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**Transition:** Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

**Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

**Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out. Transition: Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, DeMar DeRozan, grew up in Compton, California. He was a top hoops prospect out of high school and went on to play at USC. He was drafted to the NBA in 2009 by the Toronto Raptors. He played with them for nine years. He's also played for the San Antonio Spurs, Chicago Bulls, and now the Sacramento Kings. In that time, he earned six All-Star nods and an Olympic gold medal.

In February of 2018, DeMar sent out a tweet. It read, “This depression get the best of me.” It was one of the first times DeRozan publicly addressed his battle with depression. It also opened a door into something that wasn't talked about much in professional sports: mental health. DeMar had a tough time growing up. He lost several family members and friends to gang violence. He had relatives coming in and out of jail. His mom had lupus. He's carried that trauma with him for most of his life. As a kid, he would pick fights or punch a wall just to feel something.

When he wrote “This depression get the best of me,” it put DeMar in a space of vulnerability. I mean, it would for anyone talking about that publicly. But DeMar—well, he's an NBA All-Star. The response was an outpouring of support from his colleagues, friends, and the public. A response he didn't expect, so he talked about it more, became an advocate. DeMar DeRozan just released a book. It's a memoir called *Above the Noise: My Story of Chasing Calm*. It's a powerful book. I'm grateful to have DeMar joining me to talk about it.

**Transition:** Chiming synth with light vocalizations.

**Jesse Thorn:** DeMar DeRozan, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show, and I enjoyed reading your book so much.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Man, thank you for having me. And it means a lot—you know, about the book. You know, it was tough. I never knew being involved with a book would be so, you know, difficult. But you know, it's an honor. It means a lot.

**Jesse Thorn:** I feel like everyone I know who's written a book, they come out of it at the end like, “Why did I agree to write a book?”

*(They laugh.)*

Like, I just spent five years of my life writing that book.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah, yeah, I could understand it for sure. But I think hearing stuff like that makes it feel good. Make it all worth it.

**Jesse Thorn:** You're here in front of me, Los Angeles'ed out. You have on a shirt with Mookie Betts on it. You had on—it's backwards, but I think that's a Dodgers hat there that matches.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah, for sure.

**Jesse Thorn:** You got white sneakers to match there. And you're an Angeleno. Do you live full-time in LA?

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah, yeah. Off season. Spend most of my time here, work out here, family here. Still home, you know, being in the league, going into my 16th year. You know, home is always going to be home. So, you know, I always got to make it back to LA.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, it's one of those things like—you know, as I was reading your book and thinking about— You went to college in LA as well, but like you got drafted by the Toronto Raptors. Which is as far away as you can go and be playing American professional basketball. And I just thought what change that must have been in your life, to like get out of an airplane in a foreign country, you know?

**DeMar DeRozan:** Listen, I just had this conversation the other day with a couple guys of, you know, part of the reason why I stayed home was the reality that I told myself was like this may be my last opportunity to play home. Because if I get drafted, it's a good chance—you know, at the time, Lakers was good. You know, nobody really was trying to go to the Clippers at that time. So, you know, I'm looking at it like, you know, this is probably my last opportunity to play home, not knowing I would be going to another country.

But it was a positive for me as well, because it took me out of my comfort zone and my element and kind of forced me to grow up a little bit faster. Because, you know, before I got drafted to Toronto—a week before, a couple days before, I just got my passport for the first time. You know, and—

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, there's a detail in your book, which is that like you had to take that flight by yourself.

*(DeMar confirms.)*

Because there wasn't anybody else in your family that had a passport.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. Yeah. And I was like—it was like a reality check for me that I didn't realize I needed until it happened. You know, it kind of helped you grow fast,

understand responsibilities, and take a look at life from a different perspective than, you know, what I was already comfortable doing.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, one of the details that jumped out at me in your book is—you're describing that flight to Toronto, and it's, "I was gonna get to Toronto, take a tour of the facilities, and do half a day of media interviews." (*Chuckles.*) And I just thought, here's a dude showing up to a foreign country for work for his first day, hasn't even met his teammates, hasn't met his—

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You know, maybe you had met somebody at the draft or something, but like—or had a phone call, but you're showing up to work, and your first day of work as a 19-year-old is they walk you around the basketball court, and then they sit you down for half a day of interviews.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yes. It was definitely overwhelming. Because, you know, literally the night before, I was drafted. You know, literally early in the morning, get on a flight, now I'm in a whole new country. I got a suit on. You know, I think it was my second time in my life. You know, before that—obviously, (*inaudible*) wearing a suit, but wearing another suit the next day. You know, it was overly overwhelming. Then to be doing it by yourself. You know, not looking around, having somebody that's familiar to you—whether if it's a friend or a family.

