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I try to get him on the program all the time. He is so busy because he teaches a class in the middle of this program, exactly in the middle. So we can never get him in studio, but he is kind enough to be joining us on the phone. And Jon Danher is on the phone right now. Jon, are you there? Yes, it's nice to hear from you, Ariel. It is a pleasure. Great to have you on. There's so much that we can discuss. And I know you just wrapped up a class. So thank you so much for doing this. Let's get right into it, Jon. Are you surprised that George St. Pierre is no longer the middleweight champion of the UFC? In the sense that we all knew he had a medical issue going into this camp. No, because by halfway through this camp, there was something very obviously wrong. And George was having serious medical problems two weeks into the camp, and they persisted throughout. They peaked in a six-week camp between week four and week two, out from the main event. Things got so bad that literally we lost two weeks with zero training. So the camp was really something with disaster. It was only recovered in the last two weeks before the fight. So insofar as we all knew that, no, it doesn't really come as a surprise, but the medical competition turned out to be pretty serious, and he was unable to defend the belt. Wow. Did at any point you suggest for him to pull out of the fight? I mean, you lose two weeks, you're that sick. He's not in peak shape. The question there was, yeah, that was the obvious question, you know, should he pull out? It was a critical three-day period when we had lost a week and a half of training, where the camp was in complete disarray, and all momentum for the camp had been lost. And I remember on a Friday night having a discussion for us, for Harvey, George, and myself as to whether things were going to go forward from here or we should just pull the plug. It was a big event. Madison Square Garden is one of the biggest venues for the modern UFC. And so to pull out that soon before the politically, that would be a major, major decision. And it wouldn't look good for George's career. You know, there were some vacillations before the fight happened. Either would this happen or others even wanted the fight. And for George to pull out just two weeks before would have been, you know, politically disastrous. So we made a decision that if he didn't have a good workout on Monday, then George would have to pull out. He had a very good grappling workout on Monday. And then the next Tuesday, he had his kickboxing or shootboxing workout, as he refers to it, shootboxing, kickboxing with takedowns. And that was OK. It wasn't great. But he was in the ballpark. And then he showed, I must say, a remarkable turnaround in technical performance leading up to the final days of the camp. And it started to look like the old George St. Pino was literally less than a week to go before his weight loss. The problem didn't go away. They were all at the actual day of the fight and beyond, obviously. But it wasn't as extreme as it was during a critical two-week period right in the middle of the camp. And even the day of the fight, George had major medical problems, not as severe as I said, two weeks previous, so pretty bad. And he's on vacation now. And the initial tests were his stomach cancer. I mean, that's how bad it was. And they all came back negative. But more comprehensive testing after the event showed it was ulcerative colitis. And I don't know if any of you are familiar with that. It's a very painful and debilitating condition with a wide array of symptoms, which are often confused for other stomach ailments. One of the problems associated with stomach ailments is many of the symptoms are common to many different kinds of ailments. And it was finally diagnosed as ulcerative colitis. And we're working from there. Wow. He had mentioned on my show that he threw up the day of the fight and that he wasn't feeling well, but we never knew how extensive it was. Yeah, it's the worst period. Yeah, yeah. Any comeback is always a difficult thing to manage. Any comeback in combat sports is difficult. If you look at the track record of great combat athletes coming back, there's been a few happy stories, but most of them are not good. And MMA is even harder because actual sport is young and there's tremendous technical progress. It's been four years since George Ford. And the sport itself has evolved a long way since then. Thinking about individual fighters, the sport as a whole has evolved. And so to come back four years in MMA is like a 10-year layoff from boxing in

