

THE COMBUSTION CHRONICLES

**EPISODE THIRTY-THREE
MORE THAN THE GAME**

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GUEST: JARED ODRICK**

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Shawn: Welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles* podcast. Where bold leaders combine with big ideas to create game-changing disruption.

I'm Shawn Nason, your host for *The Combustion Chronicles* podcast. Throughout this series, we're bringing together the most unique and influential minds we could find to have honest conversations about not being okay with the status quo, blowing shit up, and working together to influence our shared future.

We believe that when bold leaders ignite consumer-centric ideas with passion and grit, the result is an explosion that creates a better world for all of us.

On this episode of *The Combustion Chronicles*, we have Jared Odrick, former NFL defensive end. After a dominant senior season at Penn State, Jared was drafted as an NFL defensive tackle in the first round of the 2010 NFL Draft by the Miami Dolphins. Jared went on to play seven years of professional football in Florida, five seasons with the Dolphins, followed by a multi-year free-agent contract with the Jacksonville Jaguars. His rare combination of size, athleticism, and ability made him a coveted and versatile defensive lineman. While in Jacksonville, Jared pursued his creative passions and produced a citywide arts installation titled "JAXtaporation" well as produced multiple films with locally-based filmmakers and artists.

Jared has also written extensively, with articles appearing in *Sports Illustrated* and *Sporting News*. He has also consulted on creative projects for Link Integrated Health, the HBO series, *Ballers*, and has become a frequent speaker at the Cannabis World Congress on business events. Jared's primary goal, whatever he's doing, is to engage meaningfully and to motivate authentic action. He's constantly questioning how experiences can be improved upon and is deeply interested in hearing and offering alternative perspectives. Born and raised in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, Jared now splits his time between North American coast, mainly L.A. and Toronto. Jared, welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles*.

Jared: Hey. Thanks for having me.

Shawn: Awesome. So, Jared, you have a wide variety of interests, passions, you can read all kinds of things about what you have done after your career in the NFL. But growing up, was a career in professional football, always the goal you wanted?

Jared: Growing up, yeah, most definitely. You know, I just had a conversation, I just got done having a walk with my mother right before this conversation. And one of the things that I talked

about, I'm currently bidding on some property and the property bidding took a turn that I didn't expect. And I think, you know, this is the first time in a long time that something like this has happened to me where I feel like the rug has been pulled out from underneath me. And I tried to take notice of why that was. And I think it was because I had created such a strong image of my projected behavior within the context of this property that I wanted to purchase. And I had envisioned it and I had put a lot of my energy, you know, in terms of just kind of envisioning and thinking about resources and people that would help me with this property, get it to the point where I wanted it.

You know, there would be a lot of visualization that goes along with that, and I think that's exactly what I did as a kid. And what I did as a kid was, I visualized a lot about being a professional athlete. A lot of the men that I looked up to at a young age were athletes, and a lot of the behaviors that I wanted to replicate in the way that people talked about those men is how I wanted them to talk about me. And so, I imagined myself in that position a lot. And I think I may have imagined a little bit more than a lot of kids, being an only child of my mother, and I think that's kind of probably a huge contribution to how strong, I think, I was able to make my, you know, projection of myself as a child, of my future self.

And people ask me that all the time, you know, I think that's probably one of the more common questions that not only I get, that professional athletes get in general because it's such a polarizing position. And so, yeah, I think I've always envisioned some type of sport, you know, whether it was baseball, basketball, football, even track and field when I started, you know, setting the school record for shot put, you know, I thought, like, maybe, and I just did my best to envision myself in the future of what would turn out best.

Shawn: Let's talk about the differences between your expectations going into the NFL versus the reality. What was that like? Because you had all these expectations to your dream, but then the reality of going into that, did they meet the same expectations or was it just completely a different reality?

Jared: Well, the way the question was set up, it sounds like, you know, there must be a difference between my expectations and reality. But the thing is, is that I think, you know, obviously there's the perfect ideal that you set inside your head going into sports or any type of endeavor, and that's the ideal that kind of leads you to a certain point. If your ideals aren't far-fetched, you know, then are they really ideals?

And I think that's kind of what I recognize in hindsight of that, you know, going to Penn State that I set some pretty lofty goals for myself in the recruiting process of going to Penn State. Of course, you envision yourself making some type of action and some celebratory action, like the posters on your wall. The funny thing is that the posters on my wall growing up were all basketball. I don't think there was... there might've been one or two football posters on my wall, but it was all basketball. And I think I had expectations a lot more with basketball than I did any other sport.