You know, it was new. Everything was so new for me. But you know, like I said, I needed it. It helped me grow up extremely fast.

**Jesse Thorn:** I was thinking about your upbringing in Los Angeles as I was reading the book. And there's like—there's these two kind of incredible directions that your life was pointed when you were a kid. One was, you know, you're in Compton; it's a rough scene; you have friends and family members caught up in violence and, you know, have to live with that on a day-to-day basis. You also live in the Los Angeles that people see in movies. And you know, you were a great basketball player. You had an uncle who was a sort of community organizer. And so, you were also like at Penny Marshall's house going swimming sometimes as a teenager. (*Chuckles.*)

And like synthesizing those two things was really hard for me to wrap my head around. Like, the idea that you had this life at home, and then—starting as a young teenager—this crazy other life where, you know, one of your closest friends was Romeo Miller, at the time Lil' Romeo, you know?

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. Man, it was such a high and low at times for me. Because, you know, the reality of it at the end of the day, I gotta make my way back to Compton. I gotta wake up the next morning and go to school in Compton. I gotta walk to school. I gotta—I'm dealing with the aggressiveness that my reality was, you know, Monday through Friday. But having the opportunity on Saturday or Sundays to go by, you know, one of my close friends, Romeo Miller's, house that's a mansion with a pool overlooking, you know, Beverly Hills.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, DeMar, I remember when there was a Master P cribs that involved showing Romeo's personal tiny Land Rover, I think it was. *(Laughs.)*

**DeMar DeRoza:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. Exactly!

**Jesse Thorn:** That was craziest thing I've ever seen in my life!

**DeMar DeRoza:** 1,000%. And it was always that for me, but it was kind of like a relief for me that I needed from, you know, the time that I had to deal with my reality. You know, it kind of gave me an opportunity to breathe and kind of feel, you know, safe. But with that, giving me the inspiration and the extra motivation I needed to, you know, want better for myself and for my family as well.

So, you know, I looked at it from that standpoint. That whole way of growing up saying like, “Yo, this is possible.” Like, if I'm able to do this, and I'm able to see both sides of the fence of things, it helped me keep my focus and my perspective in order for me to have my drive I needed to make it out.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, this is something that comes up a lot on the show, but like—you know, I grew up in a tough neighborhood when I was a kid, but I had these kind of like advantages that made it so it was never a question whether I was gonna be okay as a grownup. For one thing, I'm White; and I was too skinny and weird looking for anybody to think that I was gonna—you know, that I was gonna be in their clique. You know what I mean? And I was a weird nerd.

And you know, I talk to people, and there are these kind of like lanes when you're in the hood that people can see you in, and they kind of give you a little extra space. And I got the impression reading your book that there was a part of your life where it was like, “Look, DeMar has a special gift. He's gonna be a basketball player.” And that gives you a little bit of room to not have to make as many choices of, “I'm not going to get involved in this, or I'm not going to get involved in that.”

**DeMar DeRoza:** Right. For sure. And you know, I think that was kind of the era I grew up in and the morals and the inner workings of the hood, you know what I mean? Where you hear those stories where the guys older than you kind of look at you, and it's like, “Nah, you have an opportunity to make it out. You know, stay away from this.”

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Or you know, I had older cousins that protected me in a sense, and knowing how to keep me away from certain things. You know, just my family respect in my neighborhood of understanding like, you know, “That's Diane's son. You know, he got a chance. Like, nah, let's make sure he make it out of here.”

So, I had a lot of that around me. You know, you still fall victim to a lot of mistakes here and there, because there's not many other opportunities to, you know, just avoid everything that comes with being in the neighborhood.

**Jesse Thorn:** You also, I imagine, like cut a distinctive figure. I mean, how old were you when you were six feet tall? You're 6'6" now, right?

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah, that's a great question. It was early on. I'd say middle school. Yeah, middle school, around middle school.

