of times firefighters are crusty on the outside, but they are soft and cuddly and wonderful on

the inside. They truly are. They're a special breed. And that's why the fraternity and sorority of firefighters across the globe is so strong.

Chris: Well, what you're doing... I feel like I'm jumping ahead. But I want to say this before I forget. Firefighters – I'm sure you know this, but my audience, I imagine, doesn't – have a higher risk of cancer. Because of the chemicals and smoke and stuff they're exposed to.

Rip: A lot of toxins.

Chris: Yeah. A lot of toxic stuff out there, especially when it's on fire. And so, what you're doing – really reaching the fire community and many more people as well with the healthy diet – is protective. It's going to help prevent a lot of those cancers. And so, that's really admirable too.

Rip: Yeah. No doubt about it. When you're fueling yourself with all these same foods that I fueled myself as a triathlete for performance, but now you're doing it as a human being, as a firefighter, you're giving yourself the best possible chance to ward off these carcinogens that you're being exposed to. And these foods that are so high in antioxidants and phytonutrients, that are going to ward off the free radical damage and the oxidative stress that we're all exposed to as firefighters. And I had buddies that went down to 9/11, and helped when those towers went down. And the number of fatalities that has occurred from the firefighters that were there working at ground zero, the number of lung issues, cancers, it's tragic.

Chris: It is tragic. I know, I've seen a lot of those headlines. And it's like, "Man." I mean, it's like an impossible situation to be in, as a first responder. Police officers, too, are dealing with a lot of that. And the medics. I mean, everybody that was trying to help in the moment is now suffering a lot of consequences.

Well, so talk about what happened in the fire station. Cause you're the super healthy traveling guy, plant-based guy, showing up. Right? Like how long did it take you to indoctrinate and pull some people on board? Because I mean, like you said earlier, a lot of these guys... I mean, you know, they're cooking out, cooking burgers and steaks, and like hanging out. It's kind of a big part of that culture.

Rip: Yep. Big time. So, when I got done with the Fire Academy, which is six months long, I immediately went to Fire Station 1, which is the animal house of all fire stations. It's in the heart of downtown. It's also a water rescue station, cause the Colorado River is literally right near it. And there's just a lot of incidences there sometimes.

Chris: Kayakers or whatever....

Rip: Kayakers, boaters, swimmers, wind surfers, stuff like that. And I have such a strong swimming background that I was like, "I mean, I might as well do that." But it was also, and I say this in the nicest way, kind of a toxic environment. There were two engines, a ladder company, and EMS unit. So at any point in time there are 18 people, typically guys, that were on shift. And it was a zoo.

Chris: Too big?

Rip: Too big. You're up all night. The alarm is always going off. Meal times... I did not eat on the wagon. So, if you're on the wagon... And you want to be on the wagon, ideally, because if you're on the wagon....

Chris: That's the firetruck?

Rip: No, the wagon is like the dinner table. We're all eating together. So it's like, "Are you on the wagon or off the wagon?"

Chris: That means, "Are you eating with us?"

Rip: Yes. "Are you eating with us?" And I wasn't going to eat that stuff. And luckily, I was almost 34 when I got on board. So, I wasn't going to be intimidated by all these veterans that were basically calling me every name in the book, belittling and ridiculing. But I had some pretty thick skin, so I just put up with it. But I was there almost five years, at Fire Station 1. And I remember one of the guys, the first day, came up to me. He got this far from my face and said, "You little vegetarian piece of shit. You won't last three months. The last vegetarian didn't last one week." And I'm like, "Yeah, I know. You're probably right." Right? So, five years later, I'm still doing my thing.

Chris: They didn't think you wouldn't last eating that way? Or wouldn't last as a fireman?

Rip: No, I wouldn't last eating that way. And we actually became friends. And after a while, you win people's respect when you stand for your beliefs and what you believe in. But after five years, I decided I didn't want to be awake 24 hours. And that was enough. I'd put in my time. So, I went to Fire Station 2, which was what we call a single horse station. Just one engine. So, there were five of us there. And that was in 2001 that I went to Fire Station 2. And some of the guys from Station 1 that I worked with came with me to Fire Station 2.

This is a long way of letting you know that it wasn't until 2003. And one of the guys that I'd been working with since I got in, in 1998, decided to eat the same way I did. And that was JR. And then all the guys at the station. But I mean, it took six years of watching me, seeing how I perform, and believing in me. And then, one of them having this rocket

high cholesterol that kind of pushed everybody over the edge to eat this way.

