

Sport has always been my thing, but never have I excelled, always just been average. Following a rough period in my life where I fell from disaster to disaster, I discovered running. I joined my local club and the welcome, the confidence building and the general feel of belonging had me hooked. I started achieving my goals, increasing my distances, making the top three in local races, ticking off club milestones, London Marathon came and went so what was next?

My Club had the idea of a Couch to Sprint Tri programme, I mean I can swim bike and run but these guys were bonkers to do it all in once race! So off I trotted to sign myself up. The training was a shock, who on earth gets up at 5am to train....FOR FUN?!?!...well apparently that would be me now. Training before work, training after work, literally eating, sleeping and breathing swim bike run. My shock at being told I was third lady in my first triathlon, followed by lots of laughs as I questioned the person awarding my trophy, "are you sure?!"

Encouragement and advice was in abundance and more Triathlons and Duathlons ensued. My confidence and belief in myself grew thanks to the technical and general support around and with that came the need for more challenges. London Marathon, Swim Serpentine, Ride London all ticked off but I needed more. I recall a conversation with a gentleman, talking about how I had started this journey. He asked what I wanted to achieve and I told him how much of an honour it would be to qualify for the Team GB Age Groups and represent my country. He offered me his card as a Coach and some words of wisdom and encouragement and off he went. Never did I expect to bump into him again.

I rock up to my qualification race, a local race I have done 2 or 3 times before and my training partner and I start to get a bit twitchy. Super bikes all around us compared to our novice road bikes. Super fit athletes in GB kit compared to our bargain purchases from online....oh dear, we have only entered the UK Sprint Championship! Nerves aside and kind words from other athletes, I gave it my all and resolved that not coming last was an achievement! Did I qualify....I'd have to wait and see but was not holding my breath!

So it is 2019, I open an email and my jaw hits the floor...."Congratulations, you have qualified for the 2021 Sprint Triathlon Championships in Sweden". My jaw hits the floor again when I see the email is from the Man I spoke to about my goals, TEAM MANAGER! His words to me at that point, "I told you you would make it". On with the training, I had such a purpose. Then Covid hit, our race deferred and all the wind was taken from my sails. A swift talking to and taking advantage of carless roads for the best part of a year definitely paid off. Lockdown lifted but disaster struck again, in the form of a car. I was very lucky with light injuries but my confidence was shaken (and my credit card creaking from repair costs!) But it was worth it. Lockdown passed, our new date and location was announced. Valencia 2021.

I honestly cannot describe the feeling of being around such phenomenal athletes, excitement paired with intimidation yet all so welcoming and friendly. Possibly my favourite thing about the sport. The feeling of sheer panic standing on the edge of the water waiting to start my swim...what have I gotten myself into?

The beeper goes and I am in the sea swimming toward the buoys, I catch the wave in front of me and think "wow, maybe I am not so bad at this!" 750m of my fastest swimming ever and I am climbing out of the water and running into transition.

Quick change and off I go on my bike. The cheers and support are immense and the atmosphere electric. Athletes from all over Europe and I am still struggling to grasp the fact that I am here, competing. Cheers of "COME ON GB" and realising that's me that are shouting for raised a smile every time and spurred me on wanting to make them proud. Again looking at my bike time shocked at how fast I completed it, no time....this is my strongest discipline, the run. The cheers from supporters, the encouragement from athletes on my team as we encountered each other, despite competing, we were all in this together.

The finish line arrived, the overwhelming feeling of achievement and bursting with pride at my best performance to date all whilst wearing a GB suit, I am still buzzing and smiling.

My goal was to qualify and to have fun, both achieved. But to be told I finished in the top ten finish, 8th, was so unexpected. I would do it all again in a heartbeat.

Although my sights now move to the Championships in Munich for 2023, I cannot help but think back to how I got started on this journey. The support and encouragement from friends and colleagues, the advice from other athletes, trusting in my coach and the tolerance of my partner having to tailor life and outings around my training.

But also HASSRA whose generous support meant I could afford to get to the start line. Bikes, Kit, Travel, Accommodation, Training, Nutrition, Entry fees....the costs were endless but HASSRA's donation made a substantial difference for which I will be forever grateful. This not only helped me to achieve my goal but will also raise the profile of the sport and hopefully encourage anyone to give the sport a go. If anyone is ever curious, please come and have a chat as it has certainly opened up a whole new world to me!

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