**Jesse Thorn:** Like, I remember being that tall and like what it meant to walk down the street, you know, across the street from Valencia Gardens, the projects by my house, right? And be like that big, it's just really different.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah, it was different, especially early on was—

**Jesse Thorn:** Like, nobody's gonna miss you. You know what I mean?

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah, nobody. Nobody. You know, walking on campus and everything, like I think—I was looking at my yearbook from middle school the other day that I took with my basketball team, and I was bigger than everybody on my team and the coach. *(Chuckles.)* You know what I mean? It was like one of those moments to where you look at it, it's like, “Damn, during that time, that's why people used to call me lanky and all that stuff.” Because everybody was just—you know, you just don't see it that much, of people that tall. So, I definitely was taller than everybody.

**Jesse Thorn:** Even more still to come with DeMar DeRozan. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

**Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is DeMar DeRozan. He's an NBA All-Star. He's also an outspoken advocate for mental health in the world of professional sports. He recently released a memoir called *Above the Noise: My Story of Chasing Calm*. It's out now. And hey! If you didn't already know, we are doing video now. You can see video for all of our new interviews on our YouTube channel, along with our social pages—Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. So, come join us there. Why?! Well, for one thing, *(laughing)* you can see if you watch this episode how tiny I, a very large man, look next to DeMar DeRozan. Let's get back into our conversation.

You grew up especially with your mom's family all around you. How many members of your family were like actively in your life and, you know, in the neighborhood—like, within walking distance or, you know, a five-minute drive?

**DeMar DeRozan:** Man, a lot. And it's so crazy that you even say that. Like, 'cause you know, my mom is from Compton, and realizing it growing up, you know, I'm thinking—When you think of my family, I'm thinking both sides of my family in a sense. Because just my mom's side alone was so big. You know, I had so many uncles, I had so many aunties, so many cousins that it seemed like every part of the city of Compton we had to go to be at my family. You know what I mean? I may stay at my grandfather's house, I stay on the other side of Compton, and that whole side of the family is up and down that street. You know, I may

go to my grandmother's house, and it's a whole family feel block-to-block. You know, and it was so crazy. It was just that. My whole family been so big and instrumental to me my whole childhood that it wasn't a day that went by where I wasn't around at least five to ten family members.

**Jesse Thorn:** What I was thinking of is that you have this extraordinary world of people that love you and are, you know, in some ways caring for you and supporting you. You also necessarily—like, you had a lot of people in your family who had been in jail, people in your family who were killed, people in your family whose lives revolved around illegal stuff. And you know, it's a double-edged sword in the way that it isn't necessarily for other people that—you know, you have this incredible thing of all your family members, but you also have all the pain that close to you, because those are all your family members, you know?

**DeMar DeRozan:** For sure. Yeah. Yeah, but one thing that kept it together, and you never—like, I never grew up judging anybody, because it was always like real love there. Like, it was family at the end of the day. Right, wrong, or indifferent, it's like, yo, this is family. You know, whether if it's a family member who'd get incarcerated, like for whatever the crime was—you know, we never think of the crime. You think of the love for that loved one that's going away. Like, you miss that individual, you know. Whether if somebody passed, whatever it may happen, it was just one thing that always kept it connected was the love. You know? And that's all we always had to lean on.

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Because you know, growing up, you don't see nothing else. You don't see wrong in a sense, because there's so much wrong that go on, but you know the love is there, and you kind of like lean on that more than anything.

**Jesse Thorn:** Although, I would say like—I would say, though, that the scary part of that, especially if you're a kid, is that the love is unconditional, right? Family love is unconditional. But if you don't know what you're going to get from someone, that's terrifying as a child, right? So, whether it's that they got sent away, whether it's that someone was killed, whether it's just that someone is an addict and isn't reliable in some way, like all of those things get mixed up in love when you're—if you're a kid. Because you can't—you don't understand the way the puzzle pieces fit together. You know?

**DeMar DeRozan:** Oh, without a doubt. You know, and then like to your point, it's—and it's so many puzzle pieces when you're young, it's hard to like— You know, you're grouping them all in one setting. And it's so much—so many moving parts and so much that go on to where, you know, to this day there's so many things like my mom or my grandma used to say to me as a kid, to where it was like, “You will understand when you get older.”

