



## Sound Bites Podcast Transcript

### Episode: William Sawalich & Brandon Sawalich

Dave: Welcome to a special episode of Starkey Sound Bites. October is Protect Your Hearing Month, and I can think of no one better than William Sawalich to come back on the Sound Bites podcast. You were here a year ago and welcome back William.

William Sawalic...: Thank you. Appreciate it.

Dave: It's been a heck of a year for you.

William Sawalic...: Yeah, for sure.

Dave: William, for those of you who are unaware, is a rising star in motorsports racing. He came here last year when he was returning to Elko. And for those who are interested in the back story of William's racing career, I would encourage you to go back and look at a past episode of Sound Bites from last year. And you'll hear about, I'm proud to say that I've known you since you were known as the Raging Rooster. Now you've all grown up and you're William Sawalich racing, but last year was really quite a year for you. Ending up with you becoming the youngest winner of the All American 400 race.

William Sawalic...: Yeah, for sure. I mean, last year was a really good year. We had seven or eight total wins in the ARCA platform.

Dave: Yeah.

William Sawalic...: So that was really good for us. Built a lot of confidence for this year. And just going into any race this year, we obviously knew we could win, and my Joe Gibbs racing team had a really good car for me anywhere I went, so I had a lot of confidence in them to bring me a car that I could win in. And like you said, the All American 400, that was a really cool win, a milestone. Beat out,-

Dave: Chase Elliott.

William Sawalic...: Chase Elliott. I was just about to say. Yeah.

Dave: Darrell Waltrip,-

William Sawalic...: Yep.

Dave: Won in the past too.



William Sawalic...: Yep. Beat them out for that.

Dave: And now you and you're the youngest winner of that race ever.

Brandon: Yeah. You wanted that one.

William Sawalic...: Yeah, definitely.

Dave: Yeah. Yeah.

Brandon: Yeah.

Dave: Was kind of a spectacular finish too, as I remember watching it, that the top eight cars spun out due to oil on the track.

William Sawalic...: Oil. Yeah, oil on track. And two years prior to that, I got a concussion in that same race,-

Dave: I remember that too.

William Sawalic...: When I was about to win it.

Brandon: Same turn too.

William Sawalic...: Yeah, same turn.

Dave: Yeah.

William Sawalic...: So it was kind of a little redemption.

Dave: Yeah.

William Sawalic...: So it felt really good.

Dave: I love it. I love it. And you picked up right where you left off last year. You've won six times this year already,-

William Sawalic...: Yep.

Dave: In this season, and you're also running now a truck series.

William Sawalic...: Yes.

Dave: That seems to me, like okay, first question is trucks or cars, what's more fun?



William Sawalic...: So I mean, it depends on the driver and you get to go to different tracks in the trucks.

Dave: Okay.

William Sawalic...: So the trucks have a different tire compound, so it's more grip and they have more horsepower. So I always say more horsepower, more fun.

Dave: Yeah. No replacing displacement from horsepower.

William Sawalic...: Yes, for sure.

Dave: Yeah.

William Sawalic...: But they also have a higher center of gravity, so they'll roll over in the corner a little bit more compared to the ARCA cars. So they just handle a little different, but it's really based off of feel and what each driver might like. But for me, I like the ARCA car a lot. I mean, it's just got all the downforce you want and you can push it really hard and the tires don't wear away. So it's just a really fun car to drive.

Dave: Yeah, and it's beautiful. And the gentleman sitting to your right really doesn't need any introduction given that he's now a six-time guest on Sound Bites. The first six-time guest. Brandon, welcome.

Brandon: Yeah. Thank you, Dave. This was a fun one.

Dave: Yeah. they had an unveiling here on the Starkey campus of the number 18 car, which you've been racing, but also the number 19 car. So when you turn 18 in October, you will now be able to race in the Xfinity Series.

William Sawalic...: Yes.

Dave: And so that car, first of all, the wrap, paint or wrap, I mean, I know they're all wraps these days, but the paint job on it is spectacular. I love the camo on the number 19.

William Sawalic...: Right.

Dave: And talk a little bit about what happens and the difference in horsepower between the 18 and the 19 car when you go up to Xfinity.

William Sawalic...: So the 18 is the ARCA car, and that's got about 550 horsepower and it's restricted sometimes, like at the bigger tracks, it'll get restricted a little bit on horsepower, but the Xfinity car is about 650 or 700 horsepower, so a big bump



up in horsepower, but almost the same compound in tire as the truck. So it's got the Goodyear tires on it compared to the general tires.

Dave: Okay.

William Sawalic...: And a lot less downforce. So it's just a lot more to handle in the corner and you have kind of less to lean on.