terms of technical development. And if you look at, you know, there's so many famous boxers who tried to come back. Ahmed Ali came off a two-and-a-half to three-year hiatus where he wasn't even introduced. And had two warm-up fights, both of which were relatively mediocre. And then he lost his first title fight in Madison Square Garden, interestingly. So even someone as great as Ahmed Ali struggled with the idea of a comeback. Which he did after four years with a fairly severe medical condition complicating things in a weight category that he wasn't used to. So it was a gamble. It was a big, it was a calculated gamble, but it was a big gamble. And do you think that this is directly a result of him adding this weight, the layoff, all that stuff? And in hindsight, if so, do you feel like bad methods were taken to do this? Like you guys should have done something differently to add the weight and to be a healthy middleweight? I don't think it's appropriate for me to claim, you know, to directly, because I'm not a medical expert. That would be something for a doctor to answer. Or I can offer a speculation. My answer is no, because it's not the first time George has had stomach issues. He's had much less severe stomach issues than in previous camps. Also, the very nature of ulcerative colitis is it tends to be a problem which emerges over time. It's not something you eat a little bit more and suddenly you've got ulcerative colitis. It's something that builds up over time. So it's unlikely that it would have emerged as a result of, you know, increased prolonged intake during a camp and increased trying to middleweight. So with the proviso that I'm not a medical expert and with that proviso in place, my speculation is that that would be extremely unlikely. Do you think if he never got sick, if he was okay throughout the entire camp, that he would have remained at 185? Because as you may know, there are some people who believe that he had no intention of defending that title if he won it. Actually, he entered the contract negotiations on the other hand, that he would fight against Robert Whittaker. That was the understanding. A contract was signed in which it was clear that if he won, he would fight Robert Whittaker. So my understanding is no, he had the intention of fighting twice, at a minimum twice, at middleweight. In general, it's what most people don't understand about doing upperweight divisions, they don't understand that the majority of the problems you face is not the fight itself, it's the preparation for the fight. There's significant changes in diet, your training, every single one of your training partners is now a weight division champion. Most of the stress and toll on you is not the fight itself, it's the preparation for it. You're doing a six to eight week camp with people who are 185 pounders, you're a 170 pounder. And everything you hit harder, you hit a take back, you're moving a greater mix of fish and body. The problems occur, it tends to be more of a training camp problem than a fight problem. There's certain advantages to being a smaller guy, you're faster, you see things quicker. There's some advantages to being a smaller, faster guy. We never really felt that George would have a strength problem with Michael Beswick. He's an extraordinarily strong welterweight, he's the biggest, physical strength, we didn't see that being a problem. The problems with things, just physical mass, reach, things like these, these are the problems we looked at. And in camp, that definitely did take a toll. But George had every intention of having at least five at that weight. Can I ask you, John, is it possible, I don't know, the connection keeps going in and out, could we call you back, or is it possible to call you on a different line or something like that? Because I want to hear, I'm kind of hanging on every word. Yeah, what I'll do is I'll change my location upstairs. I'm currently in the basement of the Intergracy Academy, so I'll just pull up and see if that improves the response. Hang on. There may be one problem, there's a boxing class going on, there may be the sound of heads in the background, is that acceptable? That's acceptable, yeah, that's fine. Okay, is reception improving? Um, let's try again. Can you ask me again that question? Is your reception improving on upstairs now? Yeah, yeah, that's better, that's better. I think that's better. Okay, let's go with that. Are you okay with being in that position? Yeah, no problem at all. Okay, great. So, okay, so you believe that if he didn't get sick, he would have continued to fight. At this point, given what he's going through, do you think that it is more likely that he never fights again, given his health condition? Or do you expect him to come