Chris: This is a really important point right here. Okay? Because so many people in the health and wellness community want to evangelize. They want to spread the word. They want to spread the message. Like, "Food can help your body heal. Food can prevent chronic disease." But usually, the people that you want to help the most are the people you can't help because they don't want to change. But time changes things. And if you stay the course and you set an example, eventually there will be a time when people finally acknowledge that, "Okay. They're onto something. And I should probably figure out what it is they're onto." And that's your opportunity. And so, I just wanna encourage everybody watching. I know how you feel when you have people in your life that you want to help and they won't listen to you. But they'll come around. It just takes some time. It took six years, you said, for you. And it took several years in my world, too.

Rip: And the truth of the matter is, sometimes they never come around. And it can be the people that are closest to you in your life. So, just to give you an example, my wife's parents, they've been exposed to this since I met my wife when we were dating in 2002. And they both have perished and passed away, one from a heart attack and one from a lot of other complications due to not being healthy.

Chris: What age range?

Rip: Early seventies. And here they are, they know me. They know my father. They know my mother, my sister. They're at ground zero, when it comes to plant-based nutrition, and wanted nothing to do with it.

Chris: You've got to let them go.

Rip: You do what you can. And then, like with JR... He was like, "Alright, let's do this." Right?

Chris: What was his motivation? Was he overweight?

Rip: So, his motivation was... We had a little bet to see who had the lowest cholesterol level. So, we went and we got tested. And JR's was 344.

Chris: That's a tough one to beat.

Rip: 344 at 33. And his great grandfather and his grandfather perished of heart disease before the age of 50. And then, his father had triple bypass at 49.

Chris: And what did he look like, physically? Was he fit-ish?

Rip: So, JR was fit. He didn't look bad. I mean, he could lose maybe 10, 15 pounds. And he did after I challenged him to do this for 28 days.

Chris: But that goes to show that you can look pretty healthy....

Rip: You can look like a Ferrari on the outside. But lift up the hood and, "Whoa. Hey. We've got some issues here." And his blood work was indicative of that. But he was also a self-proclaimed third generation redneck. So, every meal had to have a big glob of meat on it. Preferably deep fried.

Chris: A lot of fried chicken or whatever.

Rip: Yeah. So, I like to say he had several strikes against him. A) he had a genetic predisposition to heart disease. B) he was a firefighter. And the number one cause of in the line of duty deaths for firefighters is heart disease. And then, C) as an American, 50% of us are perishing from heart disease. So, he didn't have very good odds. So, he decided to do something about it. And we started that in 2003, with just the 28-day challenge. And then, that led to all kinds of media attention and the New York Times doing a big article. And then, me getting solicited by literary agents and publishing houses to write a book. And that was when I decided to write *The Engine 2 Diet*. Because the whole genesis of everything that we did started at Engine 2 with a little bet to see who had the lowest cholesterol level. The most unlikely place imaginable: a firehouse in Texas.

Chris: Yeah. And you had all 5 guys for 28 days?

Rip: Well we had all five guys doing it for a month while they were on shift, while they were at the station. Except for JR.

Chris: So, they could eat whatever they wanted at home?

Rip: Except for JR. He was also doing it outside. And then everybody gradually started doing it. But I mean, this went on for years. We became known as the plant-based fire station in Austin, Texas. And when somebody left the firehouse, either because they were promoted or they retired, we had a list this high of applicants wanting to come in and take their spot. Because people wanted to be part of this healthy culture.

Chris: They were like, "I want to be on a firetruck with Rip!"

Rip: And we also worked out hard. We did a nice CrossFit workout every afternoon. I mean, we were hardcore into it. And then, that's when Forks Over Knives came and they said, "Hey, can we do a little story about you guys at the fire station?" It took an act of God to get the cameras in there for them to film. But it happened. I think that was in 2008, maybe.

Chris: Why was it so hard to get the cameras in there?

Rip: You go to any fire station in the country and it's almost impossible to get media in there.

Chris: Just cause the firemen don't want to do it or...?

Rip: No, no, no. Just because the higher ups don't want any interest in it.

Chris: Interesting. Okay.

Rip: And it's unfortunate because especially in this case, this is going to help so many people. I mean, the reality is, this is going to help and save more people than anything else when they can get the message to eat more plants. And the sad reality is, after this crew came in... Well, after the New York Times article came out in 2006, we had so many people wanting to come and do documentaries and do different whatever... And after *The Game Changers* filming that happened in like 2007, 2008, the higher ups at the fire station put a moratorium on any more media at Fire Station 2. Their quote was, "We want to see this whole plant-based story ride off into the sunset and be done with it." And of course, that pissed the shit out of me.

Chris: Yeah. Right. I'm sure.

Rip: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. But I got the last laugh in some ways. Right? I wrote the book. I've made this my mission. There's fire departments all over the country and the world now that are embracing this lifestyle.

Chris: And it's so much bigger than that.

Rip: Yeah. And now, look at *The Game Changers*, right? I'm working with FDNY, some of the most iconic firefighters in the world, and they took the seven-day rescue challenge. So, we're getting offers, we're getting knocks on the door, to have fire departments all over the United States and the world that want to do this with their department.