And as I got older, you start to understand a lot of those moments and, you know, why they look at it from a different perspective of a child. Because you know, to your point, we just looking at it like, “Oh man, why my cousin gotta go away for so long? Like man, that sucks. I don't want to hear nothing you got to say other than could he come back sooner.”

You know, and that's the tough part. As a kid that causes so much confusion. And you know, I think a lot of trauma comes from that, because we hold on to a lot of that we can't understand in that moment. And you know, it takes you to be an adult to figure a lot of those things out.

**Jesse Thorn:** When did you start getting in fights at school?

**DeMar DeRozan:** I mean, I was expelled from elementary for fighting, you know. And it's so crazy, because I remember having a conversation with my oldest daughter at the beginning of the year. And we was driving from school; I was picking her up from school. And I was telling her like, "Enjoy your fifth grade year. Like, your friends. You graduate—you're going to graduate this year. Enjoy it, have fun, because it goes by like that." And then that moment of me telling her that made me realize like I was expelled from the fifth grade. I wasn't able to graduate, because I was expelled for fighting. And I'm looking at my daughter—at the time, she was 10—like, I couldn't imagine that. Like, I can't fathom that. You know what I mean?

And I just remember when I was that age and my mom, devastated, hurt that I'm getting expelled from elementary. Now I got to go to—you know, try to go to summer school. And it just was a whole mess, but I didn't—I don't have graduation pictures, graduating, you know? So, when my daughter graduated a couple months ago, it was like a reality check for me. Because I remember being in the third or fourth, fifth grade fighting.

So yeah, I was young. You know, just a lot of that aggression and built-up resentment from, you know, probably not having the aggressive nature of—you know, you having to protect yourself, you having to be tough, and me having a bunch of cousins in the household to where all we did was fight.

**Jesse Thorn:** And I think—you know, tell me if I'm wrong, but like even besides the aggressive part of it, which is like a totally normal trauma response, there's also kind of an element when you're fighting of when you get hurt, like that pain is like a way to physicalize and control pain in your heart, you know? Like—

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. Yeah, isn't it? And it's crazy to even say that, because I remember me and my cousins used to get in trouble. My papa used to make us go pick a switch. So, obviously, you know, you try to look for the smallest switch. So, you go in the house, and you get ready, you know, to get a whooping. Out of all my cousins, I was the only one who never used to cry when it was time to get a whooping. And you know, as I got older and started to realize a lot of those moments why I didn't cry, because it was like my pain was more so internal, instead of the external feeling of so much that we carry and we hold in and we kind of like, you know, build up this sort of resentment towards whatever. You know what I mean?

And then I feel like the internal pain is more painful than any physical pain you could feel. You know, and you try to exploit that by getting into altercations, getting into fights and being this destructive—you know, (*chuckles*) just doing anything being a bad kid would do.

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**Jesse Thorn:** You know, we talked about you getting in fights as a young kid, but you also were already aware of making choices to protect yourself from the world around you. Like, you didn't drink as a teenager. And I don't know if you still don't.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Nao, I've never had a—I've never tasted a drink. Nothing. Not at all.

**Jesse Thorn:** And I can relate to that. I made the same choice when I was a teenager for similar reasons. And on the one hand, that's a really safe and responsible choice. And it worked out well, I think. On the other hand, when I was like 30, I had to realize—I was like, “Oh, I'm just trying to control my life.” (*Laughs.*) Like, I'm trying to be the boss of everything inside me, rather than living with myself.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. And I think for me it was like—to this day, like I don't—like, I remember, I went to go get my wisdom teeth out. I didn't want to take no pain medicine. Like, I've never—I don't take anything for headache; Tylenol, anything. And I think from that standpoint, like I never wanted to feel consciously reluctant on anything, you know?

And I always try to tell myself and try to have like self-control and feel whatever it is that I needed to go through. Because I always looked at it like it won't last. You know. Yeah, it's uncomfortable. It's painful for right now, but it won't last. You know?

**Jesse Thorn:** But like if you're a professional athlete, one of the things that you just have to get your head around is that it's not under your control.

*(DeMar agrees.)*

You have teammates, and you could be Steph Curry, and you're still only knocking down 45% of your three-point shots or whatever it is.

**DeMar DeRozan:** For sure.

**Jesse Thorn:** Right? He's missing more often than he's making it. And so, like at some point you have to learn the lesson, “I can only control process; I can't control what happens.”

