

Magnus Scheving Lazytown Interview

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Magnus Scheving is a writer, world-class athlete, entrepreneur and

producer. He has been the producer and host of popular health-related children's TV shows as well as producing and acting in other TV productions and commercials. Magnus Scheving also hosted and produced his own talk-show being a well-known comedian and entertainer in his home country of Iceland. Among his many sports awards and trophies he was two times European Champion of aerobics in 1995 and 1994, as well as silver medallist in the World Championships of aerobics in 1994.

In 2003 Magnus Scheving was voted the Marketing Man of the Year by the Icelandic Marketing Association, and Entrepreneur of the Year 2003, awarded by the Channel 2 Broadcaster and The Icelandic Financial Newspaper. After extensive public speaking around the world, Magnus realised parents always asked him the same basic questions about exercise and nutrition for children. He created LazyTown in 1991 in response to those questions, to help parents raise healthy kids, and to inspire kids to lead healthy lives.

In the years since, Magnus Scheving has become a household name, beloved by kids for its entertainment value and by parents for its healthy message. The company has been delivering pro-health and positive messages in an entertainment and non-violent way and produces only material that can stand up to the scrutiny from an artistic point of view as well as an ethical one.

LazyTown is a world of positive and healthy messages aimed at children through entertainment, humour, action and encouragement. LazyTown's vision is to become a world leading brand for healthy choices, and the healthy lifestyle benchmark for children and caregivers.

LazyTown may have the laziest name on television, but its jam-packed with action, energy and a powerful message that tells kids that they can do it!

Interview with Magnus Scheving from LazyTown

Magnus Scheving, creator and star of the hit kids TV show, Lazytown is full of energy & enthusiasm. It's easy to see why LazyTown is a hit with children as well as parents, it's addictive. It's also clear that Magnus Scheving is passionate and dedicated to promoting a more healthy and balanced lifestyle for all families as we found out in this interview.

Why do you think kids like your show?

Magnus Scheving: Good question! I think people, or kids recognise quality, that's number one. Number two is that we don't compromise when it comes to kids entertainment. And number three, is that LazyTown means different things for different audiences. For girls it is a music show and for boys it is an action show.

How does it feel to be the character that children aspire to be?

Magnus Scheving: It is really gratifying and is a satisfying experience. It is really nice because when I travel round the world kids show me their moves, they jump around and do pushups. I went to a hotel and there were 100 kids in the lobby showing me their movements, so it's fantastic. Sometimes it is difficult, because I am meant to be a superhero and Sportacus is a slightly above average superhero and he just does a little more. And I remember once I was in a city, where I was on TV and I had to do star jumps, where I jump up with my legs out. I did sixteen. I went to another city and the kids said oh you can do sixteen on the TV, so you can do seventeen for us? I said Oooh maybe! I tried and did seventeen. In the end when I was traveling round I did forty-five a day. Kids always ask you to do more and more. So they are good personal trainers.

How do your kids feel to have Sportacus as a dad?

Magnus Scheving: They have been growing up next to me for a long long time, and have always been a part of LazyTown. I take them to work a lot and they come with me for a show. They help me a lot, I take them along to hospitals as well. They have an opinion about the show all the time so I learn a lot from them, being kids themselves. I also know their friends really well, I have about ten to fifteen kids in my garden every weekend, nearly every single day. We have two kids in our household, but there are normally at least ten around. I know them all, that's a good bonus I would say. Parents, you have to know your kids' friends, its really important especially when they get older. So my kids are used to LazyTown, and that I am Sportacus & their Dad, so they don't look at me differently. I don't think they had any problems that I know, with me being Sportacus. The son said to me the other day, "Dad I think you need to start to train a little bit more because you are getting older now". They push you, which helps

me plus they like it. They are always thinking about my health.

How did you come up with the characters in LazyTown and what does each represent?

Magnus Scheving: Basically LazyTown, started sixteen years ago when I saw there was no role models in health for kids. I askedhow a show about a healthy lifestyle can be entertaining. Is it do-able? That was my biggest challenge, so I traveled around to 15 different countries to meet different kids and parents. I tried to meet 5,000-15,000 kids a month. I was a public speaker so I was able to do this. I also went to schools and spoke to teachers.

It is really important to meet as many different kids as possible when planning, because to me it's like if you don't know your audience you don't really understand what you are doing. With my work, I went to all different schools to tell them to stay out of drugs or to little kids and told them do not smoke and I also taught people over 60 how to be happy! But what I found.... it was amazing.... there was two main things that kids like (everywhere I went around the world, they all had similarities); 1 - They don't want to be talked down too, and 2 - they want to be treated equal like everybody else. Plus they want to move.

