

## **Title: Season 2, Episode 2: Technology, Storytelling, and Purpose: Inside Battle of the Branches**

### **Summary of Episode:**

In this episode of the Haivision Podcast, host Kalli Ringelberg speaks with Nick Merrick, founder of Green Beret Racing and creator of the Battle of the Branches series. What began as a single racing experience evolved into a mission-driven initiative helping veterans rediscover purpose, community, and camaraderie after service.

Nick shares the challenges of addressing mental health within the veteran community and explains how competition and shared experiences can provide a meaningful outlet. The conversation also explores the role of technology in storytelling, from capturing authentic, real-time moments to expanding the reach and impact of their mission.

By combining human connection with accessible video technology, Battle of the Branches not only showcases high-adrenaline racing but also highlights powerful personal stories, demonstrating how purpose, visibility, and community can make a lasting difference.

### **Intro**

Welcome to the Haivision Podcast, where we take a deep dive into the innovations and challenges shaping video technology. In each episode, we'll bring you insights from experts behind cutting edge video networking, visual collaboration, and video wall solutions. So whether you're professional navigating the complexities of video wall technology, working in live production, or someone who's simply curious about new tech, this podcast is for you. Join us as we explore the latest trends, share success stories, and discuss the technology shaping the future of mission-critical video environments.

### **Kalli Ringelberg:**

Hi, everyone. Welcome back to the Haivision Podcast. I'm your host, Kalli Ringelberg. Before we get started, a quick note that the episode includes discussion around suicide and mental health. Please take care while listening.

Today's episode is a really meaningful one. I'm joined by Nick Merrick, executive director and founder of Green Beret Racing and the force behind the Battle of the Branches series. What started as a single experience has grown into something much bigger, helping veterans rediscover purpose and community through competition. We talk about how that journey began, the challenges behind it, and how storytelling and technology are helping bring that mission to life. Let's get into it. Let's just start us off with a little bit of an introduction, your name, your background, and a little bit how you got started.

### **Nick Merrick:**

My name is Nick Merrick. I am the executive director and founder of Green Beret Racing, and we now run a series called Battle of the Branches. Four military branches, Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps competing in similar cars across six races for a season long mission. I got started in the nonprofit world by attending the Mint 400 in 2020, raced it for another nonprofit organization and did it with one of my best friends. We finished the race after 12 hours and this gentleman that I respect a lot, I look up to him quite a bit, looked at me from across the table and he goes, "I didn't realize I needed that." Now,

mind you, this is a retired team sergeant, the Green Beret, successful businessman, happily married, kids are successful. He's everything that you would look at and go, "Man, all right. He had it figured out. He did it."

For him to say that to me was kind of weird. I didn't expect it from him. So we kind of went down the path of it and now mind you, we're over a stack of pancakes. We just got our butts kicked in a race we weren't prepared for and really started to thinking about, well, what was it? And the thing that we circled onto is I was still on a team and I still had the community, but he didn't. So we developed an idea to make a nonprofit and over time, it has transitioned into more of a place for people to find purpose after they lead their profession. And in doing so, we invented Battle of the Branches that now instead of just doing a singular competition, we do a season long competition for them to be able to take the community and the camaraderie and put it into competition over a period of time.

**Kalli Ringelberg:**

Awesome. That sounds amazing. So obviously you saw a challenge, you saw something that needed to be addressed and you had a vehicle, no pun intended, to potentially make that happen. So what other challenges have you experienced along trying to make this reach more people, get to more people, and help more people?

**Nick Merrick:**

I think the biggest challenge is right now everybody knows that suicide is a problem. Everybody knows that PTSD is out there and that addiction is a real problem. We've done it. Good job. Our campaign of awareness has happened. The bigger thing is how do you tackle something amongst a demographic that is trained to make definitive decisions and act with violence, especially when it comes to suicide? One of the most common things that we hear after a suicide is, "Well, we didn't see any signs." And that is by design for our profession. When you deal with people that continuously go into combat, continuously fight, that they make decisions that are life and death quickly.

So when it comes down to them taking their own lives, it's going to be put into the same frame. So creating an organization that gives them a reason to hold that off, say, "Hey, I might do that, but I'm going to do it later," is a little bit more of where we try to be instead of the after the fact, because after the fact, you're probably not going to be able to affect anything other than helping out with funeral arrangements. So creating a program for that has really been the toughest part. How do you get an intelligent, driven group of people to buy into a system that isn't combat, that isn't what their previous profession was and then continually show up for it.

**Kalli Ringelberg:**

Yeah. So obviously a very noble cause in that and helping. And there's elements that you need technology to tell your story. So what have you seen along the line of where technology has been able to ... Obviously the work you're doing is incredible and it requires people like the personal human touch, but technology does help to get the message out and things. So what have you used technology or seen over the years that you've started that technology has really helped?