**DeMar DeRozan:** For sure. And I think that's the beauty of sports. And I think—I watch every sport and find an appreciation for sports, because—I use an example like, you know, I will watch golf sometimes. And the beauty of golf is no one will ever be able to master it. And I think once you know that I think you become—you know—understanding of “Let me see how great I could be at this.” I know nobody will ever perfect it. Nobody will ever go par five, get a hole in one, par four. Nobody will ever do that. I think the drive is how close to perfection can I get it to?

**Jesse Thorn:** But how did you—I mean, when you're six and a half feet tall, and you can jump the way that you can still jump even in your mid-30s when you're 16 or 17 years old, there's not much standing in your way. So, you know, maybe it was when you got to college, maybe it was when you got to the NBA that you had to deal with the fact that you couldn't just be better than everybody, right? (*Chuckles.*)



**DeMar DeRozan:** Mm-hm. Yeah, for sure. I think for me, like from the basketball perspective—right?—everybody knows like Kobe is my GOAT, of all time. That's my favorite player of all time. And I just remember being seven/eight years old crying when I seen Kobe shoot those air balls in a playoff versus Utah. Like, I was devastated. Like, I was crying, because I felt so bad for him.

But I remember the next year, he came back even better. Like, he took on the challenge. He didn't let those air balls break him. And that was something like I always carried, knowing like I'm not going to be perfect, but I'm not going to let nothing break me down. I'm not going to let it make me want to quit. I'm going to make it make me want to figure it out. You know, I used to be—the reason I don't play video games no more is because I become so obsessive. It was a point to where I remember I was playing *Crash Bandicoot*, and I couldn't beat a level. I wouldn't stop until I beat that level and beat the whole game. That's how I felt the satisfaction I needed. You know what I mean?

And I kind of carry that over when it comes to—you know, whether if it's life or basketball, it's like I know I'm never going to be able to figure everything out. But I'm willing to go through whatever I need to go through to understand more than I thought I knew before. And that's how I kind of carry a lot of stuff with myself.

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**Jesse Thorn:** When was the first time that you dealt with major depression?

**DeMar DeRozan:** Mm. That's a great question, because even when I came out about it, you know, it was—you know, the feelings of the dark, the frustration, the pain. I had a lot of those moments very early as a teenager. Honestly, I just remember being in a hateful, dark place when I was even in elementary, in a sense. Like, there used to be times where, you know, you'll find ways to try to implement on hurting yourself.

I remember I used to punch a hole in a wall. I used to, you know, hit my head against the wall. I used to, you know, try to inflict any type of physical pain on myself, because of whatever discomfort internally that I was feeling. Like, you know, at the time, I'm just thinking I'm mad. But you know, looking back on it as you get older, it's like, man, was I in a dark place? Was I depressed? What was it that I actually was in?

**Jesse Thorn:** And you don't even—I mean like one of the things about depression is—right?—connected to trauma and connected to all these painful things, but also sometimes it's not.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. Yes.

**Jesse Thorn:** Sometimes it's just the chemistry of your body, and it's immense pain.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. You hit it on the head. But it's like, you know, when you get of age, and you start to really dig into that mental/emotional side of things, you really could pinpoint

and look back on a lot of things. And you know, it'll make you question a lot of things. Like, you know, "What was this? Was this it?" Especially when you understand the feeling more.

You know, I think growing up the way I grew up, you don't understand the feelings at all. You can't express it, you can't verbalize it, you can't communicate it. Because you really don't know what it is. You just—you know, you're screaming out for help in so many different ways that, you know, even the other people can't even realize what's going on with you, you know? Because they're going through the same thing too. So, that's why you have this cycle of it happening over and over and over, especially in the urban community.

**Jesse Thorn:** You experienced—besides the kind of like day-to-day traumas that you just listed—really major traumas as well, you know, among other things. When you were a teenager, your best friend was killed while you were waiting for him to come over and hang out. And you had family members killed as well. And I wonder if now as a man in your mid-30s, you're able to see in yourself or recognize in yourself the kinds of trauma responses that necessarily follow from that, you know? Whatever it may be, right? You're at the grocery store, and your heart starts beating fast or whatever. Like, are you able to see those in yourself?