If kids don't move, there is something wrong. When you say Let's Go to the Movies! Kids jump up and down and scream.. Yay! If they don't do that they are unhappy and there is something really wrong. I found parents also generally want the same things for their kids, they want their kids to be safe and educated. They want them to go to sleep early, and don't want them to watch too much TV. Parents also want to share things and not lie or cheat, and maybe clean their room, and that's it. So after I did that research, I wrote LazyTown the book, that's where the characters came from.

When you think about a medium healthy person, in my mind a medium healthy person is someone who is in balance. Sometimes you eat hamburgers sometimes you eat salad.

So if you make a circle around all the characters in LazyTown;

We have superhero Sportacus.

We have the Laziest Villain in the world Robbie Rotten.

We have Stephanie the girl, who is very positive.

Then you have Stingy who is all mine, mine, mine.
You have Ziggy who just loves chocolate & sweets.
You also have Trickzy who is all about following the rules
And Pixel who loves technology and the motivation of technology.

So if you think about all those characters, you want your kids to follow the rules like Trickzy, but you still want your child not to be afraid to break the rules; for example women were not allowed to vote in the old days, so someone broke the rules and said "This is a stupid rule, lets change it" You want your kids to follow rules, but still break them. If you make a circle around all the characters in the group that would be the perfect balanced human being, a healthy human being.

On your best day you may feel like superhero Sportacus, you wake up and you say I can do anything! But some days you may wake and you feel like Robbie Rotten, you don't want to get out of bed! Or you may be like Stephanie and say "What if I try that, or what if I do that?" Sometimes you may feel like Pixel and say "What if I use the stairs instead of the elevator?" Don't always rely on technology... I don't think it's good to be a superhero every day, and it would be hard to live with a superhero every day, someone who has no flaws. I think if you are mix of all those LazyTown characters then you're all right.

How old is Stephanie? (from Stephanie age six)

Magnus Scheving: Stephanie when LazyTown started, she was nine years old, now she is getting much older, she is fourteen. She is fantastic, Stephanie (Julianna Rose Mauriello) came from New York, she was in musicals and also at school. She learnt the Icelandic language in just nine months... LazyTown is produced in Iceland. It is an extremely difficult language, just like English so I think she is incredible! She is also one of the most professional people I have worked with in all my life, incredibly professional. Julianna is a straight A student, schooled through the Internet, I've never seen anything like it she is amazing. Absolutely Incredible!

With so much activity why did you name it LazyTown?

Magnus Scheving: We asked a lot of kids.... when you are talking about names, you can't name it Active Town or Smiley Town because kids would

never watch it, but they were interested in what LazyTown was doing? Are they lazy? In my mind the residents of LazyTown are like the underdogs.... so we cheer for them... you can do it! Go Go Get Up LazyTown!

How much & what type of training is required to do the stunts in LazyTown?

Magnus Scheving: When we shoot LazyTown it takes seven days to do one episode. Some days I can do more than 3,000 jumps a day. So for me it is a great training program. I was always in sport as a little kid, I did all types of sports. I lived in a small town, there was nothing there, only floors, and we didn't even have a basketball hoop, it was a very poor area. There was nearly nothing there. My father was a gymnastics teacher, he taught me a lot, and then when I grew up a little bit I did all types of sports. From there I just did LazyTown.

What are your top 5 tips for keeping kids on track with a healthy lifestyle?

Magnus Scheving: Depends on the parents as they are the first step, they have a huge role as their role model. What they do impacts on the children; if they sit on the couch, talk on all the time on the phone or head to the computer, that's what you are going to get in your child. So parents should have a think about what type of role model they are for kids. The tip for parents.... always be positive. I know it is difficult, but write on your doors everywhere, POSITIVE POSITIVE POSITIVE! Put it on the doors in the kitchen, or on their rooms, try it for one week, then for two. Try and speak differently to your kids, say things like, "I am absolutely sure that in ten minutes this is going to happen because you are nice", "you are so good at it", "I know you can do it!" Say it is "fantastic that you can do it" even if they mess up the whole thing say "you are going to be so good at it!" This is the most important thing for kids and their self-esteem, plus the best health message.

There are many ways you can keep kids on track, you can have a meeting every Friday night sitting down for five minutes. Everyone in the household sits down and says one thing they like and one thing they dislike. When I did it in my home it was very funny, we laughed a lot. I said I was very unhappy when you didn't clean your room. I was really happy

when you helped Mum with the trash. Then my boy said, "I was very unhappy when you didn't come home from work until late, 8 o'clock or nine, but I was very happy when you read a book for me". It puts it into perspective, then you realise what they like and what they dislike. It is good for parents and children.