And so, when football started having an uptick during my high school career in terms of getting, you know, national attention and whatnot, I think football felt not easy to me, but, like, I didn't have nearly as many expectations, like, childhood expectations. And so, it all kind of felt like, you know, a surplus of experiences, you know, it felt like it was having this abundance as opposed to filling a capsule or filling a void or filling this encapsulated set of expectations. So, it just felt like I kept playing football and my personality integrated with football to the point where I just kept having these surpluses of, I guess, rewarding interactions.

Shawn: I read a quote where you said, "While actively playing, I got away from the game as much as I could. I moved to Canada in search of a fresh outlook, I searched for perspective and truth because I knew the game and the people in it weren't challenging me." So, when your NFL career ended, Jared, in 2017, it seemed like you were pretty at peace with it and a matter of fact, I believe you were on the beach in the Dominican Republic and actually posted a picture of yourself on Instagram getting the call that you had been released. At that point in your career, were you ready for life beyond football and was the transition out of sports easy for you?

Jared: Well, it's a funny question because I'm still, you know, got some legal things with the Jaguars about my departure from the Jaguars. And they referenced that photo in Dominican Republic and it's a funny reference point anytime it comes up in any type of conversation because it does seem to, kind of, I guess attract a certain type of attention. And I think that's kind of what I wanted out of that posting was to give guys, so many guys end up leaving the game and you see these Dear John letters of Instagram posts or Twitter feeds or press releases where they're so sad to leave a game and they seem like these lost puppy dogs. These big burly men that, you know, clash like titans on the field now all of a sudden, you know, seem sad and bewildered. And it was just, like, I just didn't wanna fall in line.

And I think I didn't want to fall in line and kind of give the public what they wanted, which was the story arc of the hero, the story arc of the warrior, which is, you know, a warrior that survives the battlefield, you know, and walks away from something that's the only way they

know how to be. You know, they're supposed to be clinically depressed, they're supposed to be upset about this, and I'm like, "Well, why?" You know, why are people upset about this? And I came to the conclusion that they must not have anything else about themselves that they're excited to explore, or that they even know is something to be explored.

And I think I just kinda wanted to throw a wrench in that narrative, in that expectation that we see at these Dear John letters, it's like, "You know, I scored a lot of touchdowns and made a lot of money. And it's not about any of those things. It's not about the awards, it's not about the accolades, it's about the people that you meet and the relationships that you make in the locker room. That's what's special to me." And it's like, you literally see it reprinted on these centimeter squares called Instagram from any player that, you know, ends up being relieved of his football duties. And I just didn't want to be that, especially my departure from something that has thrown a, you know, a name and a statistic and a digital representation of me on Madden and fantasy football teams. I didn't want to just be another cardboard cutout. And I've used that phrase multiple times because that's what it felt like I was hardening as a part of my career. I was being hardened more and more into this kind of set pattern of behavior that you have to enact as a football player in order for the majority of the public to receive you as one.

Shawn: Totally. I work in Disruption and you are the epitome of everything we talked about. You questioning, always asking why. I love that. I love that you didn't go with the status quo, and your statement around you didn't want to just fall in line, that's beautiful, and I truly commend you for that.

[00:10:00]

Jared: Oh, I appreciate that.

Shawn: The reason we wanted you on *The Combustion Chronicles* and wanted you here is that you, you know, there is this image of, you know, "He is a football player. He is this..." it's like you said, that 1-inch centimeter box on Instagram, there's this whole portrayal of what football players are and are to be, and you have literally blown that shit up and said, "No, it doesn't have to be that way. There's life after football." And that's what is so powerful to me is you're affecting the world in so many different ways and still exploring it. And I commend you for that.

Jared: Oh, well, I appreciate that. I think the thing is too, is that it's, you know, even that narrative, even that set of words that you have just said of you know, it's like there's expectations about football players, you even hear the most kind of routinized football player interview say that same thing. So, when even the seemingly subversive angst that a football

player has, like, "I'm not your normal everyday football player," when you hear them say that that's an everyday football player kind of comment. And I think what ends up happening is that I think I grew averse to even starting to say that. I grew averse to saying #I'mdifferent. I can't tell you how many people I've seen do #I'mdifferent. It's antithetical in itself. So, it's just trying to show a different set of behaviors as opposed to having empty Instagram rhetoric about being different. And I think that's kind of what I hope came through at that moment for people in their posting. But it seems to have me in hot water with my former employer

Shawn: Well, I would have some words for them, but I won't say it here. And your ability and individualism and that's disruption at its finest. And you are good with it, you're fine with it, and love it. And even, you know, talking about some pieces that you have been a part of and written, you know, you wrote the piece on, "Who Do You Cheer For?" And then, you know, in 2019 you wrote "Kneeling to Nike," and this year you wrote, "Pattern Participation of Celebrity: Routine Retention of Social Status." Nothing norm that we would see out of what I would say a football player, so all three were really interesting commentaries about the dynamics between professional athletes, fandom, race, and society as a whole. Why have you written those and been a part of those?