Dave: Yeah.

William Sawalic...: So you got to do a little more as a driver.

Dave: Yeah. Wow. And you've certainly shown, I mean Brandon, I don't know, you want to add in on this, but I remember I was at a work meeting and remember we simulcast his first race, an ARCA last year that was in Phoenix, right? Your first win, not your first race.

William Sawalic...: Yes.

Dave: And you led most of the way, but then at the end of that race got spun out, if I'm not mistaken.

William Sawalic...: Yes. Got spun out and restart.

Dave: And I have to say what I've seen in the maturity between last year and this year has been remarkable because the thing that impresses me the most is you almost always are right at the top finishing at the pole position for the start or near the top, so you really know how to find the line on any track that you're racing. But last year you'd be out front and then you got bumped. And rubbing is racing I think, as we learn. And what I've seen this year is you've gotten into it a lot more.

Brandon: Yeah, he's more my opinion, more aggressive. I mean, that comes with experience.

Dave: Yeah.

Brandon: Right. More of an aggressive, and I get asked Phoenix or wherever do I get nervous and everything. It's like I believe in his skills and what his talent is. I think kind of like everybody else, when you're driving normally, you're worried about others.

Dave: Yeah. Yeah.

Brandon: And with him, and it's really what you always talk about is the team, getting out there and being able to be out front and getting at the top. And it takes a team.



And I've learned a lot just by of course being around it because you think Talladega Nights go down the list, right? Just get to go fast.

Dave: Yeah.

Brandon: It's like chess, it's strategy. It's really, it is so much more. And what he's been able to do and continues to do is just mind-boggling to me as a dad but.

Dave: And Brandon, you're fond of saying, don't worry about the competition, let them worry about you. But I think what happened between last year and this year is you've learned, you have to be aware of the competition. Last year I would say, I don't, whether it's unfair to say, I mean Jesse Love was sort of your nemesis last year.

William Sawalic...: Yeah, rival.

Dave: It seems like you guys were always back and forth.

Brandon: And you need that just like in business, you get a push.

Dave: I was just going to ask, did Jesse Love make you better?

William Sawalic...: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, he made me want to go get that win more and just honestly beat him.

Dave: Yeah.

William Sawalic...: Just to show that I was better and faster and we had our few run-ins and that just fueled the fire for me to really dig deep and go get him.

Dave: Yeah, I've really seen, now you're back at Elko trying to get, I mean I remember when you used to race cars at the age of 9, 10, 11 in Minnesota here, and now you're coming back looking for that first victory on the ARCA series.

William Sawalic...: Yeah, yeah. I mean I started racing the legend cars at Big Elko.

Dave: And then Little Elko.

William Sawalic...: That's, yeah, and Little Elko in the quarter midgets, that's where I started when I was nine. I have never raced a full body stock car at the big track since last year in the ARCA car. So that was the first time I was there in a full body stock car. And that was a little bit different from what I remember from that tiny legend car.

Dave: Yeah.



William Sawalic...: So that was a big change for me. But nonetheless, I mean it's pretty much all the same and what I remember.

Dave: And it's kind of cool to see you come back home and race on that track in front of the home crowd. So now what I want to do is transition a little bit from the racing itself really into the observance of Protect Your Hearing Month, October.

William Sawalic...: Yep.

Dave: And sometimes you look at sponsorships between corporate and some sort of sporting event or whatever, and you say, where's that connection? But this is a noisy industry that you're in, and I know because I've measured the sound level in or near the car when it's running at pretty high RPMs.

William Sawalic...: Yeah.

Dave: And I know that it makes it difficult, number one to communicate with your crew when you're racing.

William Sawalic...: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, that communication part of everything is huge in racing. You've got a spotter up top and yeah, your crew chief. There's so much information that the driver needs. For example, the spotter will tell me where the other cars on the track are compared to me. Tell me what lap times I'm running. So that all plays a huge role in how I run a race. And I also need to communicate to my crew chief what's going on with the car and how he can make it better. So it's just a bunch of little things that if you miss out on, that can be a win or loss in a race.

Dave: For sure. And even just being in tune, without the communication in tune with the car. Even though you're wearing hearing protection, you still have to hear where you are in the power band, where to shift,-

William Sawalic...: Yep.

Dave: Any other noises going around the spatial awareness because you don't have windows in these cars. You got to know where it is that your competition is.

William Sawalic...: Yeah, absolutely. And even on restarts, you're starting side by side and you can hear the other car's noise and you know when he's firing, so it just gives you an extra indication of when to go and so you're just not really guessing.

