

Ninja Warrior UK: Race for Glory

Press Pack

Ben Shephard & Chris Kamara – Presenters

How excited are you for the return of Ninja Warrior UK after a three-year hiatus?

Chris: It's been incredible. We left a brilliant show behind and now we have created a monster of a show. It has gone to a whole new level. We're bringing it back bigger and better than it was before. We have so much fun, it's superb.

Ben: I'm ridiculously excited to be back. It's an absolute privilege for Kammy, Rochelle and me to host this show with the energy, the joy, and the inspiring competitors.

Chris: I thought you were going to say inspiring commentary!

Ben: It's the most life affirming, exciting, positive, thrilling, inspiring, ridiculously crazy show!

There have been quite a few changes for this series. What can fans expect?

Ben: We've changed the format. For the first time ever, worldwide, we've introduced Elite Ninjas. Our competitors are going to be racing on the course, which is inherently exciting, but then they're going to have to try to beat an Elite Ninja. We have these extraordinary professionals who work on the courses, they compete worldwide, and we brought them all together like the elite dream team of Ninjas. It's ratcheted up the tension and excitement.

Chris: It's amazing. Elite Ninjas are on another scale. Some of them aren't human!

Ben: They're like superheroes or Greek gods. They're incredible. And, for the first time ever, we're looking for a female champion and a male champion.

Chris: We'll have two champions this series, and we have a real champion from a previous series as an Elite Ninja who's actually called Tim Champion!

How does the new format make the show even more exciting?

Chris: Obviously, the race element. You've got fans for both parties, you've got two competitors on the start line who want to get to the semi-finals – or, when they're up against an Elite Ninja, to the finals. When they're up against a Ninja, they get a two-obstacle head start, and they've got to go because they know the Ninja is on their tail. It's really something else.

Ben: The other thing you have when you've got people racing is that the lead can change hands. One simple mistake on an obstacle, a stumble here or there, and the person you're up against can suddenly get ahead of you. We've had races in the heats where there's been one second between the two competitors getting up The Wall, so you can imagine how fast and how tight that is. It's seat-of-your-pants stuff.

What do the Elite Ninjas bring to the series that's special?

Ben: Class, experience, knowledge, know-how. Very calm, cool, sexy customers, aren't they Kam?

Chris: We had a race yesterday that is THE best race you will ever see, it really is. It's taken Ninja Warrior UK to a whole new level.

Ben: They've all competed globally, they've all excelled on international Ninja Warrior series, and they all do this for a job now. It's like putting keen amateur racers against professional athletes and seeing how they get on. Like Kammy said, that two obstacle head start is just enough to give the amateur competitors the hope of getting to the top of the Wall and beating the Elite Ninjas. And it's just enough for our Elite Ninjas to be salivating when they get released off the line. It's so exciting, they come in like a train. They're desperate to catch them, it's so competitive.

Chris: There's a fine line between our Elite Ninjas and some of our runners, so it's very topsy turvy, touch and go.

With a new format, does the show still have that family friendly and fun feel?

Chris: We haven't changed, the competition has changed. People aren't coming dressed as chickens. But our sense of humour hasn't changed.

Ben: What has changed is that there's been a proliferation of Ninja gyms around the country. Since the initial launch of Ninja Warrior UK several years ago, people have started training specifically for Ninja obstacles, so on the start line everybody has some experience of some of the obstacles – not all of them, and that's one of the wondrous bits as you get through the competition, there are obstacles that they've never seen before anywhere because they're brand new to Ninja Warrior UK. Everyone comes with a level of expertise because they can train around the country now. It's raised the level. The only people who are dragging it down are me and Kammy! Poor Rochelle, she's desperately trying to pull us up.

Chris: Rochelle's fantastic. She's been amazing.

Which obstacle are you most looking forward to seeing contestants taking on?

Chris: We haven't completed filming, so watching two athletes try to get up Mt. Midoriyama will be special.

Ben: Our grand final will be the best two men and best two women doing the Rope Climb. It's such an old school challenge, but watching these athletes go for it is just extraordinary. I've always loved Ring Toss, ever since I watched the Japanese version of the show. It's a classic. Watching the professionals fly across Pole Grasper, while the amateurs are grappling with it, is amazing. I really love the grip strength obstacles.

And The Wall! The Warped Wall has taken out a number of competitors that you wouldn't expect this year. Regardless of how easy some of them make it look, it's no mean feat to run up a four-meter wall.

Is there anything about the show that viewers might not get to see on screen that you find interesting?

Ben: The struggle me and Kammy have getting up the stairs to where we stand!

Chris: They'll see me getting helped down the stairs by Rochelle.

Ben: What people probably don't get on telly, but you do get in the studio, is the scale of the course. It's very rare that you look at a TV set and think it's bigger than it looks on TV. The scale of it is epic. The crowd are so involved as well, there's singing and dancing. Our warm-up guy, Stu, does such an



incredible job of getting them involved in the show. They're such an integral part. The atmosphere is second to none. And maybe the amount of tea we drink and Vocal Zone throat sweets we consume.

Cups of tea and Vocal Zones keep us going because we're screaming and shouting so much. I desperately try to contain myself. Kammy's voice is much better trained because he does so much football, but I lose my voice within a couple of days because I can't control how excited I get.

Another thing people might not see is that the community around this is really incredible. They want to compete, they want to win, but they're all urging each other on. There's an amazing community around Ninja Warrior globally that we get to be a small part of, and that's why it's a privilege for us.

If you could see anyone from history take on the course, who would it be?

Ben: I'd love to see the Olympic decathlete Daley Thompson do it. He was my absolute hero growing up. For me, he epitomised the perfect physical specimen. I think he'd be extraordinary. I say from history, but he's still alive! And Johnny Weissmuller, the original Tarzan.

Chris: Bruce Lee, my hero.

Ben: I could see someone like Simone Biles taking it on. We've had some amazing gymnasts. What about Boudicca?

Of your fellow presenters, who do you think would be most likely to win in a race across the course?

Chris: There could only be one winner, Ben Shephard. On the first series we did, he would have been in the semi-finals. He did the course, got up the wall, then the insurance people said he's not insured to do it!