Jared: Well, they seem to, I guess, pile up. Like, the words that, I guess, are typed or written, they seem to pile up in my chest and come out when I feel like it's kind of like an aching or a full feeling where it's like it's gotta come out or I can't do anything else. I think it comes about because I disagree with the way that things are being widely perceived. And I think I write so much about the athlete and try to create a new perspective on it because I think there's some things that I wish I would have recognized about what I represented as the professional athlete and as a collegiate athlete to the larger public and the way that they digested me and ingested me.

And I wish I understood that better, that I had better coordinates while I was within the context of the game. And I think if I would've known that a little bit more, I would have navigated better, and I would have been able to have a more autonomous experience while within the context of a team scenario. And I think that's the thing about football, you know, when it goes from high school and collegiate play, where you're not playing for money and it's not about industry, and you're just kind of sacrificing yourself for the experience as opposed to making it a direct collection of pay for play. What happens is, is that it goes from the game of football to the business of football and I think that's pretty standard in the public's understanding of that.

But I think a lot of times people say that but they don't know what it's like to go from loving something that is so, you know, wholly engulfing of your being both physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, hormonally, you know, that it will engulf you so much, and then it totally changes when you get paid for it. And it's just kind of that dynamic, I don't think ends up happening. And maybe I'm shortsighted on this, if you can help me out, but that dynamic that happens so succinctly in that crossover, you kind of become hardened in the behavioral patterns that equate to more money, which is what football has become. Football has become that, as opposed to, you know, you get hardened in those behaviors as opposed to, you know, I think when you're playing football, it's, like, for the good. It's always for the good, for the good, for the good. And then when you start to play for money, you know, it's really not just for the good and for the good of the team and for the good of, you know, what you can give, but now you have to calculate what you can take, you know, and what you can take from football.

And so then you have to start to calculate those things, you know, because it's kind of a tricky rhetoric within the context of the game where you wanna die for your brothers and give up a limb for your brothers, a ligament for your brothers. But at the same time, you're like, wait, "I'm giving it up for these guys that go home to separate places that have separate bank accounts, that have separate families, that I probably won't speak to for the next, you know, 30 years." And it's like there's this balance that you have to play with, you know, giving yourself up to the game, but then also recognizing that you're within a context of a industry-driven sport that you grew up loving, not calculating.

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Shawn: That's so fascinating, Jared. And I wrote a couple of things down that you just said that, like, resonated so deep. You said, "It was piling up in my chest and it had to come out." And then the whole concept about what you represented if you would have known more. So, this whole perception of diversity of thought, it does kind of seem like it can get you in some trouble sometimes. So let's flip that to the public's relationship and the view of the athlete, right? And even more, you had said in one of your pieces that "In an age of virality, when 1000 retweets provide more validation than a single constructive conversation between peers, it is our responsibility to exemplify the change we want to see." What is that change you wanna see?

Jared: I mean, it's to destabilize the way that we think about our athletes. I think athletes have so much potential in accruing, especially football players, I think there's a huge deprivation between the way that they're able to be individuals within the context of the game in comparison to baseball players, football players, I mean, baseball players, basketball players,

and soccer players. And so, I always use, or I tend to use, even on this last article, I use NBA players as a prop for my piece. I guess I say prop because I think they're propped up for a lot of other people's, you know, pieces and industries and artistic gestures. And so, I think the change that I wanna see is to destabilize athletes in the general public from the expectations that they would have of themselves while playing the game, or even during their process of ascension or, you know, or in the process of leaving the game.

Because I think sometimes these expected patterns of behavior and the way that we should react as being a part of the game and then separate from it, but especially separate from it, doesn't bode well for guys. A lot of guys I know had the propensity to continue living as kind of like a piece of memorabilia. This is nothing against going to the \$500 ball signings at the mall. I have nothing against that, if that's what you want to do and that's the thing that you're interacting with. I just think that you have such an effect on, you know, the public through a game that preaches pretty stable and foundational morals, you know, of strength and of duty, of hard work, of blood, sweat, and tears.