Dave: Yeah. For me, I mean, think that's been kind of an education for me as I learn more and more about car racing. I think one of the secret sauces of NASCAR is, and I've seen where you've been ahead massively, and then if there's a spin out or some reason for a yellow flag, everyone just joins up again. You go back in



and start again. And so that ability to hear what the competitors are doing as they're coming off the yellow back to start racing again is important.

William Sawalic...: Right.

Dave: And every millisecond counts.

Brandon: Gives you the advantage.

Dave: Yeah.

Brandon: The other thing, it's helped SoundGear on the car has caused a conversation more than I thought. I mean, I knew it would bring awareness to the product, but more the protection of healthy hearing.

Dave: Yeah.

Brandon: And when I talk to people now, it's usually yes about Starkey, but it's how's William doing and then SoundGear.

Dave: Yeah.

Brandon: I mean, I used to, William, oh, you're Brandon's son. No, I'm William's dad now.

Dave: Yeah. Yeah.

Brandon: And as we've talked about, that's the greatest compliment a parent could get, but whether it's in DC and other industries, it's brought awareness to what products are out there that could help.

Dave: Yeah, and I'll tell you,-

Brandon: And winning [00:11:00] helps. I mean, meaning getting out there.

Dave: It's awesome.

Brandon: And the team and everything. Yes.

Dave: I mean it is raising awareness within the general population. Then the second part, I'll say, having had the opportunity to go down and meet some of your competition and some of your team, test their hearing, talk a little bit about the importance of hearing.

William Sawalic...: Yeah.



Dave: I've always been impressed with you. Ever since you were this high and playing the drums, you were aware of the importance of preserving your hearing. You were wearing hearing protection when you were this tall playing drums.

William Sawalic...: Yeah.

Dave: Not many kids are including this one. So you started wearing protection before you had to wear these.

William Sawalic...: Exactly.

Dave: I'm not that smart and I had to learn the hard way. And so that's one thing. But I was also impressed at, well, first of all seeing hearing loss in some of your contemporaries, 17, 18, 19 years of age. But also after talking to them a little bit about the importance of hearing that the fact that the damage that occurs is permanent, how quickly they were like, okay, I got to do something about that. And they got it. And even if they had a little bit of loss, it still is important now at this tender age to make sure that you're protecting your hearing all the time. So in the race car, communicating with the team, listening to the car. How about when you're training? I've seen your training facility.

William Sawalic...: Yeah.

Dave: That hot room, and I know you have devices, custom devices that you can wear while you're working out, but it's important that you not overdo it either.

William Sawalic...: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, going back to hearing protection, I've always been around it. That's what I've known my whole life. So I knew it was a smart thing to do is to protect my hearing, so I don't have any problems later on. And I feel like another big misconception is that you get hearing loss when you're older. I mean, I don't think many people know that you can get it when you're younger. I mean, obviously loud sounds can cause damage for a few days, but they don't know that it can affect you long term.

Dave: Right.

William Sawalic...: So that's something that I would always know growing up and that my mom and dad reminded me of.

Dave: Yeah, and you're absolutely right. People always think of it as only something that affects old people, but age and noise, they're almost inextricably intertwined. As you get older, you've listened to more loud sounds throughout your life, and it's important even starting now to do that, hearing protection. So I know streaming, but streaming at levels that are not extreme. And then also using the protection when you're not racing and you're just out in the pit area or you're watching someone else race.





Brandon: And then we've been able to provide, you have the protection and then they realize they have hearing loss. I mean, whether it's race fans, team members, they've been around it for so long and we've been able to educate them on solutions because they don't know what they're missing out. It just gradually comes upon and then 10, 20, 30 years. And so we've been able to educate on product and solutions and racing's a small community per se down in North Carolina and all the teams know each other and they want the best because everybody wants the edge, either that edge for the competitive advantage on protection, sound quality, and then just throughout the week so they could hear.

Dave: Yeah. Well, and following up on that, a lot of times when I talk about the fact that Starkey has this SoundGear division, first people look at me a little crazy. Why would a hearing aid company want to protect or prevent hearing loss? Well,-

Brandon: I hear that a lot too because what, one in six teenagers have a hearing loss?

Dave: Have measurable hearing loss already?

Brandon: And I hear that too. It's like, oh, well you're in a great business. It's like, I don't want to make money off somebody's misery or that. I mean, so what's the solutions we could do upfront to help people?

Dave: There's plenty of work to go around given that the adoption rate for hearing aids is roughly a third of the people, let's say, that have hearing loss do something about it. And so if we can prevent some of that loss due to noise exposure, I think it's a win for everything. And it's a win-win. The partnership and the sponsorship I think has been fantastic. I don't know if you have anything to add.