back at some point? There's a definite possibility. I don't want to say yes or no, because it's not my decision whether he comes back or, these are deeply personal decisions that George has to make. Moreover, they have to be made not as spur of the moment decisions, these are life-changing decisions, so they'll have to be made on the basis of George's reaction to the medication he's taking for ulcerative colitis. From what I understand, the standard medications to ulcerative colitis take some considerable amount of time to take effect, anywhere from three to eight months, before you'll even notice significant changes. So we have to see how he reacts to his medication regimen, and make a decision based on that. Are you in favor of him not fighting again? In other words, would you prefer that he doesn't fight again at this point? My thing is always with athletes, are you happy to do this? What I don't like to see is people fight because they feel they have to. This is a sport, it's a very, very hard sport. I don't think many people are aware of the rigors of what goes on in a championship-level fight camp. It's not for the faint of heart. And if you're not 100% committed to the project, and it's something which you positively enjoy doing, at least in some way, you may not enjoy every aspect of it, but there has to be some kind of deep sense of enjoyment or fulfillment that I don't believe you should get involved. I know one fight camp where George wasn't mentally committed to it was the fight camp with Hendricks, where there was doubts about whether he wanted to do the, to be fighting, he had thoughts about retirement prior to the fight. That was probably the fight camp where there was the least motivation to get an injury, which he normally would. Here, there was a tremendous motivation. George was extremely enthusiastic about the fight and expressed that he desired to come back, but there was a physical problem, which was making it difficult. So, your first question was, medically, will he be able to come back? The answer is, we don't know yet, but we'll see how he reacts to that. It's a medication. And your second question was, psychologically, is he mentally in the game? Does he want to do this? And I believe, I know for a fact, prior to this event, he hasn't been able to work yet, but since this medical problem has come up and become so prevalent and emerged so strongly in the middle of the last camp, I guess it's an open question at this point. It'll be determined by how he reacts to the medication that he's on. In all honesty, considering how he was feeling, are you surprised he beat Michael Bisping? Oh, that's a great question, Ariel. I mean, I'm not going to lie to you. Two weeks out, just before the fight, I had a talk with Farasa Habib and I straightforwardly said to him, the George St. Pierre that I saw trained today gets knocked out by Michael Bisping nine times out of 10. That was two weeks before the fight. Wow. And Farasa looked at me and I looked at him and we didn't say a word, but that was true. That was a absolutely critical period. I will say, George's ability to come back from that absolutely horrendous standstill of the fight camp and come back and look very, very strong the last week and then go out on a fight and perform as he did, it was really something to watch. For me as a coach, it was one of the most inspirational things I've ever seen an athlete go through. Wow. How nervous were you in the corner? Have you ever been that nervous before, before a GSP fight? To be honest, I never really get nervous in the corner because I have a task to perform. Anytime I get nervous, anytime I'm watching a fight, it's as if I'm not doing anything and I'm in the audience watching someone I like. But if it's someone I don't like, obviously I don't get nervous. If it's someone I'm not attached to or something like that. But if it's someone I like but I have a task to do, then nervousness never comes into it. You have a job and you're expected to do your job as a professional. The reason I asked about nervous was just knowing what he had been through and the fact that you just said two weeks prior you thought that he was going to get knocked out nine times out of ten. I was greatly impressed by the degree of improvement in a week and a half. George went from looking like a second-rate fighter to something very close to the old George St. Pierre. Wow. Were you in favor of him even coming back to begin with? That's a great question, Ariel. When he first said, I want to come back, I had a very negative reaction to it. I was like, no, I don't think it's a good idea. You don't need the money. And straightforward, I said to him, I just don't

think this is a good idea. You've already done so much. And I had a heart-to-heart talk with him. Why do you even want to do this? What's this about? And so my initial reaction was, no, I didn't want him to come back. But he talked passionately about it. I could see that he wanted to do it. It wasn't just on the spur of the moment saying, you know, sometimes athletes just want to be back in the spotlight. A lot of times it's hard for an athlete just to leave the spotlight. It wasn't that. He felt like he had something to do in the sport. So initially he was talking about, you know, let's go back to 170 and Tyrone Woodley become the champion. And I remember we watched the fight of Tyrone Woodley against Robbie Lawler together. And we were both greatly impressed by Woodley's performance that night. And he told me, you know, let's get back in there. And I said something to him. I said, you know, go back and fight at 170. You're just going to be doing the same thing you did for a decade. You're going to fight another top tier, very, very tough welterweight. And you've done that so