I think there are a lot of great morals to the game, but I think sometimes the industry skews us to think that we can't have these things transferred over in different ways. And I think sometimes it incentivizes us to become these, you know, these pieces of memorabilia in a post-career as opposed to it activating us in a post-career to doing something else. And so, maybe it's a lot of my own projection of not wanting to feel like I'm not having an autonomous post-football life. But either way, it's something I felt like voicing. That's the change I wanna see. I wanna see more autonomous individuals, people who don't feel lost without the game. And I just wanna promote that. And not that I'm the leader of anything, you know, it's just trying to promote each different guy to be the leader of their own ideas and their own set of morals and kind of, you know, build their own foundation separate from the game.

Shawn: Yeah. I love that you talk about the building blocks of the game itself, great morals, but what I'm sensing in that is that sense of how do you find authenticity and individualism inside that structure, right?

Jared: Oh, it's difficult. Yeah. It's very difficult. Yeah. I mean, but that's what you have to give up in order to be a part of a team. You have to give up a sense of individualism. You have to give all those things up. And that's why I think the game is great. It's just sometimes that the industry becomes fucked up. And I think the industry is what kind of you have to be weary of as a professional and even as a collegiate player, you know, because industry comes into it. And I think that's what's tough is, like, you know, you find individualism within it when you think

about the industry that you exist in, but you relinquish the individualism in so far as it is your interaction with your team, right? Interaction with the other people, interaction with your teammates, interaction with your coaches, interaction with people that give you this web of meaning, as opposed to this web of investment and return.

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Shawn: I'm a huge sports fan, and in particular, I have a real love for college basketball. What would be your advice to that 17- or 18-year-old freshmen college basketball player? Because they can go after one year and go to the NBA where it's very different than how college football's setup and stuff. What would be your advice to that 17- or 18-year-old young man who has not really lived life in a way but has been put on a stage that is so powerful?

Jared: My advice would come in the form of questions. My advice would come in the form of asking them questions to find out, you know, the sincerity of their movements, the content of their conviction. And, you know, if you can find that out and hopefully try to outline to them through a series of questions, the way that they view sport, you know, and asking them, you know, "Well, what do you want out of the game? Do you think that you're getting it? Do you like what you have to do to get what you want out of the game?" You know and ask them questions. And I think that's probably the biggest thing that I see happens, especially, you know, to, like, athletes or entertainers that people hold in high regard.

And I think it happens even tenfold to basketball players, you know, because they have more opportunity for an individualistic persona. And I think because of that, people tend to shy away from asking them hard or cutting questions in the same sense where people I've seen in my own career shy away from asking me harder cutting questions because it would destabilize their relationship with this person who's highly sought after, or highly paid, or highly popular, or highly anything. And I think people don't want to make, you know, a conscious effort to ask hard questions of those people, like, "Well, what are you doing this for? Why do you play the game? Is that good enough for you? You know, who are your role models within the context of the game? You know, what do you wanna get out of this?"

"Do you understand that, you know, the differences between collegiate and professional football? Do you have an understanding of the differences in the responsibilities, the communication?" And things like that. And when they don't have, kind of, something...whether you're a 17-year-old athlete or whether, you know, a 17-year-old basketball player about to go play D1, or whether you're a 35-year-old, you know tight-end that's about to retire from the NFL, you know, if you don't have a separate set of beliefs, morals, values, then what the game

purports and what the game, you know, they have to match to a certain extent in order for you to be integrated with the game, right? They have to have some crossover for you to have success within the game, right?

The morals and the behaviors and the expectations that you have of oneself and the morals, expectations, and behaviors that the game has of you, they have to have crossover. But if you don't have some type of carved out set of behaviors for yourself and expectations separate from the game that the game doesn't ask and the game can't affect, well, then you would have to question your autonomy. And you would have to question, you know, whether you're just a replicant of the game's mold, and you're furthering solidifying that, or whether you can be an individual within that context, and you keep some sense of, you know, integrity throughout your career. I think I wouldn't tell them to do anything. I would just kind of ask some questions and keep that spirit of question asking alive in their head throughout their process

Shawn: That's like a mic drop moment for me, just to hear you talk and the connection to the 17-year-old and the 35-year-old in that deep conviction. And you said two things that I wrote notes about there was that the sincerity of your movements and the content of your convictions. Beautifully said. I have to ask you this, Jared, like, what do you attribute your deep self-awareness, your deep convictions to? Was it how you were raised? Where did you find that so profoundly? And it comes across in everything you do.