Chris: So, let's talk about *The Game Changers*. Because that movie has drawn a lot of criticism. Right? It seems like a lot of the meat lovers....

Rip: I haven't heard much of the criticism. You'll have to share it with me. I only hear the good stuff. I only hear, "Oh my God. It's amazing. It changed my life. It's amazing." I mean, then of course you've got the Joe Rogans and the guys that he brings in there. But I take all that with a big grain of salt.

Chris: Right. Well, yeah. And so, there's a handful of guys that just, if you step back and wonder why would they be so trying to pull this movie apart – and we'll talk about what the movie is – it's because most of them have

written diet and health books that advocate eating meat. And so, they have to defend it. Like they've got to defend their book, no matter when it came out. Like, "I said, paleo was good. My paleo book," or whatever. So, anyway, I know there hasn't been a whole lot of backlash. And most of it's been amazing. But talk about the movie. Like what was the point of this movie? Because there's a lot of movies about plant-based eating.

Rip: Well, this was extraordinary because, really, the one goal of this movie was to dispel the whole myth that real men eat meat. And that you need meat for protein, for optimal health, and to be big and strong. And so, by basically obliterating that whole belief, we're now reaching (for the most part) men who are a really, really hard, tough audience to reach. Like firefighters. Why it took almost six years for that to happen at Fire Station 2.

And *The Game Changers* does it through, to me, a really cool lens. It's through the lens of James Wilks, who's a former mixed martial artist – boxer/fighter. And he goes on this search for the truth in nutrition. And he goes all over the globe. And he's interviewing some of the best athletes on the planet that are plant-based. From strong men to endurance people, like Scott Jurek, world's strongest man Patrick Baboumian, a lot of the Tennessee Titans football players...

Chris: I'm in Memphis, Tennessee. And I was surprised to see that. I was like, "Whoa, Titans are plant-based? Some of these guys?" It's awesome.

Rip: Yep. And then, the quality in which it was done... He was able to get Louis Psihoyos to be the director of the film. And Louis already won an Oscar for *The Cove* in 2011. So, he's a stud. And then, you were able to get people like James Cameron involved as executive producer, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. So, there was a lot of plant-based muscle that was behind this push. Not only in raising the required money to make this be the documentary it was, but also in helping devise a good strategy to get it out there. And they've done a brilliant job getting it out there. It's now on Netflix. And it's been on Netflix since October 16th, 2019. What I've heard is, in just four months, it's the fourth most downloaded documentary on Netflix ever.

Chris: Nice.

Rip: And it's only been out five months.

Chris: If haven't seen it, you should join the club and watch it.

Rip: Yeah. It was the number one most downloaded documentary on iTunes. And it achieved that really fast. In one week. Achieved that distinction in one week. So, this documentary will far and away have more eyeballs on it than any documentary ever in the history of civilization. That is exciting because, to me, we need this more than any other time if we

want to have a civilization moving forward in the next 20, 30, 40, 50 years.

Chris: Yeah. I love the way you explained it because that's pretty much the way I've explained it to people too. And the handful of people that have tried to criticize or attack this movie or pick it apart, are missing the big picture. They're missing the message. And first of all, the myth is, as you said, that you have to eat animal protein to be fit, to be strong, to be healthy, to excel at a world class level as an athlete. And so, this movie shows you all of these incredible athletes who are just like kicking butt at their sports. And they're completely fueled by plants.

And then you're thinking, "Wait a second. If the world's strongest man, or one of the world's strongest men, Patrick Baboumian is not eating meat, what do I need it for? If he doesn't need it, why do I need it?" And that's the light bulb. And I love it so much. I'm so glad it's out there because, again, there's still so many people that think meat is healthy, or they need it to be healthy, or they need animal protein. That aren't even athletes. And then, you've got a whole bunch of athletes that think they need it too, because they're athletes. It's reaching both.

Rip: *The Game Changers* will truly be a game changer. Right.

Chris: I have no doubt. It'll be really cool to see the follow-up.

Rip: And then, you look at the people that want to affiliate themselves with this film, because I think they want to further this movement. Like Arnold Schwarzenegger, James Cameron. Jackie Chan, that's going to help get this thing into China and get all those eyeballs on it. You've got Louis Hamilton, six-time world champion formula-one race car driver. You've got Novak Djokovic, number one tennis player on the planet.

Chris: Was one of the Williams sisters in it?

Rip: Well, no. Serena and Venus, there was a little shot of them at the very end as athletes that are kind of plant-based. And you also have like Tom Brady, who's 80-90% plant-based and attributes his dietary regime to him being now 42-43, and his longevity in the NFL. Kyrie Irving, one of the best NBA guards. I don't know if you've seen his Nike commercial that he does where somebody asks him... Because he's one of the best dribblers ever, amazing shooter. And he does this amazing thing. And then, somebody goes, "Man, how did you do that?" And he goes, "Plant-based diet."