**Nick Merrick:**

Humanizing the mission is really the place where technology comes in. In years past prior to the internet, I might date myself here, it was all in writing and you had to have a professionally trained

writer that knows how to put the correct things on paper to elicit the emotion that you want. But now we can get authentic reactions of why individuals are continuing to show up, how it has impacted their life and what it is in real time. And we've all seen with AI coming on the scene that it's so tough for an AI to produce authenticity. And when you have a real person right in the middle of something that is emotional form talking, even not even to the camera and being able to capture that, it strikes a different chord when you're showing it to people and saying, "This is what we do." And then of course on top of that, showing the really cool fun things when the cars are ripping around and the dirt bikes are jumping or we're falling out of planes, of course that's a really fun thing as well.

**Kalli Ringelberg:**

Awesome. So just walk me through it during a race. Where is the technology come in, the human side? Obviously we're watching this, so that's a big part of it and you get to see the personalities through the technology. Just walk me through where the cameras are, what kind of... And the thought process behind putting them where they are.

**Nick Merrick:**

So really it comes down to three different places. So we have a mobile person that's always walking around with a camera and in your face, not in your face, from a distance, catching really bad angles of you at times. You find out that you have a double chin and you didn't know and you find out on the B reel, but that person is grabbing really the candid shots and the candid stuff is powerful when trying to tell a story because you can tell that it's not rehearsed and you can see somebody really intent and focused on what they're doing. And that happens whether we're building or we're racing. Then you have your stationary things where they are inside the vehicle or there's a camera on a iPod that is sitting at the pit when it comes in and it just kind of gets a fixed angle and gives a little bit of a look at the chaos and we'll put time-lapse to some of it to show how much work is going into a much more condensed period of time, and then when people are in the cars ripping and rolling.

And then we have our action type shots that we try to do. So this is everything from FPV drones flying around us all the way through dedicated, specific and choreographed things that we're trying to get. And that is a lot of times it comes down to jumps or really fast flybys or a specific takeoff during a race or whatnot. And we try to mesh all three of those in there to show a storyline of this is what the race series is. This is the teams that are in it. And these are the individuals and interweaving high adrenaline powered with humanized performance of what the mission is.

**Kalli Ringelberg:**

Okay. Obviously these are a lot of positives with the way technology has evolved to show the insides and outs of what's going on as you said to really, it's both storytelling and humanizing. So what are things that you wish technology could do better and that would really help progress your story with maybe trends you've seen or just something you hope comes in the future for this?

**Nick Merrick:**

Organize my emails a little better, I think that would be great. In reality, when it comes to the media side, there are things that could make life easier that could change its own battery, change out its own SIM card type stuff, which when we're doing long desert races, we might be able to slave the power of the

camera to the car, but the actual card inside of it can't transmit anywhere if we don't have the reception. But of course that's all in a fantastical thought of what could be. But realistically in the future of how we're doing it, being able to have the integration of AI into what we're capturing to say to prompts to the people that are recording us, then have to reference note cards or having the ability to stream with actual, I guess, overlaid telemetry of what the cars are doing against each other without having to purchase giant packages from huge companies and really investing.

It's something an organization like us, we can't afford, nor would I as the director want to purchase that as we have a mission. I'm finishing my Q1 board stuff right now and I can happily report we spent 98.43% of our funds on the mission and I think spending more money on technology might not be necessarily the best thing, but as AI is coming around more, as we're integrating more systems together to be able to get different angles and automatically transition between shots or whatnot, I think that would be probably something really beneficial. And then lastly, Starlink is an amazing thing to be coming out. So shooting footage from places where you don't have cell phone signals and it almost feels like you're on the moon is a great thing for us as well.

**Kalli Ringelberg:**

Yeah. I was going to say that was my next follow-up question. You have a background obviously with your background and you've been in probably some pretty contested terrains and environments and there's a budget there that maybe accounts for some of it. So did you ever see that you'd be using similar technology or that you'd have access to technology that could work in those same ... I mean, these races are out in the desert, so there's not a lot of connection, there's not a lot of common technology out there for people. So how does it feel to be able to have that accessible to you today not in the field where you used to be?