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah, but it's more so of a like... you know, I more so feel certain things when I'm with my kids. Because it's like when my kids—when I'm around my daughter and my son, it's like my survival instinct, my guard, everything is just completely shut off, and I'm kind of in the most vulnerable state that I could be in when I'm with my kids. And if something happened that gives me like a—my survival instinct kick in or something that, like a worry, or any type of instincts kick in when my guard is down, that's when I kind of feel those trauma responses. You know?

And it's like—or even like if my daughter falls and hurt herself, it's like I find myself—like, my emotions of everything just shoot out the window. And it's like, you know, that's when I feel it the most is when I'm with my kids. But you know, when I make the conscious effort of being outside, it's like my survival instincts automatically kick in. So, it's like I become numb to so much stuff, because I'm aware of everything that's going on.

**Jesse Thorn:** One of the things that I found hardest with my kids when they were young was finding the comfort within myself to be with them on their terms, sit there for an hour straight and play "drive a car around the mat" or whatever. That was really hard for me. Because I realized I'm just pushing, pushing, pushing all the time. And you know, you were pushing, pushing, pushing getting through the hood. Playing basketball is just pushing, pushing, pushing constantly. And like the hardest part can be stopping.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. It definitely is. And you know, I have moments where—you know, my kids really checked that in a sense. Like, they really, really checked that in so many different ways that—you know, I remember it was the day last week; I'm playing with my son, and I'm trying to read something to do with work going on in the NBA.

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I got my phone, and my son literally grabbed my phone and said, “Put your phone down, Dad,” and hand handed me a car. And it's like alright, alright. It kind of like—the reality check of it—like, kids definitely check you in a whole different sense that'll help you realize what you need to work on. And I think I'm overly grateful for that, because I would find myself like just pushing and pushing and pushing and not taking a second for myself or for my kids or just taking a second. Like, you know, at times—like, I used to be a big guy who watched shows all the time. Like, sometimes like, man, take a second—whether if it's a couple hours—watch your favorite show. Like, just decompress, don't care about nothing else but the show. And I gotta find my—I find myself trying to get back to that a lot of times. Especially, you know, for my kids.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Teasing.*) *Friends*? Is that what the show? I'm guessing.

**DeMar DeRozan:** No, no, no, *Friends* wasn't my show.

**Jesse Thorn:** Probably just *Friends*, right?

**DeMar DeRozan:** (*Laughs.*) Nah, *Friends* wasn't—my show was *Breaking Bad*. That was my show.

**Jesse Thorn:** Oh, who doesn't want to decompress and watch *Breaking Bad*? (*Laughs.*)

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. Just a little *Breaking Bad*, yeah.

(*Jesse cackles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** We have to go to a quick break. When we return, we'll talk with DeMar DeRozan about getting name-dropped in the biggest hip-hop song of the year. Keep it locked. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

**Promo:**

**Music:** A booming, spirited brass band.

**Mark Gagliardi:** What's up people of the world? It's Mark—

**Hal Lublin:** —and Hal, from *We Got This with Mark and Hal*.

**Mark:** The show that settles those pointless arguments that you and your friends have. Should you put ketchup on a hot dog?

Or liquid, foam, or bar soap?

**Hal:** And our 500th episode of *We Got This With Mark and Hal* is available now. It is super-sized and a ton of fun.

**Mark:** Yeah, we've got guests coming back from the entire 500-episode run of our show. Some of your favorite MaxFun stars, some of your favorite regular, out in other places in the world stars, too. Some really fun surprises, and every single one of them had a topic for us to cover.

**Hal:** You can listen to it right now on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) or wherever you get your podcasts.

*(Music fades out.)*

**Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is professional basketball player DeMar DeRozan.

Okay, I need to ask you about something that—I was about to say is frivolous; it's not that frivolous. The greatest rapper in the world, Kendrick Lamar, is from Los Angeles—from Compton, where you're from—and has been involved in a long and intense rap beef with Drake, one of the most popular rappers in the world. And it culminated in a song that Kendrick Lamar recorded, called “Not Like Us”, that I think at this point it's safe to say, like as long as hip-hop lasts, it will be in the pantheon. Like, it is one of the greatest, most significant hip-hop records ever recorded. He raps about you in there. And also you're in the video. *(Laughs.)*

