



From a life behind bars to breaking world records

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A prolific armed robber turned world record holding athlete is using his powerful story to stop youngsters living a life of crime.

John McAvoy, from Putney, stars in the new Red Bull Wild Card series which features four athletes who have achieved success in unlikely circumstances.

McAvoy was released from prison in 2012 after being jailed for two life sentences at the age of 22 for conspiracy to commit armed robbery.

After discovering his athletic prowess on the rowing machine of the prison gym, he has become a passionate advocate of the rehabilitative power of sport.

Since his release, he has competed in six iron man competitions, speaks in schools and prisons and has become the first Nike sponsored triathlete in the world.

He said: "I started training out of anger. I was deemed the worst of the worst and put in a 24-hour-a-day seclusion unit. I was so angry at the establishment and I had to find a way of managing my anger."

"So I started training."
In 2009, McAvoy found out in prison that his best friend Alan had died in a car crash during a police chase in the Netherlands.

He said: "I remember sitting there and it was like someone had switched a lightbulb on in my head. It made me look at my life. I'd gone from a little boy who was so ambitious to a loser."

"I just started going to the prison gym all the time. One day the prison officer looked at the monitor on the rowing machine and said how quick I was."

"Next day he brought in a sheet with all of the world records in rowing and I realised even at that stage I could break two of them."

McAvoy set 11 rowing records in the prison gym – eight British records and three world records.

The world records were the greatest distance covered in 24 hours, the longest continuous row and the best time for 100,000 metres.

McAvoy said: "I haven't gone through a miraculous change. I always had the skills and intelligence I was just using it in the wrong way. It's the same with



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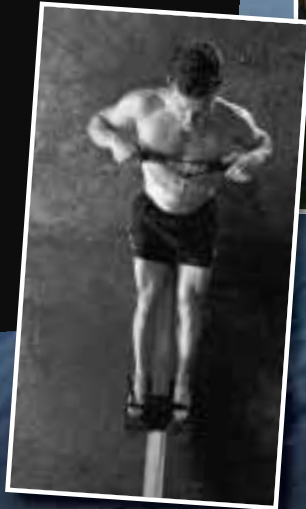
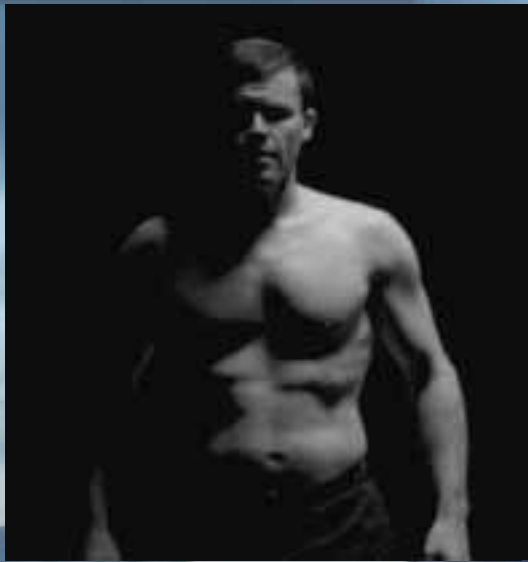
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Cycling, running and swimming; John McAvoy trains for his Iron Man events



all these kids.

“The people in my life that I saw as successful were older criminals in their forties to sixties all with nice cars and large houses. This becomes normal.

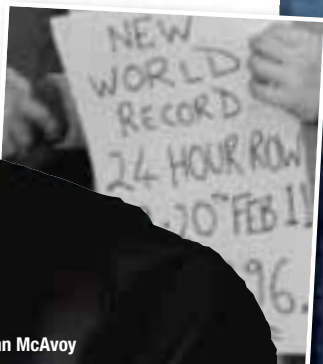
“A lot of young people are ferociously misguided. The only people a lot of them meet with money are criminals and they think that crime is the only way that they will get it.

“It’s not that they have a lack of ambition, it’s that they don’t believe opportunities are available to them any other way.”

McAvoy has also set up the John McAvoy Children’s Trust which helps disadvantaged youngsters change the trajectory of their lives.

He said: “I was deemed the worst of the worst. If I can turn my life around then anyone can.”

● John’s episode is available to view on Red Bull’s YouTube channel from April 18.



John McAvoy

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