Chris: That's in the Nike commercial?

Rip: Yes.

Chris: Nice. That's amazing. And this must be a new one. Or new-ish?

Rip: It's actually about a year old.

Chris: Oh, wow. I missed it. It's on YouTube, I'm sure.

Rip: It is. Just put in "Kyrie Irving plant-based Nike."

Chris: Yeah. That's amazing. So, I'd love to know what your diet was like – your performance diet versus now (your regular healthy diet).

Rip: I can tell you that it is almost the exact same. The only difference is now I'm not eating 5,000-6,000 calories a day. I'm not eating as much of the fat. I'm not eating as much avocado, nuts seeds. I don't need it. But the thing is, when I was training four to eight hours a day, the great thing about eating this way (and I want anybody that's an athlete out there to know this) that just by eating more calories during the day... So, let's say I go from eating 2,300 calories a day to 3,300. And I have an extra piece of whole grain bread – that's 7 extra grams of protein and 100 calories. I have an extra 2 ounces of black bean pasta noodles. And each one of those is 10 to 12 grams of protein per 2 ounces and let's say 50-60 calories. So, where I'm getting with this... Or I have an extra 1/3 cup of black beans on my brown rice. That extra third cup of black beans is 7-8 grams of protein. So, just by consuming another 1,000 calories, I'm getting another 30-40 grams of protein. I'm getting more essential fatty acids that I need. I'm getting more polyphenols and antioxidants and everything to mitigate all the oxidative stress that I've put on my body by being out there exercising so hard. So, it's fantastic. It's fantastic. I just don't eat as much.

Chris: Yeah. That makes sense.

Rip: And when I was training, I was a lean mean 162-165. These days, I'm typically 175. So, I'm like 10 pounds heavier. But I train 45 minutes to an hour a day. And I still eat a pretty substantial amount.

Chris: I'm 162. I have a high metabolism, so I have to eat a lot.

Rip: Wow. Yeah. And how tall are you?

Chris: 6'2".

Rip: We're just about the same height.

Chris: Yeah. But it's always been a challenge for me to gain weight. And eating the volume of food that I would need to eat, as you said... I mean, I don't want to say it's exhausting, but it really is tiresome trying to get that much food in your body.

Rip: I will say, when I was doing this full-time, it was almost like another exercise. Like I swam, I bike, I ran, I ate.

Chris: Yeah. When I was in college, I got really into weight gain, like bodybuilding. And I wasn't trying to compete, but I was just trying to put on weight and get bigger and stronger. And I was doing that by eating six meals a day. But I was eating just garbage. Weight gainer shakes, creatine and whey protein. Just tons of tuna and chicken and crap. But yeah, it was exhausting. And I couldn't keep it up for long. I did it for about a year. And I was like, "Man, I love going to the gym. But I just can't keep us this eating."

Rip: Well, dude. I mean, the thing is, you look lean and mean and wonderful. I have people that come up to me and they're 6'1" or 6'2", they're like 160 pounds. And they're like, "Yeah, I want to put on muscle and blah, blah, blah." I'm like, "Dude, you're beautiful the way you are." They're like, "But people think I'm thin." I'm like, "Yeah, compared to everybody else that's out there. But do you feel good?" "Yeah." "How's your energy?" "Fantastic." I go, "Well then, just don't worry about it." I mean, don't get obsessed with getting big and putting on pounds. Just for vanity reasons.

Chris: I don't want it bad enough to eat that much food. That's basically where I'm at. But I love CrossFit-type workouts. And there's a gym called Iron Tribe in Memphis that I have been going to for years. And yeah, it keeps me fit. It keeps me strong. It kicks my butt every time I go in there. Now I'm chasing the young guys, 22/23 year old guys in there. And they keep you on your toes. You know how it is.

Rip: Yes. Yes.

Chris: So, this is a question I ask everybody. This is kind of a fun question. But if you had to eat the same thing every day...

Rip: I love this question.

Chris: Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The meals can be different. But you just had to eat the same thing every day for breakfast, lunch, dinner. What would it be?

Rip: So, every morning it would be my Rip's Big Bowl cereal. For people that don't know what it is, I've got a cereal that's in Whole Food stores. It's called Rip's Big Bowl. But before I had a relationship with Whole Foods, I would make my own concoction. And it's just bite-sized shredded wheat. It's Uncle Sam's Wheat Flakes. It's the Ezekiel 4:9 nuggets. And then, it's extra thick Bob's Red Mill oats. And so, I take even amounts of each one of those four whole grains and put them into a big container. Mix them up. And then, that's my foundation. And then, on top of that, I will put a fresh banana. I will take two big handfuls of frozen mango chunks, put them into a bowl, microwave them for 45 seconds, and put those on.