I would also play music, and try to do things...play before your eat. For example... Use a balloon, from when they are really young and try to bounce the balloon to their favourite music and yours. When they are older you can have fun with it, my little girl she is learning all kinds of dance, so she teaches me how to dance in different dance styles and I teach her disco dance, she thinks it's ridiculous. So we have fun for a few minutes before we eat. We just blast up the music and we all have to do it. It is amazing; you can use music a lot.

My son and I, we have a lot of jokes, we don't take it really seriously, but we have fun. It started off for just a month, now we do it all the time, but we came up with a list, I write the clothing and he writes the movement. So if I'm wearing jeans he has to do pushups. If he is wearing a hat, I have to do jumps, just stuff like that to get you moving. So when we are out, wherever we meet up we have to do the action. It is funny, as he has had to do it at school and at the mall, wherever I meet him, even in the street. Another one is if someone is wearing red socks you have to do a ridiculous exercise like act like a dog, or walk like a duck. It is funny; he wears red socks as often as he can.

So tips for parents are basically just try and have things available. Let them help you cook. Put fruit and vegetables all around the house, have it not to high so they can see it on display. Stuff like that. Cut it up, have it on top of the TV.

What are some tips to encouraging kids to eat well?

Magnus Scheving: It is a big question because in my mind a healthy person is a person who can eat hamburgers one day and salad another, or sometimes chocolate, sometimes not. I believe kids need to taste something nine times before they like it, especially with fruit and vegetables and something new. Food may not have an immediate impact, they may have to taste it many many times so keep trying. If you don't start introducing food when they are young, from year one till seven, then there is no turning back. From seven they may only change their taste a

little bit.

For example, for a healthy breakfast, think about if you would really have that in a hotel? And would you have it on a tray? And you eat it in your room? Experiment by eating in bed together pretending it's a hotel. Let's say you have porridge or oatmeal and you start eating it when you are two years old and you want to encourage tasting.... in a hotel you would have banana around the bowl and juice brought to your bed. Kids remember that feeling, the good feeling of having it together. It brings positive feelings to food, rather than someone yelling "You have to eat this broccoli".

How can parents ensure their kids understand the importance of being healthy?

Magnus Scheving: I would say there is one rule that I always follow, if you don't know anything about health or food think about it like this, the more the food changes from the original form the more unhealthy it gets. Let's say you have a fish, if it's from the sea and you eat it right away (sushi) you give it a 10, let's say you steam it, now it's worth 8, if you overcook it in a steamer you would now give it 7. But if you make it into grilled fish on a pan it becomes a 6, then we move down to fried fish, so it is now 4. Once you make it into a fish finger and put batter on it the fish becomes a 3. If the fish comes out of a can (white fish), then it is better for you to eat the paper from the can as this is healthier. A packaged fish finger doesn't look like a fish any more so it's worth nothing. You can take the same principle for potatoes, if you eat it from the garden and cook it a little bit it's good, when you mash it, it's worth a little less, if you make it into a French Fries or a potato chip it loses most of it's value down to 2. The more you change food from the original state the unhealthier it gets.

What exercise is good for kids and how can parents encourage this?

Magnus Scheving: I would say kids should not exercise. I don't think they should, they don't need to. They want & need to move. If they have the right atmosphere to play, they shouldn't realise that they are exercising. They should not really think about health or worry about getting fat. Encourage activities in the household that inspire them to move. You can take them out on the bicycle or run with them and play games. Parents have a huge job, being role models to a kid, and they need to realise that.

Do you have plans to tour LazyTown in Australia?

Magnus Scheving: LazyTown is now a live show, I am not playing myself. I used to do the live show for four years in Iceland, every single day and all weekend, I am getting a bit older, so they wanted to replace me. We have a live show running around the world, one million people have already seen it, that show is coming here to Australia. It is going to be a live show and the characters look exactly the same. Even my staff did not realise that it wasn't me on stage. Which is brilliant, because kids notice. The show in Mexico City sold faster than U2.

What is your new healthy kids eating initiative?

Magnus Scheving: Basically it is for me.... we call vegetables and fruit names, such as sport candy and do campaigns about sport candy to encourage healthy choices. The idea behind LazyTown is simple we want to move kids physically and mentally, we want to move Australia and the world.

I am currently writing a book, 'How to raise Healthy Kids', with Dr Miriam Stoppard. It is due to come out next year. I think parents need help to raise healthy kids.... I know it's difficult to raise kids, especially healthy kids as there are lots of challenges. Parents need solutions and ideas. I hope LazyTown and the new book will give them ideas. I plan to come to Australia again as Magnus, just to speak with parents.