**Nick Merrick:**

Probably not the answer you're looking for, but coming out of special operations, we get the leading edge of communications. So I'm kind of a little bit more used. I have 11 and a half years overseas and we had connectivity almost continuously to a fault where we'd be able to talk and have a whole lot more communication with our command than generations past. And seeing as I just retired not even a year ago coming into this field, it was more of a, how do we do this for what we're doing, which led me to talk in too Haivision and saying, "Hey, I have an idea. Place where I see a gap in communication that is currently not being filled on the market or at least not being filled very well, would you guys be interested in doing something like this?" And talking to individuals that have a similar background and them saying, "Dude, I think I see it. Let me talk to the folks at work and see what we can do." And obviously Haivision came out to the Mint 400 with us, put stuff on one of our vehicles, was live-streaming. We were absolutely there, glued to the TV watching our cars that are not super fast, crawl through the desert and have fun.

**Kalli Ringelberg:**

Awesome. I mean, I love to hear that obviously from my side, but part of what you're saying is there's something important to humanizing the story and technology can help with that, but there's something to be said about accessibility. So in this case, we're all working together to make this sort of happen for you so that other people might learn something or take something from it. So how does it feel for you to have evolved so much in it that you can maybe project that story into other people's lives and other

people's things just through racing, which I don't know if you probably identified it pretty early, but some of us are pretty surprised to hear the difference it can make.

**Nick Merrick:**

I kind of love that our message is that reaches out there through social media, through different things is resonating because of technology, because the way that we can use Haivision to capture far more of what we're doing. I met an individual a couple weeks ago that I'd never met him. It wasn't through a mutual friend and we kind of chatted for a little bit and eventually he goes, "Wait a minute. I've seen you on this podcast." And I was like, "Oh man, I've never had that happen to me before. I've never been recognized."

I'm from a small town in Iowa. I worked in an obscure unit doing stuff that we weren't supposed to be public. So seeing that our mission is being out there, and he was ecstatic to meet me and talk about the mission and what it is that we're doing and seeing that a small organization, we're all volunteer, I only have a couple staff members running this thing, can have an outsized impact where people across the nation can all of a sudden know who we are, know what we're doing and make an impact where they seek us out and go, "Dude, I know who you are." I was like, "Man, this is really cool."

**Kalli Ringelberg:**

Yeah. So on that note, what message would you like someone who, let's say they come to you and they say, "I have this great cause, but I need help with the storytelling." And obviously, we know technology can help with that, but what sort of advice would you give going forward and maybe what you wish you had done differently or earlier in the process? What would you want them to leave with?

**Nick Merrick:**

I hate that I'm saying this, but I know it to be true. You have to capture everything. We have to put somebody on a camera, otherwise we dive into what we're doing and then you miss all of the opportunities to grab the content. If you don't have the content, you can't create it and you can't send it out and then you might as well just be telling somebody that you caught a really big fish and then you threw them back in the water. Nobody believes you. So it's really find a person that has even just a little bit of an idea of how a camera works, your iPhone or a GoPro or whatnot, put it on a tripod and just let it record and you can at least create something that you can develop your narrative and then push it out that way.

**Kalli Ringelberg:**

Final question. You mentioned Battle of the Branches. Can you tell us a little bit more about the future of Battle of Branches, what that looks like in the next races?

**Nick Merrick:**

Next race is a... Because we developed our cars to go off-road, they have 33-inch tires on it, big old roll cages, lights, all that kind of stuff, the next logical race that we would go and do is a drag race on concrete in Colorado. So May 23rd, we're going to be the Pikes Peak International Raceway as a part of Slush Fest and we're hosting our own competition for everybody in the public to come take part of. Slush Fest has given us their miniature drift track and we are bringing out drift trikes to put on a multi-round competition for people to come out, talk trash to their friends, have fun, drift around the track and enjoy

the community that we're providing while we host round two of our Battle of the Branches series.

**Kalli Ringelberg:**

Awesome. Actually, one thing just came to mind. I want to make sure that other people who are listening to this who feel like myself that we tell you how amazing this is. Is there a way that people can support you on this?

**Nick Merrick:**

Absolutely. Since we are a 501(c)(3) we do accept donations, sponsorships, grants. You can make some really funny jokes about that, but we are at [greenberetracing.org](http://greenberetracing.org). Go to any of our social medias. It's just @greenberetracing and taking links to our webpage. You can donate. You can buy merchandise. And if you want sponsorships, you're interested in really producing something or coming on board with our partnerships, which I should phrase that we don't have sponsors, we have partners. So any company that comes on, we have a directive conversation about their KPIs, what they care about, what they want to see, and then we tailor the stuff we're doing to help them. That way we're both growing together. I think we have an amazing organization and a really cool message to push out there. And when we're bringing people on board, we want them to feel the same way that it's just not a transaction, but instead it's an investment in both of our futures so they can email me at [info@greenberetracing.org](mailto:info@greenberetracing.org) and we will send over a sponsorship package and start a conversation.

**Kalli Ringelberg:**

Thank you for tuning in to The Haivision Podcast. Make sure to subscribe for more exciting discussions with our experts.