**Music:** “Not Like Us” by Kendrick Lamar.

*I'm glad DeRoz' came home, y'all didn't deserve him neither*

*From Alondra down to Central, better not speak on Serena*

*And your homeboy need subpoena, that— move in flocks*

*(Music fades out.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** And I wonder like did you get a—like, I heard an interview with DJ Mustard about like getting the call. Because no one mentioned to him that they were using his beat for it until a friend of his just called him and heard it on the radio or whatever. But like, I heard about him getting the call, right? I wonder like did somebody call you and say like, “Hey, DeMar... you know that thing with Kendrick and Drake? Anyway, you're in the new song.” *(Laughs.)*

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah, no, he actually told me himself. I ended up talking to him, and he brought it up. It was crazy. It was more of a thing like someone you actually know, like you don't think nothing else out of it, like out the norm. It's kind of like your friend asks you to do

something, and it's like, “*(Clicks teeth.)* Alright, man.” Like, you know what I mean? It was more so one of those. Like, “Alright, yeah, alright, cool. Alright. I got you. I'll do it.” It wasn't—

**Jesse Thorn:** And you went down; you're in the video.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. I didn't think nothing of it in the meanwhile, because it was actually a thing from somebody you know. You know what I mean? It's kind of like, you know, your friend up the street actually knocking on the door, saying, “Man, ride with me to the store.” You're not gonna ask where you going or nothing.

It's like, Alright, let me put my shoes on.”

**Jesse Thorn:** DeMar, let me put it this way. Kendrick Lamar gets on the phone with—he sends me a text message, says, “I need you in Houston to stock groceries at the Piggly Wiggly.”

I'd be like, *(eagerly)* “Oh yeah, okay! See you tomorrow, Kendrick!” *(Laughs.)*

**DeMar DeRozan:** That's kind of—that's literally how it went. Just like—*(chuckles)* it was like really one of those things. Your friend across the street knocking on the door, saying, “Man, come with me to blah, blah, blah.” It's like, alright, let me get my shoes, put it on. I don't know where you going. And you know what I mean? It's kind of like one of those, like.

[00:35:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** But it also—I mean, like you're also aware of the immense resonance. Because, you know, you made your career and a second home in Toronto, which is sort of like Drake's home. And Drake is more deeply tied to the Raptors than any other celebrity to any—

*(DeMar agrees.)*

Like, maybe Spike Lee and the Knicks. But like, other than that, right? Like, that guy has lived and breathed the Raptors, and they him. Right? And you know, the reason that you're one of the subjects of the song is because you came home to California, where you're going to be playing for the Kings. But you know, it's an offhanded thing. It's not like—you're not the center of the subject. But like, you knew this is a big deal for me to show up for Compton in this. Like—

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. And I think that's more so how I looked at it. Like, you know, this is for my city. This is where I'm from. This is where I was born. Without this city, I wouldn't be anything. You know, it's the city that molded me and shaped me. And you know, it was kind of tricky for me. Because, you know, first place I went to after I left Compton was Toronto for nine years. You know, they molded me, they shaped me, they—I learned so much from that place. I gave my all to that place while I played there.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's very clear in the book that like, if you had your choice, you would have stayed there your whole career.

**DeMar DeRozan:** 1,000%. And I think any real person understands that and understands my love and my appreciation and everything I gave to not just that city, just to—you know, to that whole country. You know, and I think from the standpoint—you know, it's easy to get overlooked thinking— You know, I just engulfed myself in a situation that was going on where more so I'm looking at it like, you know, this is—I'm from Compton, California. You know, this is one of a good friend of mines. You know, and it's so easy to look at it from the standpoint of like Drake was a good friend of mines too. And it looked like—you know, it looked like however it looked, you know?

*(Jesse says something indistinct.)*

But at the end of the day, I'm from Compton. Compton, California, you know. And I think anybody who knows me personally will understand that and know from my perspective what it is.

**Jesse Thorn:** What about when you're dancing on stage at the show?

**DeMar DeRozan:** That was just—I think that was the excitement of it being like—man, everybody in here from all walks of LA in here. And it was like more of like a celebration, you know? And I think that part of it don't get talked about enough that, you know, it was more of a celebration for everybody from LA. It felt so cool being around every neighborhood, all the rappers that we sit up here and don't get a chance to be able to see in the same room that's from LA. You know, that was like my excitement from it more so than anything.