Chris: Why is that? Oh, they were frozen.

Rip: They are frozen. Put those on there. And then, I put a small handful of walnuts. And then, I put like a tablespoon of chia seeds. And I soak it down with oat milk. And then, when I get bored of the mangoes and the bananas, I do blueberries and raspberries. I do grapefruit and peaches. The great thing is no two bowls are ever the same.

Chris: Grapefruit on the cereal? I love grapefruit, but I've never done that.

Rip: Nobody has. And it's awesome.

Chris: Alright. I've got a new idea.

Rip: I'm telling you.

Chris: And we didn't mention this. So, in the bio – and you just brought this up, so I want to make sure everybody knows – you actually have food products. An Engine 2 line of food that's in Whole Foods. And so, talk about the different products. I mean, obviously there's cereal.

Rip: So, yeah, we have all kinds of products. It's an exclusive to the Whole Food market stores. We will be going outside of Whole Foods here in about four months to other retailers. But for 10 years it was exclusive to Whole Foods. But we've got the Rip's Big Bowl cold cereals. We've got granolas. We have got veggie broth. We've got pizza crusts. We've got raviolis. We've got burritos. These are all in the frozen section. We have pasta sauces. What am I missing here?

Chris: You have some cracker-type products, too.

Rip: Unfortunately, our manufacturer went out of business. So, the crackers are no longer on shelf. At one point, we had 40 different products on the shelf. And now we're kind of narrowing it down to our core bestsellers. But those are some of them.

Chris: Yeah. I haven't had them all but....

Rip: And burgers. Plant-based burgers.

Chris: Oh really? Okay. Yeah, what I've had I've thought was great.

Rip: Yeah. And the thing is, I mean, I truly believe it's the healthiest packaged, boxed, or canned products on the shelf.

Chris: Explain why. What's the philosophy behind it. Because people might be like, "What is this? It sounds like processed food."

Rip: Well, so we have very rigid criteria, when it comes to what can make the Engine 2 grade. So, everything has to be a 100% whole grain. We don't do any processed grains. Everything has to be in a 1:1 ratio with the

number of calories, when it comes to milligrams of sodium. So, that's a long winded way of me just saying, everything's got to be low sodium. Everything's no added sugar. Or we have one sugar in there, and it's always like the last ingredient in the deck. Like our pizza crust has some maple syrup in it, but it's the second to last ingredient and very minimal. And then, everything has to be no added oils. We don't do any added oils. So, we want all the fats to come just naturally occurring in the food. And everything's non-GMO. Let's say half the products are organic.

Chris: Yeah. That's great. Okay. So, that's breakfast. We took a little rabbit trail on breakfast. But what's lunch?

Rip: So, lunch would be two big sweet honkin' sweet potatoes. I don't like the skin, so I take the skin off.

Chris: Ahh! So much nutrition in the skin, Rip. Don't do it.

Rip: Dude. I feel like I am overdosing with nutrition. I don't need any more fiber. I feel like I'm getting all the vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, antioxidants that I need. And so, I'm not doing the skins.

Chris: Alright. We'll let the skins go.

Rip: Thank you. And then, I usually put some sort of bean on top – like a Pinto bean on top. And they typically come from a can, but no salt added. And then, I just put them in a bowl. Microwave. Put those on top of there. And then, steamed greens that I typically have in the fridge. Leftover steamed greens, whether it's kale, spinach, collard greens, mustard greens, beet greens. And then I do a little bit of salsa and a little bit of low sodium tamari. And that's my lunch.

Chris: I would destroy that.

Rip: Yup. Destroy it. Just gobble it right up.

Chris: Black beans and sweet potatoes are major staples at our house. As are greens. Yeah, that sounds awesome. And then, what's dinner look like?

Rip: And then, dinner would be brown rice or farrow or pearl barley. But if I had to pick one, it'd probably just be simple brown rice. Then it's black beans. Because I do the pinto beans for lunch. I do the black beans at dinner. And then, I do kind of an assortment of sliced up veggies on top. I kind of call it my veggie relish. So, I've got green onions. I've got tomatoes. I've got water chestnuts. I've got bell peppers. I've got some avocado. And then, I do the low sodium tamari again. And I'm in Heaven. And then, I would snack on fruit during the day.

Chris: Yeah. Fresh fruit. Whatever. Apples. Bananas.

Rip: Big bowl, sweet potatoes, rice and beans.

Chris: That would work for me. I could roll with that every day.

Rip: Every day, all day, until I'm 120.

Chris: So a lot of people in my community understand the value of plant-based nutrition. But there may be some people watching that don't. That are trying to figure out like, "Why should I not eat animal protein? Why is it bad? Does it even matter? I mean, okay. *The Game Changers* showed that you don't need it. But is it harmful?" So, do you want to talk about that?

