

**EPISODE 475**

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:34.8]

**FT:** Welcome to So Money everyone, I'm your host Farnoosh Torabi. We've got a guest today who had his dreams totally crushed at a young age of 22. Do you remember when you were 22? Maybe you're not even 22 yet but when I was 22, I was I think graduating from college, going to grad school at Columbia. I was just sort of trying to figure things out. Our guest today at that age had just stated to dedicate his entire life to the NFL. He became an NFL player at 22, actually making it to the big leagues playing for his hometown team, the Chicago Bears, and then having it all go away after one game, just one game.

Matt Mayberry is here today. He is a former linebacker for the NFL Chicago Bears, had planned on being on the team for about a decade but he lasted just one game. He suffered a life changing injury, and so what did he do? Well he got really depressed as one would but then he decided to take back control of his life and start his own company, why not? Matt Mayberry enterprises. It's a training and consulting company that specializes in maximizing the performance of individuals and organizations all over the world and of course Matt pulls from his own life experiences to inspire others and his list of clients include big corporations, fortune 500 companies, NFL and NBA teams, government and nonprofit organizations, professional associations, hospitals, universities, you name it. They want him there to help their people learn how to beat adversity.

He's also one of the most read columnists in Entrepreneur Magazine, and of course he has a new book out, it's called *Winning Plays: Tackling adversity and achieving success and business and in life*. In the book he talks all about his own failures, his setbacks and how he ultimately reclaimed his strength and started over. On the podcast, Matt also reveals an even earlier setback. Before being forced to leave football after the injury, Matt was addicted to drugs. How motivational speaker Stedman Graham and of course life partner of Oprah Winfrey helped Matt change the course of his life, he gave him 20 minutes to make a decision. Matt speaks at over 120 events a year as the key note. How does he get this gigs? It's a selfish question.

Here is Matt Mayberry.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:03:03.5]

**FT:** Matt Mayberry, welcome to So Money. Congrats on your new book.

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**MM:** Thank you so much, I really appreciate it, very excited.

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**FT:** It's very rare to actually get to the NFL, you got to the Chicago Bears. Unfortunately experienced an injury that had you on the sidelines and in during that time, you decided, "I'm going to transition to a different kind of career." And now you have this polished bio, you got a book out, you're writing for Entrepreneur Magazine, everything seems to have fallen into place. But certainly, there must have been a time when you just didn't know how to connect the dots.

So take me to that place, take me to the time where you had no idea what to do. I'm sure you were crushed. I mean, to get to that point of playing for the NFL, that's such an epitome and then to realize, to have that self-realization that maybe you need to figure something else out and quickly. Take me to that place, what was it like?

[0:03:56.9]

**MM:** Absolutely, you know I was. I was extremely crushed. Here I was since six years old, I had a dream of playing in the NFL, it wasn't always necessarily an NFL dream but just being a professional athlete and I eventually reached that childhood dream and here I am, not only playing for the Chicago Bears but also playing for my hometown team, the Chicago Bears. So it

added so much more emotions to the equation and when I got hurt playing the San Diego Chargers, my whole life came crashing down on me.

I had no idea what was in store for my life because I ended up reaching an injury settlement with the Chicago bears. An NFL team just can't cut a guy and let him go when he's hurt so what happened was I reached an injury settlement with them and right then and there, I had no idea where my life was headed or what I was going to do next.

Two weeks prior, I met Stedman Graham, you know, Oprah Winfrey's boyfriend of 30 plus years, and we were talking at an event that I was doing for charity when I was with the Bears and he really liked my story and when he found out I got hurt, he said, "Matt, I'd love for you to speak at this leadership event, I think you'd be great." My first initial reaction was, "I got a D in public speaking in college and I'm terrified a group of 20 people. I think I'll pass."

Not to mention Farnoosh, I was depressed and angry. I just lost my dream, I was completely depressed, I wasn't talking to any friends or family members for at least two weeks and here I was, at 22 years old, completely lost about where my life was headed and my first initial reaction was, "Hell no, I'm not going to do this event." But when I hung up the phone and he said, give him a call back in 20 minutes, I thought long and hard about it and right then and there I knew that I was starting to feel sorry for myself and letting my circumstances really dictate not only my happiness but also my destiny, if I continued to let my circumstances really dictate what my next move was going to be.

So I called back and I said, "You know what? I'm in." I took that risk, I was nervous, I was scared, I still wanted to play in the NFL, I just reached an injury settlement, I didn't know where I was going to be in five years and long story short Farnoosh, speaking at that event really helped me discover my true purpose and passion. Six years later it's a full time business, I've got about six employees, travel around the world speaking to Fortune 500 companies of all sizes. It's an incredible blessing to know that my biggest blessing was discovered through one of my biggest failures.