**Jesse Thorn:** When you're a professional athlete, you don't really get to choose where you live and work. Which is, you know, something I don't think people really wrap their heads around when they think about the life of a professional athlete. But, you know, early in your career in the pro leagues in the United States, you don't get to choose at all. And even later on, you don't have that much choice. And even—you know, you're from Los Angeles; you wanted to play in Los Angeles. Well, you can only choose between two bosses. You know what I mean? Like, I'm from San Francisco. If I want to move home and work in San Francisco, there's a lot of people I could work for, right? It's a very limited set of choices.

So, I imagine it's a big deal that at this point in your career, you're headed to Sacramento to play for the Kings. You know, that's not Los Angeles. That's a six- or seven-hour drive away. But it's also—it's a lot more Los Angeles than Toronto is. You know, you can take a 40-minute flight home and be home at the end of the day. And that must be a really big deal for you at this point in your life.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. I mean, everything happens how it need to happen. You know, me playing in Toronto for nine years, San Antonio for three years, Chicago for three years. Now going into my 16th season, having the opportunity to be closer to home. You know, who knows? This may be my last couple that, you know, I put my all into and have this opportunity to make the most out of it. Having the opportunity for the family to, like you

said, take a 40-minute flight and be there for me more than ever in my whole career—you know, I think that's something I need. And I think no better timing than now. You know, and I think that's the cool thing and a special thing to have this opportunity going forward.

**Jesse Thorn:** There's this thing that people say in sports, which is flags fly forever, right? The idea is that the thing that matters is winning the championship, and nothing else. Everything else pales in its comparison, right? There's 30 teams in most of the big sports leagues.

[00:40:00]

30ish teams. People's—great professional athletes' careers are 15/18/20 years, the best of the best. Most professional athletes get a few years. So, even if you are Kareem AbdulJabbar, and you play for 20, you still have odds against you that you'll even win one championship. You haven't won a championship in your career. Do you think it will be okay if you retire not having won one?

**DeMar DeRozan:** Yeah. I mean, gotta be okay. You know, like I said, that goes back to me just knowing that I didn't cheat the game. I didn't cut short corners. I didn't make excuses. If it happens, it happens. You know? If it don't? You know, it don't.

You know, I can hang my head on the fact that, like I said, I love the game to its purest nature. I gave everything I could, you know. And at the end of the day—you know, I was telling somebody this the other day. It's like at the end of the day, all I ever wanted to do—on top of winning a championship—was be respected by my peers. You know? And the respect and the admiration I have for my peers means more than anything to me. You know, and that's what you do it for is to be respected by the ones that do the same thing as you. And I think, you know, when I walk away from the game, regardless how it happens, the love and the respect that I have for my peers means everything to me.

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, DeMar, I'm so grateful for your time talking to me and your story and your book. It was really nice to get to talk to you.

**DeMar DeRozan:** Man, thank you. Thank you. I appreciate you.

**Jesse Thorn:** DeMar DeRozan. His new book is called *Above the Noise: My Story of Chasing Calm*. You can also catch him this year on the court playing for his new team, the Sacramento Kings. And hey, if you check out our social media pages—that's TikTok and Instagram and Facebook and YouTube—you can catch us quizzing NBA all-star DeMar DeRozan about that most important of subjects: his favorite video game, *Crash Bandicoot*.

**Music:** “Crash Bandicoot Main Theme” by Vicarious Visions Audio—a playful, percussive number.

**Transition:** Relaxed, thumpy synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created in the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, as well as at Maximum Fun headquarters—overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. You know, we just had Judy Greer in the office for an upcoming episode. She was very upset that she's never seen the fish truck that shoots fish into the lake. And it occurred to us, we haven't seen it in a long time too! Fish truck, write in. We want to know when you're coming back. California Department of Fish and Wildlife, hit us up! Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Los Angeles, drop us a line. Fish, write us a letter!

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Daniel Huecias. Our video editor is Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our friend, Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can download it pay-what-you-want at [DJWSounds.bandcamp.com](https://djwsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music was written and recorded by the wonderful band, The Go! Team. The song is called “Huddle Formation”. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use that.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. And in fact, I insist that you do so! You'll find video from just about all of our interviews, including full video of the interviews that you heard this week on YouTube. Great way to share this show with others. And great way to see how enormous DeMar DeRozan is. It turns out NBA players are very tall. I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

**Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](https://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*(Music fades out.)*