Rip: Yup. So, again, this is like one of the biggest myths that is swirling around out there. And so, we really have to deprogram people because we've been so programmed to think that we need animal protein. And that the only source of protein comes from animals, which is such a criminal fallacy.

Chris: Where you get your protein is the question, right? That's the number one question for all vegans. Right?

Rip: But to try and set the record straight... There's good carbs. There's bad carbs. We know that there's also good fats and there's bad fats. But there's also good protein and there's bad protein. And I will tell you that right now, bad protein comes from animal protein. And it's because it's way too clumsy. It's just clumsy in nature. It's too high in the sulfuric containing amino acids that does a real number on our body. So, it raises cholesterol levels. We don't want to have elevated cholesterol levels. Especially if you're a female, it creates a condition called metabolic acidosis, which siphons calcium from your bones, which leads to osteoporosis. So, you think you're doing everything you can, you're drinking your milk, you're doing it. But the animal protein in that milk actually siphons calcium out of your bones. So, you're unwittingly peeing your bones away. So, it drains your bones of calcium. It acts incredibly harsh on your kidneys and your liver. Ask anybody that's had kidney issues and been to their doctor. Their doctor will tell them to go on a low protein diet.

And also, and this is very important for your community, animal protein (especially the protein that's in dairy casein) promotes tumor and cancer cells. Really, 86% of the protein in dairy products comes from casein, which is a growth accelerator. It's put there by the mother cow to grow that baby cow as fast as possible. And the last thing, if you've had a brush across the bow with cancer or anything like that, you don't want to be feeding yourself with Greek yogurt, sour cream, butter, milk – which basically is loaded with casein, that growth accelerator. That's basically going to be fertilizing any dormant tumor and cancer cells that

you have. And we all have them in us. And we're just continually fighting them off.

So, you obviously know all that, but I think it bears repeating. So, that's why animal protein – whether it's red meat, chicken, fish – it's not healthy. And then, the animal protein in dairy is just carcinogenic. So, animal protein is bad. Now plant protein, on the other hand, is where all protein originates from. This is where all the nine essential amino acids come from. It's the mother source. Whether it's your histidine, isoleucine, leucine, lysine, methionine, phenylalanine, threonine, tryptophan, or valine. These are the nine. And they all come in plant-based protein. They are in the perfect composition in proportion – whether it's black beans, watermelon, kale, broccoli.

You don't have to do any of this food combining. There's no such thing as an incomplete protein. It's a fallacy that goes back to when Francis Moore Lappe wrote *Diet for a Small Planet* back in the early 1970s. And she got this whole thing started. In her most recent edition, she basically said that she was erroneous and she apologized. But of course, the meat and the dairy jumped on this bandwagon. And said like, "Plant-based proteins. Not only are you going to have a hard time getting all you need, but they are incomplete. And who wants to bother themselves with doing all the rice with beans, and peanut butter with bread." And so, yeah, it's a joke.

Chris: Thank you for bringing that up because I know the food combining myth is still pretty pervasive, even though it has been proven to be a myth.

Rip: And all these very reputable organizations will tell you, "Plant-based proteins, aren't complete. There's a few like quinoa..." And then, they'll say something else. And it's a joke. And *The Game Changers*, to me, does as a really nice job addressing that.

Chris: Yeah, it does.

Rip: I mean, the fact of the matter is, as we talked about earlier, that's the main thing that they try and address is protein. Animal protein. You don't need it.

Chris: And of course, some of the largest animals in the world are plant eaters. Right?

Rip: Sure. Last time I checked, an elephant was. And a rhino was. And a giraffe was. And I guess maybe a silverback gorilla was. Maybe they do some insects there too, right?

Chris: Yeah. A little bit of bug protein. And so, every plant, every fruit, every vegetable, every nut and seed, they all contain amino acids. And your body uses those amino acids to build complete protein in your body. And

you don't have to eat them all at the same time or together. And your body recycles protein. A lot of people don't realize this.

Rip: That's exactly right.

Chris: It recycles proteins, when cells die off. And you have something like a trillion cells that die every day or something like that. And they're being replaced, regenerated. More than a trillion, I think it is.

Rip: But the funny thing is... And everybody thinks, "Oh God, if you're eating plants, you're not going to get enough protein." But the reality is that we only need a minuscule amount of protein. I mean, we need it very badly. But we only need between 5-10% of our calories coming from protein. And as you just said, it's such an important nutrient that our body actually has an ingenious way of just recycling it from our own tissues. And if you get too much protein, over about 12%, it just either turns to fat or you pee it away. So, it's the one macronutrient... And when I say macronutrient, I'm talking about protein, carbohydrates, and fat. It's the one of those three that you cannot store. As human beings, we can store fat. Like we're world class at storing fat. We can store carbohydrates as glycogen and glucose in our blood and in our muscles. But we cannot store protein.