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**FT:** 20 minutes he wanted you to call him back. Not next day or that evening, why do you think he wanted you to call him back relatively quickly? He didn't want you to wallow in your misery for too long probably?

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**MM:** Well from that aspect, it benefited me because I didn't have a lot of time to think about it. I just had to make a decision and go. But in reality, why I had to call back so soon was because the meeting planners of that event, it was kind of last minute.

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**FT:** You probably quickly found that the audience really, really loved your story? There's nothing like living failure through someone else's failure?

[0:07:05.1]

**MM:** Absolutely, I think that's what really helped me is to be able to resonate with the audience, whether I'm talking to a university's football team or a group of 2,000 Fortune 500 executives, it's talking about my failures. And athletics is a very much alike in business. You know all the characteristics and traits to win in the game of business, the same things I had to apply to reach that level in the NFL.

So they kind of go hand-in-hand so I connected really well with being able to tie kind of the professional athlete message into the world of business. So if right from day one, I wasn't necessarily always a good public speaker, but I really started to develop that story and being able to translate it into the business world to make sure that the audience was getting actionable ideas that they can leave the event with.

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**FT:** Your new book, *Winning Plays: Tackling adversity and achieving success in business and in life*, this concept of having to overcome adversity, it's not a new concept, how do you put a fresh spin on this?

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**MM:** For me, it's really being able to turn those failures into gifts. I think failure, adversity, hardships, tragedy, no matter how dark a tragedy may be in one's life, it's an opportunity to really turn that into a gift and really a breakthrough for the future. I think the more we can redefine what failure means, society in general has deemed failure as something negative.

So I think the moment that you can really start to deem and really have, put the perspective is that failure can really help you get to where you want to go, I think the better off you'll be. That's really the goal of this book, is to not only help people redefine what failure means but also give the strategies that helped me overcome a teenage drug addiction that nearly killed me, get an injury settlement, a career ending injury with the Chicago Bears and then so many failures all throughout my life, which I describe in detail in the book, to really how did I turn those into stepping stones for really to create a bigger future for my life?

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**FT:** In summary, how did you do that? I didn't know about the drug addiction when you were a teenager, that to me alone, to be able to overcome that and then still make it to the NFL, that is, most people can't even do that in a lifetime and do that all before...

[0:09:13.4]

**MM:** I always say, no matter who I'm speaking with, association is everything, "we are who we hang out with" and at 16 years old Farnoosh, I started to hang around with drug addicts, drug dealers, people that were committing crimes and ultimately I instilled their habits, what they were doing on a daily basis. I've done every single drug you could think of besides heroine, my mother's seen me do cocaine five times. My best sport growing up was baseball, I was actually getting recruited to play in the major leagues, I got kicked off my baseball team in high school

because I stole one my teammate's wallets. Because I saw the \$100 bill in there and thought up all the drugs I could buy with that money. So that's kind of a short glimpse of the life I was living at 16 years old. I was able to overcome that chapter in my life due to the love and support from my mother and father as well as my grandparents and all the people close to me.

I kind of had an awakening when I had to go to a drug treatment program. Two weeks into that, my father, one of the strongest human beings I've ever met kind of broke down in tears and said, "Matt, what are we doing wrong as parents? How can we help you get out of this dark, deprived world that you've been living in for so long?" It was that conversation with my father that really transpired the beginning steps to really turn my life around and that's when I discovered the power of goal-setting. I set a goal to get a division one college scholarship offer and it was that night, two weeks into my drug treatment program when I really started the building blocks to really build something incredible out of my life.

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**FT:** Now you're very busy, as you mentioned, running a business, traveling the globe, giving speeches. How has your new stage of success redefine your relationship perhaps with money?

[0:10:57.2]

**MM:** It's a great question, I think one of the biggest things that I've been able to do over the past let's say eight years is really educate myself. I think if someone had to ask me what is one piece of advice that you think everyone should know about money and it would be education. I think so many people are walking around uneducated, not knowing what type of investments they should do, not knowing certain retirement plans is going to help them, their children and their grandchildren down the road, and really just the lack of awareness of how to make your money work for you.

So I think for me, what I've been able to do the past couple of years is really start to have my money work for me, whether that's an investment, compound interest, a lot of things that you talk about and it's really just living in your means. I think a lot of people, especially being a

former athlete, we could talk about that briefly as well. I thought I was the richest kid in the world and I ended up blowing all of my money that I made.