many times. If you come back, you're just going to do the same old thing you did for a decade. Nothing's going to change. And he said, wait, if you come back, it's a huge thing to come back after four years. If you're going to come back, why don't you do something different, something that's going to change your legacy. And we talked about it some more and I said to him, listen, there's always been three criticisms of your career. The first is that you're so controlling and tactical in your approach to fighting that it makes for boring fights. That's always been a persistent criticism. The second is that you never fought upperweight class. You always fought guys at welterweight. And the third is you don't finish fights. Those are the three most persistent criticisms of the legacy of George St. Pierre. I said, why don't we do that? Why don't we focus on a training regimen that strongly emphasizes submissions and TKOs slash KOs, punching powers, it means it's finishing a fight. You go up the weight division and you focus on the old dynamic in, out, and lateral movement of George St. Pierre to create a faster paced fight that people find more interesting. So we ran the idea past other people, Feras Zahavi, Freddie Roach, et cetera, et cetera. And everyone said, you know what, that's a good idea, let's go with that. The initial training that I saw George do in grappling, George came in and worked with the squad and strongly emphasized submission holds. Normally what I teach George to do, it's really what we call grapple boxing, which is the mix of striking and grappling on the ground. It's mostly positional work. Instead, we changed everything to submission holds favoring strangulations from the back and leg locks. And George made remarkable progress. He started working a lot with Freddie Roach on just the mechanics of punching so that he's hitting harder. He was sitting on his punches better and just worked on the mechanical elements of just straightforwardly hitting harder with a strong emphasis on left hook, jab, and straight rear hand. And these made significant changes. There was a noticeable sense in which he was definitely hitting harder and he was working submissions with a lot of success in the gym. He started working with karate specialists who brought back the old linear in-out movement that George was so famous for in the early days of his career. And we were pretty confident before the camp started that people were going to see something new, something that would add to George's legacy. This wouldn't be George at 170 fighting another tough welterweight and doing the same thing he's done for a decade. This would be him fighting upperweight class with a strong emphasis on finishing the fight in a dynamic, mobile way that people found exciting. And I think the plan was brilliant. Unfortunately, the plan ran flat into a physical problem which was completely unforeseen. But George is the incredible athlete that he is. He managed to find a way to get through that and enact the original plan and he did exactly what the plan was designed to do. He finished the fight with a beautifully applied strike into submission hold. He showed increased power. He knocked down a man who's extraordinarily difficult to knock down in a weight division above himself. He showed genuine improvements in submission attacks, finished beautifully on the back. And he did it on a man above him in weight class in a dynamic, exciting fight that went back and forth and thrilled a sold-out crowd at Madison Square Garden. So all three aspects or all three of the main criticisms

of his legacy were answered in one fell swoop, so to speak. So it was a fantastic achievement on his part, made all the more remarkable by the fact that he had to go through so much physical adversity in order to get it done. Incredible. Two last quick things for you. When do you expect to find out if you'll fight again? I leave that entirely to George. Right now, he just came back from vacation. He obviously communicates a lot with his own manager, so I don't think it's appropriate for me to give a date. I'll leave that up to George. He's the man in the fit, and he should make that decision. That's really up to a combination of George, his doctors, and his management. Were you surprised that he did it so quickly? Or considering what he had been through, were you not surprised? Basically, he didn't try to wait it out or try to see if he'd feel better, that he just kind of said, no, I'm not going to stick around here. No. George has always had a deep affection and respect for other athletes in the UFC, and his feeling was, yeah, I could hold on to this and see how long I can ride this out and then delay the fight with Mr. Whitaker. His feeling was, that's just not fair to the other athletes, because I'm an established athlete. I have a legacy. I don't need the money right now. The other guys are working for their legacy, and they do need the money right now. The UFC is a business, and they can't just have some guy who ... The UFC, in a sense, did George a