Chris: What are you most excited about now? Like what's next for Rip?

Rip: Wow. So, I've been with Whole Foods for 10 years. And it's been an amazing 10 years. And I've been traveling, going around and espousing all the virtues of this lifestyle for 10 years. And probably doing 100 lectures, at least, a year. And so, I'm looking forward to not traveling as much. I'm really excited to be home with my family and my three kids.

Chris: How old are the kids?

Rip: Hope is 5. Sophie is 10. And Cole is 12. So, I'm looking forward to being home with them. I'm looking forward to taking the food line outside of Whole Food market stores. I'm looking forward working with municipalities, like the city of Pittsburgh and other cities that want to use what we did with the city of Pittsburgh as a blueprint for their emergency personnel. They are true heroes, in every sense of the word. And yet, they're not taking care of themselves appropriately. And many of them don't even know it. And when the number one killer of firefighters is heart disease, when the number five killer of policemen is heart disease... I look forward to reaching out and helping these people.

I'm looking forward to all the other platforms that we have, and continue to grow them. Whether it's online coaching, like you have. We've got some online coaching as well, that helps people stick with the lifestyle. A lot of support. We do live weekly conference calls. And then, we take the big group and then we break out into smaller groups. It's amazing what

you can do now with this Zoom technology. And we find in the big group, people get a little shy and inhibited. But we break you up into smaller groups and now people like to get real.

And then, we also have a wonderful meal planner for people that don't know what to eat, how to do it. And it's almost like this AI meal planner where you put in your likes, your dislikes, how much time you have, how many people you're cooking for, and then it generates a whole meal plan for you, based upon what your criteria is. And then, it generates grocery lists. And if you live in a neighborhood that has Instacart delivery, it will be delivered right to your doorstep. So, it's this wonderful, curated meal plan that for a lot of people, it makes it a lot easier.

Chris: Technology for better living.

Rip: Technology for better living and easier living. But it's funny. I find that the easiest way isn't always the best way.

Chris: Fast food is easy.

Rip: Yeah. And there's something to be said for rolling up your sleeves and getting after it.

Chris: In our community, when we're encouraging people to take control of their health and take massive action, I think it's really important that they go and buy their food. You know what I mean? And sometimes the cancer patient is not the cook in the family. I was not the cook in the family. And so, my wife was not on board in the beginning. And so, I realized, "Okay, if I'm going to do this, I've got to do it." And so, I went to Whole Foods. I went into the produce department. I picked up the broccoli and put it in the cart. You know what I mean? And there's something about that, that I think every patient needs to buy their own food. Cause it's powerful. Like when you buy it, there's some connection with your brain and your actions that you want to eat it more when you've picked it out and bought it and put it in the cart.

Rip: Exactly. Now you've got a little bit more of a relationship with that food. And I just got done giving this lecture on how to become a label reading Ninja warrior. And most people don't know how to read a label. And they don't know if this thing in this box is healthy or not healthy. And, "What am I looking for?"

Chris: There's a lot of food additives. Do you know the number?

Rip: Oh, I don't. I mean, I would imagine that it's in the thousands of thousands. But what I'm really focusing in on is how much sodium is in there, how much fat is in there. And then, do they have bad fats (meaning coming from animal products, lard beef, stuff like that, butter.).

Chris: And processed oils too.

Rip: Sugars. Oils. And we're also looking for, is this a whole grain or a processed kind of imitator. Just because a bread says it's wheat doesn't mean it's a 100% whole grain.

Chris: I want to close the loop on the firefighter who had the 344 cholesterol. Because I don't think we finished that story. So, how did he turn out?

Rip: Well, so, he did the 28-day challenge. His cholesterol in 28 days dropped from 344 to 196. So, it dropped 148 points.

Chris: That's insane. That's amazing. 30 days. And listen, I know there are people watching who have heard, or their doctor has told them, or told someone they love that you can't change your cholesterol with your diet. Like people still believe this. That cholesterol has nothing to do with diet.

Rip: Hogwash. I mean, literally hogwash. And again, it's a shame because doctors should know better. But unfortunately, they don't know better. But you can really achieve better results, as far as lowering your cholesterol, with whole plant-based foods. And then, you're not only lowering your cholesterol systemically, you're also bringing down the inflammation. You're just doing everything to create a body that is just like spilling over with health. As opposed to masking it and having beautiful numbers, but doing nothing to really address the core causation of what's going on.

Chris: Yeah. I mean, there's a host of benefits. It's like anti-cancer benefits, anti-inflammatory benefits, more energy, better bowel movements. Being regular. Pooping two or three times a day. Better skin. Healthier hair and nails. Stronger bones. It's just on and on and on. It's almost incalculable, the number of benefits you get when you eat a diet that's rich in plant food – fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, beans, seeds, and all that good stuff.

