

Up and Coming Elysia Finds A New Challenge

Eighteen months ago, a friend from Witney Roadrunners, the running club I have belonged to since I was eight, asked me to do the running legs of a duathlon he was participating in. I ran, he cycled, I ran, he cycled and I ran!

First Triathlon

It was great fun and something a little different from all the running I had done over the years. I have represented Oxfordshire and the Southern Region regularly over the last six years at cross-country, 800 and 1500 metres and, in January 2006, I gained my Welsh vest. I hadn't done much serious cycling before, just leisurely rides around the lanes of West Oxfordshire with my family on nice, sunny days. Cycling would be a new and exciting challenge, after a bit of persuasion my parents agreed to buy me a beginner's triathlon pack. I entered my first triathlon fifteen months ago on a boiling hot day in Newbury and won the prize for 1st Novice. The swim was great, in a pool, so no wetsuit needed! My Mum and I were 'early bird' swimmers for years while I was still at school in Burford, so I had no problem with this discipline. The cycling went okay, but I knew this was where I needed to improve. The running went well and is still my strongest discipline to this day. But I was hooked! I wanted to improve and learn more about this sport and I was eager to test myself to a new intensity.



Army Orders

I was very lucky to be given a Gap-Year Commission with the Army and entered Sandhurst on 25th September 2005. On commissioning, I was soon being asked to compete in every sport under the sun! In April 2006, I saw on orders (the daily notice board), the opportunity to do the Army Novice Triathlon Championships; I jumped at the chance. (I had kept up

my high level of fitness during the winter months at a cross-country skiing training camp in Germany with my Regiment).

An Up and Coming Novice

On the day the race went very well and I was spotted as an up and coming novice, with the potential to perhaps make the Army team. At the event I found out that the Army Triathlon Team was flying out to Cyprus the following week for a three-week training camp. With my performance on the day I thought I had nothing to lose and enquired as to how many places were still available. Well, one thing led to another and before I knew it I was flying out to Cyprus. If you don't ask you don't get! The Head Coach for the Army Team, Warrant Officer Butters was fantastic, setting daily training sessions as well as interesting talks on nutrition, setting our own personal goals and the different aspects of training we should be aiming towards as triathletes. I gained an

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invaluable amount physically and mentally from the training camp and returned to England a different athlete.

Youngest British Qualifier

The weekend after we flew back from Cyprus, I competed in the Blenheim Triathlon, a sprint triathlon (750m swim, 20k bike, 5k run), and finished 3rd, qualifying for the elite race the following year. My next big race was my first Olympic Distance Triathlon (1500m swim, 40k bike, 5k run). I had never covered the distance before, but I knew I had done all the training I could and was ready to race hard. I couldn't believe it when I crossed the finish line in 2 hours, 16 minutes, exceeding all my expectations. I was exhausted and what I had just achieved didn't really sink in until the results came out. I had qualified for the World Age-Group Championships, which were to be held later in the summer in Lausanne, Switzerland. At the time I was only 19, just qualifying in the 20 to 24 age group category and this made me the youngest qualifier Britain has ever had.

World Championships

Representing Great Britain in my first season of triathlon surpassed my wildest dreams. I always hoped that one day I would perhaps make the GB team in athletics but triathlon never crossed my mind! The World Championships was an incredible experience. The venue of Lausanne was beautiful and the weather conditions were perfect on the day of the

race. The 8,000 spectator crowd was overwhelming and, when it came to race day, the adrenaline just wouldn't stop pumping. Wearing the GB strip was a very proud moment for me and I think my parents were even more nervous on the day than I was.



Their support was fantastic, as was that of my coach WO Butters. My brother ran most of the run route with me; I heard his loud voice shout at me around every corner! I finished 12th and was in complete shock. Out of a wave of 86 and for my first season in

triathlon I had to be pleased with my performance!

What a Year!

After the race, I went back to work for three weeks, which involved a great Adventure Training week in North Wales. After an incredible year, which I will never forget, with the Royal Logistics Corps, I left the Army on the 16th September, to go to Swansea, where I am now studying Sports Science. Swansea is a brilliant location for me as the British Team has a base in the Welsh National Pool and this is where I am training day in and day out!

I have met some incredible people over the last year who have helped me in their own individual ways. I owe a great deal of thanks to them for their support. I am already looking forward to next season when my first elite race of the season will be on June 2nd at Blenheim Palace. Blenheim will be a nice, local event to start off with; see you there?

Elysia Ridley