[0:11:50.6]

**FT:** Yeah, what was your first paycheck?

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**MM:** Excuse me?

[0:11:54.0]

**FT:** What was the first paycheck as an athlete? What was the contract?

[0:11:59.0]

**MM:** I think \$15,000. The very first one that I've ever had was \$15,000. That was I think my largest from like an actual paycheck.

[0:12:14.0]

**FT:** But of course you had aspirations of making bazillions as an NFL athlete?

[0:12:19.8]

**MM:** I had goals to make — listen, I had a dream to play at least nine years in the NFL. I lasted only one game. So you can see kind of the disappointment that I had back then, six and a half years ago.

[0:12:35.5]

**FT:** For you, what was the biggest education? If education is the most important thing when it comes to strengthening your finances and your strategy around money, what for you was the biggest education?

[0:12:48.8]

**MM:** The biggest for me was just learning how to make my money work for me. I never knew that I could really have my money work for me. I think so many people don't realize that it's not about going to work hard, sure you want to work hard and work smart, obviously those two go hand in hand. But at the same time, you want to try to get your money to work for you.

For me it was investing in some startups, really going the investing route as far as what are some businesses and things I can get associated with, the different stocks, getting familiar with the stock market. Just things that you can do to really try to help you. It's not instant gratification, I think that's really where the one of the biggest negatives that people have with money is they want right now. They want to see a return right now, and in the investment as you know, it's the long game. I'm all about the long game thinking about 15, 20 years from now, that's kind of how I approach my money strategy.

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**FT:** What was your biggest financial failure to date? How old are you now? 28?

[0:13:49.9]

**MM:** 29.

[0:13:50.7]

**FT:** 29, okay, I guessed. What would you say so far was your biggest money failure, regret?

[0:13:57.2]

**MM:** My biggest money failure without a doubt was when I blew all of my money that I made from the Chicago Bears. Without a doubt.

[0:14:05.3]

**FT:** Where did you blow it on?

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**MM:** Vegas, partying, shoes, I think one of my biggest thing back then...

[0:14:12.7]

**FT:** Athletes love shoes.

[0:14:13.5]

**MM:** ... I mean I have literally over 400 pairs of shoes.

[0:14:15.5]

**FT:** Athletes love shoes, why do you think that is?

[0:14:19.2]

**MM:** I don't know? Maybe being an athlete, I was just really obsessed with shoes. I just had a weird obsession with shoes, I think a lot of my teammates might have rubbed off on me.

[0:14:28.2]

**FT:** Influenced you? Yeah.

[0:14:29.9]

**MM:** Just buying watches and going to Vegas every other weekend and...

[0:14:34.7]

**FT:** Did you go into debt?

[0:14:35.4]

**MM:** Just carelessly spending on things that really didn't matter.

[0:14:38.4]

**FT:** Did you go into debt?

[0:14:39.8]

**MM:** I did not go into debt, no. But I completely blew all of my money to the point where when I got hurt with the Chicago bears, I had to go back and live with my parents at 22 years old.

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**FT:** Yikes.

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**MM:** After being, you know, here I am an NFL athlete, people notice me when I go out and I was living just such a great life, I achieved a childhood dream and here I am moving back in with my parents with an injury. So not only on top of being depressed about the injury, but also, I have no money, I'm completely broke and I'm living with my parents.

[0:15:10.5]

**FT:** How soon after or long after, living with your parents, broke did you start to become more financially independent?

[0:15:20.2]

**MM:** It took about, I would say a year and a half. When I started speaking after Stedman, even though that that moment in time really helped me really find my true purpose and passion was and I started to speak word of mouth got around. I wasn't getting paid what my speaking fee is now. A couple \$500 there, \$600 here, maybe \$300. It really was whatever a local organization or group had to pay me. Sometimes it was for free. It didn't happen overnight but I would say, it really took about a year and a half after my injury to really get back on my feet from a financial standpoint.

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**FT:** I'm curious also to learn how you — did you just get home one day and go, "I'm going to have a website, I'm going to piece this story together, I'm going to recreate who I am, story of Matt Mayberry and start marketing myself"? Because at some point, the offer started to come through. You're a very in demand speaker right now and of course you're a published author. What was the conscious strategizing around the brand building of Matt Mayberry?

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**MM:** In the beginning there really was no strategy, that's the crazy thing about it is I literally, after I spoke that night with Stedman, I said, "Wow, this is really what I want to do." I was so emotional to the point where I had tears in my eyes after the event when I was sitting in my car. I thought about my injury and getting hurt with the Chicago Bears, losing my childhood dream, and then being on stage in front of hundreds and hundreds of people just really ignited me and really gave me a type of energy that was even greater than playing in front of 85,000 fans.

