



Harness the Expertise of Sporting Champions
and Realise the Talents in others



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News

17/09/2009 News!! Blog: Canoeing World Champion Anna Hemmings

Anna Hemmings is a 6-time World Canoeing Champion. She is currently working on setting up a new venture and is involved in our 'Inspiring Sport' project - Backing Talent in East London and Manchester.

As the ICF Canoe Marathon World Championships unfold this weekend we caught up with Anna Hemmings, undoubtedly Britain's most successful ever female canoeist, to find out about her first World Championships experience...

"The marathon canoeing World Championships 2009 are rapidly approaching and when I think of that event it evokes a blend of emotions from happiness and satisfaction to sadness. Over the length of my career I won a total of 8 world championship medals, with 6 of them being gold. So my memories are mostly of joy and delight at being victorious but there's also an element of sadness that I'll never compete again in a race that I adored. That's not to say that I want to go back and return to the water, but the lead up to that event and the race itself always provided me with so much excitement, nervous anticipation, and enjoyment and I miss that.

When I reflect on my career I realise that one of the underlying reasons for my success in marathon canoeing was the joy and passion that I had for the event. I'm a strong believer that in life you have to follow your heart and chose to excel in something that you're passionate about. That really is the best way to get the best out of yourself; because when you're enjoying what you're doing its easier to put in that little bit extra, to go one step further and make the difference. And that's usually the difference that makes the difference when it comes to wining and losing races.

My very first senior marathon racing World Championships was in 1994 in Amsterdam, Holland. My preparation for the event was far from ideal because up until a week before the race I was preparing to compete in the junior race. I was still 17 years old and planning to defend the Junior World Cup title that I'd won the previous year. My training had been going well and I was excited and confident that I could finish the season on a high with victory at the World Cup in my final year as a junior. Those emotions were turned completely upside down when one of the girls from the senior team pulled out with an illness and I was asked to step up to the senior event. The junior race is 21km and the senior race was (at that time) 40km, so my answer as you can imagine was a very firm NO! But my coach is very persistent and very persuasive and I eventually said that I would think about it, which was of course taken to mean yes!

Race day arrived and my emotions were all over the place, at times I was excited about the opportunity that lay ahead and I wondered how I would get on against the best women in the world. Then reality would hit and I would remember that I had prepared for 21km not 40km! I was scared, I didn't know what to expect, and this was completely out of my comfort zone. I didn't know it at the time but I've since learnt that sometimes you have to be prepared to step out of your comfort zone and into the unknown. In order to surpass ourselves and push boundaries it's imperative that we step out of our comfort zones.

So I was prepared to step into the unknown but I was still worried about the actual race, if the other girls were going to be too fast and I would end up last! If I wouldn't be able to finish. What if the big scary senior women are really nasty and they capsize me! A whole array of thoughts went through my mind. My sports psychologist was at the event and he reminded me that I was never going to become truly world class if I was bound by fear. It was time to start "controlling the controllables". That meant there was no point worrying about all the 'what ifs' because most of them I couldn't control. There was no point worrying about how fast the other competitors were going to be or if they were going to be nice to me because I couldn't control that! It was time to start focusing on me and what I could control – my final few hours of preparation – eating and drinking the right things, staying out of the sunshine and finally I could control my race plan and being the best that I could be. "Control the controllables" became a motto that stayed with me for the rest of my career.

I arrived on the start line with a fine blend of nerves and excitement. I got off to a decent start; I was in the middle pack following a good rhythm. As the race progressed I found myself climbing up the field, one by one I picked off another competitor. They weren't so big and scary after all and I was enjoying myself. That was until about 32km when I hit a huge wall! All of a sudden I was struggling big time. I was seriously depleted of energy, the pain was kicking in big time, and my whole body began to screech in pain. But it was at this moment that I knew I could push on through to the end – I'd been there before, in a thousand training sessions. I was in this zone where your body screams at you to stop. But I had the mentality to drive on through, to find that extra effort, something I'd developed over those long hard hours in training, this ability to push myself to the limits of where it hurts and well beyond. So I paddled as fast as I could and went through the pain barrier. Finally after 3 hours and 5 minutes of racing I crossed the finish line. I had no idea how many competitors were in front of me, I was just delighted to have completed my first senior marathon World Championships. I soon discovered that I came 5th! I couldn't believe it!



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It was a little overwhelming and took a while to sink in but when it did I knew that I had made the right decision. I didn't come home with a medal but I learnt so much from that one experience. The moral of the story is that you never know what's possible or what you're fully capable of until you try and you may not succeed at first but you'll only fail if you don't try. So if you want to become truly world class you have to be willing to get out of the limitations, push the boundaries and dare to be different."

[Click here](#) to see Anna's sporting biography

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