Jared: Well, you hope that it does, but I think also it's a combination of, I think, of the way that my mom raised me and the way that my father raised me. And that's collectively embodied in me, but it was done separately. You know, my parents weren't...I don't recollect or remember my parents being together since they divorced at a pretty young age for me. And I'd have to say that, you know, my mom is very duty-driven and she's very active in her space and community. And she's a person that people can count on. And then where, my dad, you know, I think he kind of speaks a bit more philosophically and artistically.

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And some of the pitfalls of that is that it can sound really nice and that we can want to write those things down, but, you know, if you don't follow through with some of those artistic statements, well then, they become tragic and they become poetic. And I think that's kind of whatever recognizes, like, you know, you can create a really nice phrase, you know, the content of your conviction. It rolls off the tongue nicely, but it's one of those that if you say that, you better mean it. And if you're asking questions of other people about the content of their

conviction, then you better have some yourself. And so, I think it comes from, yeah, recognizing who my parents are and recognizing how I could continue that positively.

Shawn: Well, next time you're with your mom and your dad there in Pennsylvania, like, thank them because what they've given this world is an amazingly beautiful man who is a world-changer. So, a call to action to our listeners. What is the one thing from today from your life that you would want our listeners to take away from your story and what you've shared?

Jared: Do work. Do work. You know, the work that's placed upon you, recognize it being placed upon you, and then after you recognize, and after you get through the work that's been placed upon you, go find another load to pick up and put more weight on your own back. And I think that'll actually, you know, it frees you from the weight that you feel from everything and everybody else. You know, when you're able to collect, you know, responsibility for your experience, I think it ends up working out more often than not. So, you know, whether that's creatively, whether that's, you know, a business enterprise, you know, whether that's relationships or whatever it is, I think the more that you can kind of, you know, take on yourself and create your own kind of, you know, moralistic effort and output separate than what's expected from you, then I think then, you know, you become a free man.

I've been reading some Orthodox texts from some Orthodox presets of late because I ran into some Orthodox priests that were wearing Corona masks, and I asked how that interplayed with their faith. I was literally drinking coffee and I came at an Orthodox priest at a coffee shop, you know, kind of questioned him about his faith. And I think it's a very similar thing to the 17-year-old basketball player, is that he's got the gown and the makings and the public appearance of somebody that usually tells us what to do or questions us, you know?

And that we don't ask questions of these kinds of public figures of authority because we don't have our own narrative for what they might mean and represent to us. We accept the narratives that have been given to us about priests, Orthodox or not, or 17-year-old basketball players, you know, going pro or not, you know? And so, I guess it's create your own context, tell your own story so you're not just an object of somebody else's.

Shawn: Awesome. Thank you for that.

Jared: Yeah.

Shawn: Well, we've come to this point in the podcast that we call "The Combustion Questions". And so, it's three random questions, fun, that I'm going to ask you to just follow your gut on and answer. So, the first combustion question, Jared, is if a pizza place was going to name a pizza after you, what kind of pizza would it be, and what would be on it?

Jared: What kind of pizza would...? It would probably be a Quattro Formaggi. So, it'd be a four-cheese with pepperoni and some basil. Yeah. That's about it.

Shawn: That's speaking to my heart. So, the question in that though, is it red sauce or white sauce?

Jared: It's gonna be white because it's going to be, like, some form of, you know, a really nice ricotta.

Shawn: Yes. You are my long-lost brother. Because I've never thought about taking a white pie and adding pepperoni to it, and I think I might have to even do that tonight for dinner.

Jared: Let me know how it goes...

Shawn: I will.

Jared: ...if you can pull yourself out of the ecstasy.

Shawn: That's right! So, question two, would you rather be able to fly or be able to be invisible?

Jared: Fly or invisibility? Well, I tend to have more dreams about me flying, which Freud and Jung say is me having aspirations that are too big for my britches. That's what Freud and Jung would say what flying represents in dreams. So, I'd probably...Invisible? No, invisible, the temptation to do fucked up things would be too easy. So, I'd say fly.

Shawn: I like that. Yeah. I think I would fuck with a lot of people if I was invisible. And number three, what do you think about potted plants?

Jared: What do I think about potted plants?

Shawn: Yes.

Jared: They're nice to look at. They're healthy to have in your home. But if you're like me, then you better have somebody in your life that remembers to water them. I love them. The only plant that I have in my house that's potted is one that you only have to water when you remember. So, it's a good thing. It's a good relationship.

Shawn: Awesome. Well, Jared, thank you for sharing your journey, your insights. Stay safe and be well and thank you again for sharing with our audience.

Jared: Hey, much appreciated. Thanks for your time.

Shawn: Thank you so much for listening to this episode of *The Combustion Chronicles*.

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