So it was a truly incredible feeling but after that moment, I didn't say, "I need to build a website, I need to do this." I kind of just went out, shared a message, I spoke. And at that point I was not talking about the drugs, I was not talking about my past as a 16, 17 year old. The only thing I

was doing was really sharing all the things that helped me get to the NFL in the first place because those ideas and strategies could be implemented in any organization to help the employees of that organization. So that's kind of what I was doing.

It wasn't until I consulted a few mentors who are currently authors and speakers such as Stedman, John Gordon, Matthew Kelley, some well-respected authors and speakers. They said, "Hey, this is what you need to do, you need to get a website up, you need to actually start talking, you need to be authentic and vulnerable and start sharing your full story. It's a powerful story, you overcame such a dark time when you were 16. Share that. There's learning lessons in there, there's growth lessons in there for people, so share that. It would make it that more impactful."

When I started to do that, when I started to really get serious about strategizing my story and telling it in such a way that people can learn from it and apply it to their own life, regardless of what they did for a profession, that's really when everything started to take off and that's when all the pieces started to get put together, such as the website, my brand material, my niche market, which kind of I thought honestly, it was going to be athletics, being a former athlete.

I never in the beginning said I want to be speaking to, out of a 130 keynotes I do a year, I would say over 90 of those are in the business world. I never said that in the beginning. I kind of just took my message and ran with it and the business world was very accepting of that. So that's kind of how it kind of, it really developed for me.

[0:18:53.0]

**FT:** All right, let's go down memory lane a little bit. I would love to learn a story about little Matt growing up and maybe your first experience or understanding of money.

[0:19:07.9]

**MM:** I think my father always tell me, "Money doesn't grow on trees." That famous saying that we've all heard at one point from our parents more than likely. He would always say that to me. Not necessarily that I believe in that, but that's when I date back to being nine, 10 years old, that

is one story, I remember him telling me that almost at least every other weekend when I wanted a new toy or a new bat for baseball or whatever it was. I remember that he would always say, "Money doesn't grow on trees."

[0:19:42.6]

**FT:** Growing up, was your family very talkative about money? What did you learn from your parents about money?

[0:19:48.7]

**MM:** From them, I learned about saving. I learned about living beneath your means and really just working hard every day and setting yourself up. My dad's an iron worker, he's been an iron worker for the past 40 years, so they got the blue collar work ethic, "we're going to work hard six days a week and we're going to save, we're going to enjoy and we're going to take some vacations".

So for them, it was really all about — I learned how to be frugal and how to really make the right investments as well. My dad taught me a lot about investing and the stock market and some things that I should get, really participate in and really is going to help me 15, 20 years down the road and eventually even my children when I have children.

[0:20:33.1]

**FT:** All right, Matt, you're very busy, I see you doing over a hundred key note speeches a year. Is that right?

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**MM:** Correct.

[0:20:41.1]

**FT:** Okay. How do you get this opportunities? Who is hiring key notes almost every other day?

[0:20:49.6]

**MM:** I mean everyone. Associations, Fortune 500 companies, Fortune 100, I mean, all organizations usually have an award dinner, sales event, athletic organizations, NFL, NBA, every college usually brings a speaker in for the beginning of the year. Obviously associations that I mentioned, that's probably one of the more well-known ones because every association has events throughout the year. So there's associations that are for every industry and every city in every country. So there's a lot of different events taking place throughout the year to where speakers are in demand for those events.

[0:21:27.5]

**FT:** Great. All right, let's talk about a habit that you have that helps you with your finances? What's something that has really been pivotal for you?

[0:21:36.9]

**MM:** Automatic, you know, automating my bills, automating, paying myself every month, every other week, whatever it is. Certain months are different, but really just automating that instead of — it's been a game changer for me, it really has. Just knowing that every month, this percentage of my paycheck's going in to my retirement or for whatever I want to put it in, this money is going towards investments and then this amount of money is going to bills. So really just setting up an automation system that I don't have to think about it, it's just done.

[0:22:07.7]

**FT:** Do you still buy shoes?

[0:22:09.9]

**MM:** I do not.

[0:22:10.2]

**FT:** You do not?

[0:22:12.5]

**MM:** I do not, no I do not.

[0:22:13.5]

**FT:** Is it more like a post trauma or is it just that you have found other things that you'd rather spend your money on?

[0:22:22.3]

**MM:** I think it's a little bit of both. I think I realized that what a bad money habit that was, buying all the shoes that I bought, and I definitely have realized with what you just said, there's a lot of other more beneficial things that I could be spending my money on than shoes.