Brandon: No, it really has because we've been introduced to a lot of other companies that are partners with Joe Gibbs Racing and just being able to collaborate and idea share, but also how we could provide employee benefits with hearing aids and Starkey hearing aids to their employees. So it's really worked, quite frankly, exceeded my expectation a lot more than I was expecting. So especially, I mean, you mentioned the gym. Maybe we should go do a workout with him or two. I've seen some of those videos.

Dave: I don't think I could come close to keeping up.

Brandon: No. No.

Dave: No.

Brandon: No. No. No, but I mean,-



Dave: No. And you're doing that all the time and I know a lot of people do stream, but people your age need to recognize that if you're streaming, even with custom monitors or AirPods or whatever, that you got to listen at a level that is safe because you can be, essentially what I've done in some places is ask people if I could just take their AirPods out what they're listening at and measure the level.

Brandon: Yeah.

Dave: Sometimes it's equivalent to the level of a factory worker.

Brandon: Well, Jim, he's been an ambassador. I mean, for SoundGear, unofficially, just by people asking, "Hey, what's that?" And so it's been a win-win for everybody.

Dave: Yeah. Well, and I think that this sponsorship, if there's anything else you have to add of why it is that we started this way, but I think that raising awareness is the most important thing.

Brandon: Yeah.

Dave: Protecting your own son's hearing,-

Brandon: Yes, we've done that. Yes.

Dave: Is important.

Brandon: Yeah.

Dave: And then I think really seeing your success has been a joy for everyone at Starkey and in the larger community as well.

William Sawalic...: Absolutely.

Dave: So since I have father and son here, then when you guys go out for a ride, who drives usually?

William Sawalic...: Usually him.

Brandon: I was going to say, you answer. Yeah.

William Sawalic...: Yeah.

Brandon: I think it's just by,-

William Sawalic...: I drove one or two times.

Dave: Once a dad, always a dad.



Brandon: Yeah, that's the thing. It's just naturally. But sometimes I'll let him, but yeah, I know what to expect. Or I, apprehensive.

William Sawalic...: He knows his way around town better than me. I have to follow a map.

Brandon: But when I'm,-

Dave: The nice thing about living in Eden Prairie, Minnesota for people that don't live here is if you get lost, just keep driving. It's built in a circle,-

Brandon: See that's what you should've done the other day.

William Sawalic...: Yeah.

Dave: And all you got to do is just go left and just keep going. It's a little bit like a NASCAR track, so maybe you can,-

Brandon: But when I'm in North Carolina, I let him drive. He drives me around.

Dave: Yeah.

William Sawalic...: Yep.

Dave: All right. All right. Fair enough. And the other thing I was going to say, you've only had your license for about year, year and a half, right?

William Sawalic...: Two years, yeah.

Dave: Two years now. Have you had any speeding tickets?

William Sawalic...: Nope. No speeding tickets.

Dave: So you know,-

William Sawalic...: Perfect record.

Dave: Where you got to gas it and when you got to pay the,-

William Sawalic...: Well, not that I gas it.

Dave: Okay, okay. Okay, good. Well, your dad's here too.

Brandon: Yeah. You got to keep your superpower on the track is what he's telling you.

Dave: Indeed.



William Sawalic...: Yeah.

Dave: Well, I can't thank you enough for being here with us in commemoration of Protect Your Hearing month. And like I said, I watch to see when you're racing that you got those monitors in all the time. Because one of the things that I hated, another occupation that places people at risk for hearing loss is musicians. And a lot of times in the early days I would see the musician's plugs would be on their shoulder instead of in their ears. And in these cars where the level is often 120, 130 decibels when you're in the cockpit, that can cause instantaneous damage.

Brandon: And what he's doing amongst other younger athletes too, is he's eliminating that stigma.

Dave: Yeah.

Brandon: Helping eliminate that stigma, having something at your ears, so.

Dave: Wow. Keep up the great work.

Brandon: Yes.

Dave: Good luck this weekend.

William Sawalic...: Thank you. Appreciate it.

Dave: I wish you all the success and continued success.

Speaker 4: Hometown win.

Dave: You're killing it.

William Sawalic...: Yes.

Dave: Hometown win. Let's go.

William Sawalic...: Absolutely. Let's do it.

Dave: So thank you for listening to this special episode for protect your hearing, wear hearing protection if you are in noisy environments. Like this if you enjoyed this conversation. Please feel free to send us an email at [soundbites@starkey.com](mailto:soundbites@starkey.com) with suggestions for future content. But otherwise rubbing is racing. We'll look forward to seeing and hearing you again soon. And thank you William, and thank you Brandon for joining us.

William Sawalic...: Thank you.



Brandon: Thank you.

Dave: Take care.