

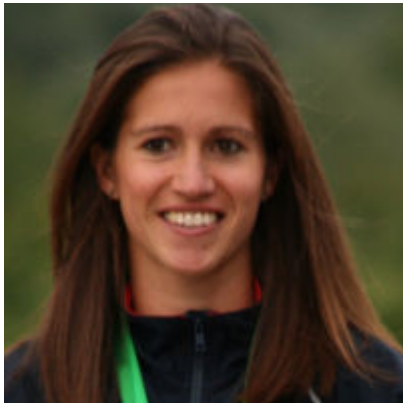
[Back](#)

- Sportsister - <http://www.sportsister.com> -

Sportsister talks to Anna Hemmings

Posted By [Louise Hudson](#) On 07.05.09 @ 11:37 am In [features](#), [features-spotlight](#) | [No Comments](#)

Sportsister talks to canoeist Anna Hemmings about being a six-time world champion and double Olympian, fighting back from illness and her recent decision to retire from professional sport.



Firstly, congratulations on an amazing career. Can you name one highlight from your many achievements that stands out the most for you?

That's a really tough one, because I've competed in both sprint racing and marathon racing within canoeing and they're quite different disciplines. Obviously in sprint racing the highlight has got to be competing at the Olympic Games; just to be part of that is really special.

On the marathon side, out of six world titles it's quite tricky to pick one, but I guess if I had to, I'd probably say winning in 2005 [at the Marathon World Championships, Perth, Australia]. I had two years out prior to that with chronic fatigue syndrome and coming back to win was really rewarding in many ways. It was a big relief that I could still do it and it was a tribute to a lot of people who'd helped and supported me through that tough time. It was quite an emotional victory.

How hard was it to take the decision to retire?

I've been canoeing since I was eight years old and have been professional for the last fifteen years, so it's not a decision you can make overnight.

It was a really tough decision because I love the sport, it's a great lifestyle and I feel privileged every day to be paid to do sport for a living.

It was particularly tough with 2012 looming in the distance, but I realised that I probably wasn't enjoying it as much as I used to. It became apparent that I wasn't prepared to make the sacrifices that I needed to make to commit 100% - in the past I'd never really considered them to be sacrifices; they were merely life choices. So in the end, it was quite clear.



As a professional athlete, becoming ill with chronic fatigue syndrome must have been devastating.

Yes, it was. Probably the worst part about it was that even when I was diagnosed, there was a lot of mystery about what the illness is, what the causes are and how to treat it. The not-knowing and the lack of information was really hard to deal with.

The mental battle was probably just as challenging as the physical battle - to go from being a professional athlete to being sedentary is pretty hard.

I tried so many different treatments and solutions for the illness. Eventually I did find something [Anna used reverse therapy] but it just took a long time.

So what's next for you professionally?

During the last five or six years I've developed a motivational speaking career where I speak to a variety of different audiences, ranging from blue-chip companies and CEOs at conferences to schoolchildren and students. I get a buzz out of inspiring people and I enjoy sharing my story. In addition to that, I'm looking to get into sports broadcasting.

How different will your lifestyle be now?

It'll be very different. I won't miss the amount of dedication that you have to put into it but it was really hard to say goodbye to the sport and I'm quite sad in one way. When you devote your life to something for 20-odd years, it's hard to let go.

But at the same time, I'm really excited about what the future might hold and embarking on a new career.

I'm also looking forward to being able to do different sports, which I haven't been able to do for a while.

I enjoy going skiing in the winter and playing tennis in the summer; I want to run a marathon and go mountain biking.

Does it frustrate you that canoeing lacks coverage in the media?

Yes, it does frustrate me. There are a lot of sports that only get attention once every four years and canoeing is one of those. But the Great Britain squad is starting to get better results which will hopefully start to improve spectator viewing because it will drive a bit more publicity. But it's so hard [for canoeing] to compete against sports like football and rugby.

Who should we be looking out for next in canoeing?

The women's squad is really young at the moment and there are quite a few young girls who are pretty talented. Rachel Cawthorn [aged 20] is one; Jessica Walker - who I raced with last year at the Olympics - is only 18 at the moment and she's also very talented.

Any tips for aspiring canoeists?

I'd say have fun and enjoy it, because that's when you get the best out of yourself - when you're doing something that you're passionate about and that you really enjoy.

Technique is really important in our sport, so working on that and getting a technical coach to help you is also really valuable. But like most things, if you want to reach the highest level, it's about hard work and dedication.

Becky Done, Sportsister
The Women's Sports Magazine

Related features on Sportsister:

- [1] [Taking on the Thames](#)
- [2] [Sportsister talks to kayaker Rosie Cripps](#)
- [3] [Canoeing: Team GB win silver in Australia](#)
- [4] [Sportsister meets Lizzie Neave](#)

Article printed from Sportsister: **<http://www.sportsister.com>**

URL to article: **<http://www.sportsister.com/?p=10333>**

URLs in this post:

- [1] Taking on the Thames: **<http://www.sportsister.com/?p=9611>**
- [2] Sportsister talks to kayaker Rosie Cripps: **<http://www.sportsister.com/?p=5901>**
- [3] Canoeing: Team GB win silver in Australia: **<http://www.sportsister.com/?p=5325>**
- [4] Sportsister meets Lizzie Neave: **<http://www.sportsister.com/?p=3967>**

Copyright © 2008 Sportsister. All rights reserved.