Man, I love that story. I mean, what an amazing turnaround in the cholesterol. I mean so quickly. And I think that's going to encourage a lot of people too, who are struggling maybe with hypertension or high cholesterol. It's almost unbelievable. Like it doesn't sound true that you can have such a dramatic shift in your health so quickly. But it is true., if you do it. You've just got to do it. And everyone's different. Some people respond faster than others and all that. But 30 days hardcore of whole food, plant-based diet. Things are going to change. Get your blood work done before and after.

Rip: Well, let me say that you don't even need 30 days. And that's why I wrote *The 7-Day Rescue Challenge* book, because what we discovered is that actually in 6/7 days, you can really do amazing things with your internal biochemistry. And if you saw *The Game Changers*, that one firefighter,

Nick, dropped his cholesterol 107 points in 7 days. And the average cholesterol drop that we have in our immersion programs – and this is tracking over 2000 people over the last 10 years – is right around 26 points. So, we have some people that do 70, 80, 90, 100, and some people that do 5, 10, 15.

Chris: But usually the highest initial numbers are the biggest droppers, right? The people with the highest cholesterol that respond the most.

Rip: Absolutely.

Chris: And people with like a little higher than normal, they're going to come down to maybe normal.

Rip: And we have some people that come in at 170 and they come down to 155. Yeah. So, it's all relative like that.

Chris: Here's one little bit of really difficult rocket science wisdom. And that is, when you stop eating cholesterol, your cholesterol goes down.

Rip: Who'd have thunk?

Chris: I know! How does that even work? I don't understand it!

Rip: And you correct me if I'm wrong here, but is cholesterol only found in animal products?

Chris: Yes, Rip. Yes it is.

Rip: So you're saying if we only eat plants, we're not consuming any cholesterol?

Chris: That's correct, sir.

Rip: Wow. I like that. I like that.

Chris: Yeah. You're not consuming cholesterol in plants. Although there's a little caveat that if you eat too much saturated fat, like from oils, it can elevate cholesterol. But the major source is animal food.

Rip: I'm glad you brought that up. So, how much saturated fat is in beans? None. How much is in fruits, vegetables, whole grains? None. Where you find saturated fat in the plant based world is in limited amounts in nuts and seeds. And that's why my father really wants his heart patients to like...

Chris: Like four walnuts a day or something like that?

Rip: Almost no nuts and seeds. Yes. Ground flax seed meal for the omega-3s. And the one fruit – I guess it's a fruit – that is off limits completely on my program, my father's program, McDougall, Ornish, Klaper, you name it...is coconuts.

Chris: Got it. Yup. Because they are very high in saturated fat.

Rip: 91% saturated fat.

Chris: And avocados have some.

Rip: Avocados are about 15% saturated fat. So, you've just gotta be judicious and not have a big bowl of guacamole. That's why on our program, we limit you to half an avocado a day, if you're doing the seven-day rescue.

Chris: That's enough for most people. I mean, you have half an avocado on a meal and it's great and you enjoy it.

Rip: Yeah. Yeah. But the seven-day rescue program is for people that need a reset. You need a reset. You've had a hard time during the holidays. And you're like, "Oh my God, what have I done?" And so, it's for those people. It's for people that want to lose like 50 to 100 pounds. This is a really great way to get there. Or for people that have had heart disease. It's a hardcore program. It's not hardcore once you dive in and you do it and you realize, "Oh my God, I can eat all I want of these foods." But it's hardcore for people that are coming from the other world. Yeah. Yeah.

Chris: I just want to make sure that we're clear. I know you're not saying that people are going to lose 50 to 100 pounds in 7 days.

Rip: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. But this is the program I want them to follow. And then they do it for another seven days, and another seven days.

Chris: Just like, "Let's give it seven days and see what happens and then continue."

Rip: Yup. And then you'll realize, "Wow, this wasn't hard. This was easy. I feel great. I enjoy the foods." You know the drill.

Chris: I love it. Well, thank you, Rip. I want to be respectful of your time. You've been so generous with it. And you're an awesome dude. It's so great to connect. I've been an admirer from afar of Engine 2, of what you're doing. I've seen your interviews and videos on YouTube and all kinds of stuff and just thought like, "Man, that guy's great."

Rip: Yeah, my pleasure. I appreciate you reaching out. And I look forward to having you on my podcast. We are going to rock it.

Chris: This year. Alright. Thank you again, Rip.

Rip: My man.

Chris: This is awesome. Okay, everybody. Thank you for watching. Please share this video. Obviously, there are people in your life that need to hear this message. And hey, there may be some firefighters in your life, especially, that will connect with Rip and his message. I mean, this is where he got his start helping firefighters. So, yeah, share it. Help us reach more people. And thanks for watching. We'll see you on the next one.

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