favor. They didn't have to give George the title shot. They could have given it to three other people there that were very, very well qualified to take that title shot. It would be, I think it would be reprehensible on anyone's part, George or anyone else, to get that shot and then delay a weight division based upon waiting for a result. You don't even know what the result is going to be, and it could be, as I said, anywhere up to eight to 12 months. I mean, this is a long, long process. You can't just hold a weight division for months at a time and expect other people to be happy about it. The UFC is a business. They have to run the business. They have to get things going. The athletes are the same. They're a brand unto themselves, and you can't just tell five people, you've got to wait for me, and we'll see what happens. Maybe something will be good. Maybe something will be bad. It's just unfair to say that to anybody, and George felt strongly about that, but it was unclear, so he said the best thing to do is to vacate the belt and let's see where I stand six months from now and work from there. Okay, I lied. One more quick one. If he came up to you right now and said, John, what do you think I should do? Have I done enough? Should I walk away at this point? Would you tell him no mas? You're asking for my personal opinion? Yes. My personal opinion is that there's literally nothing more you can do, and that would be my personal opinion, but that's what I said the last time, too. My initial opinion, the first time, was what more do you want to prove? You've lived your life in this sport. You've done everything you want. You don't need money anymore. You have fame and wealth, and you have a remarkable legacy. You're unquestionably one of the greatest of all time. It's not the greatest of all time, and then George came out and did something even greater. His legacy was enhanced by the fight with Miss Bing in a remarkable way, and I'm just not sure what else he could do at this point. He said it's possible to get to the 155 and win a third belt. If he did that, that would be incredible. But can George make 155? I don't know. As far as I know, he's never been on that low. He's not a particularly big welterweight. I know there are people fighting currently at 155 who are physically larger than he is. For example, I'm quite certain that Khabib Nurmagomedov is physically larger than George walking around. He's got a higher body weight, and he makes 155, but it's extremely difficult and rather unhealthy for him. Is it possible for George to make 155? I believe medically it's possible. Is it healthy for him to do it, especially given the stomach issues that he has? I don't know the answer to that. My initial hunch is, for me as my personal opinion, it would be the same as I had previously. What really more do you want to prove? You've done everything there is. If he does have a deep and abiding passion and wants to come back and fight at either 155 or 170, and I feel the same kind of passion that I felt before, I will back him 100% because I'm not just a coach. I'm also a friend. I would never just leave a friend and say no. But my initial hunch would be, you've done so much, why are you doing this again, especially if

you have any doubts about your health. So we'll see. Absolutely fascinating stuff. I can't thank you enough, John, for the insight, the honesty, the transparency. I really appreciate you coming on today. I know you're very busy. So thank you so much for this. Absolutely fascinating. I really appreciate it. My pleasure, Ariel. Pleasure talking to you as always. All right. We'll talk to you soon. There he is, the great John Danaher, one of the very best at what he does, one of the very best BJJ coaches in the entire world checking in, and that's mind-blowing stuff. If you had any doubts, and look, I know people could say, oh, he's just protecting his guy, he's his coach. If you had any doubts as to how he was feeling, I mean, we found out even more about how he was feeling, and it sounds horrific, but if you had doubts about his intentions, about the decision to walk away, you got to give him props at the very least for this. He didn't have, like, it's not like he had to come back for February or March, right? He just said, look, I know I'm not coming back. There's nothing that will convince me to come back at 185 after what I've been through. I'm out of here. Take the belt. Have your fight with Whitaker and Rockhold in Perth, and I'm not going to stand in the way. And in fact, I was told that he actually, through other sources, reached out to Rockhold to give him the heads up that he was going to be doing this before it was made public. Just giving him that heads up. So I think it says a lot about GSP, and quite honestly, I didn't even know that it was that bad, his health issues, and hopefully he gets better very soon. I think he's been trying to downplay it a little bit, but did not. Two weeks before the fight, he thought he'd get knocked out nine times out of ten. That's insane for a coach to say.