[0:22:39.7]

**FT:** Yeah, so when you approach spending, what thoughts go through your head? Do you have a philosophy around money management?

[0:22:46.3]

**MM:** I really don't. For me, I've kind of done well for myself now to the point where it's less, you know, I know when I was first starting it was more of you know, "I can't get this, I want this." Or, "I'm going to save this for that." Now I don't really live like that to the point where I have a little bit more freedom to where I can indulge in myself. Whether I want to take a vacation, whether I want to buy this.

But to be honest, most of my spending habits are for my business, to help what's going to make my business grow, what's going to help me grow as an individual. I go to conferences still, even when I'm not speaking, I'm always investing in myself. So I think I let go of the shoe habit and instead really picked up the personal development habit to really invest back into Matt Mayberry.

[0:23:39.1]

**FT:** Awesome. All right, let's do some So Money fill in the blanks Matt. This is the part where I start a sentence and then you finish it, and maybe we'll learn a little bit more about how you like to splurge along the way.

If I won the lottery, let's say you won a \$100 million bucks, the first thing I would do is \_\_\_\_\_.

[0:23:56.0]

**MM:** Help out the inner city of Chicago.

[0:24:00.5]

**FT:** Yeah, do you feel like you were a victim of that?

[0:24:03.8]

**MM:** I do not. You know, I grew up in Chicago suburbs so I wasn't in the inner city growing up, but what happened was I started hanging around with inner city kids because they all — there's a project in Chicago that used to be called Cabrini Green and they tore those down when I was in high school and all of the kids that were in there kind of migrated to the suburbs.

So some of those guys came to my high school and even surrounding areas and that's really who I started to associate myself with. So maybe you can say I was a victim of that, but I chose to hang out with them, I don't blame them, I don't blame them taking down those projects and them coming to this area. But that's kind of what happened there.

[0:24:46.9]

**FT:** how about this? When I spend my money, the one thing I spend on that makes my life easier or better or both is \_\_\_\_\_.

[0:24:57.2]

**MM:** Personal development, without a doubt. So whether that's a new book, a new audio book, a new conference that I'm going to, different retreats, whatever it may be. Something that's really going to help me grow as an individual.

[0:25:09.6]

**FT:** Who are your guru's? Who do you look to for inspiration?

[0:25:13.4]

**MM:** There is a lot of people. I learned from everybody. Just the other day I learned from a homeless man. I'm over here complaining about the traffic and here's a man just being grateful for being alive. So it was, I only said that story because I really do try to pick up a lesson from every interaction, every conversation that I have. But some of my mentors, as I mentioned earlier, John Gordon, Matthew Kelley, Tony Robbins is another great guy who have been around forever. He's kind of like the grandfather of writing and speaking. So there's quite a few people that I learn from every day, whether that's reading books, listening to audio programs and then even a couple of phone calls a week with my mentors.

[0:25:58.3]

**FT:** Or just observing life, keeping your eyes open.

[0:26:00.2]

**MM:** Absolutely, just observing life.

[0:26:02.3]

**FT:** When I splurge, I don't buy shoes apparently anymore, but I do like to buy \_\_\_\_\_. It's okay to have fun with your money, you know that, right?

[0:26:14.9]

**MM:** I'm a watch guy so I splurge on watches. That's the closest to my shoe spending.

[0:26:21.6]

**FT:** All right, good stuff. I'm thinking about a watch purchase. It's going to be in my future sometime soon. Watches for me, I like so many watches that I can't fathom spending so much on every single watch. All right, when I was growing up, the one thing I wish I had learned about money is \_\_\_\_\_.

[0:26:40.5]

**MM:** That regardless of circumstances, you can create wealth for yourself.

[0:26:44.7]

**FT:** When I donate, I like to give to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

[0:26:48.6]

**MM:** Boys and Girls Club because the children of this world are the future of our world.

[0:26:54.0]

**FT:** Last but not least, I'm Matt Mayberry, I'm So Money because \_\_\_\_\_.

[0:26:58.6]

**MM:** I am So Money because I love life and everything that money can do for you.

[0:27:04.1]

**FT:** There's so much more ahead, you're only in your late 20's. I feel like such a grandmother interviewing you. Truly an inspiration Matt. Thank you so much and congratulations on your new book. We wish you more success. The book is called *Winning Plays: Tackling adversity and achieving success in business and in life*. Thanks a lot.

[0:27:22.3]

**MM:** Thank you so much Farnoosh, I really appreciate you having me on, it was a blast.

[END]