

Charlotte Gower, Year 11. Charlotte has just returned from competing in the Deaflympics in Japan, where she was highly successful, winning 7 medals! Here Charlotte talks to Miss Callan about swimming and competing at such a high level.

Personal Journey & Motivation

- 1. What first inspired you to start swimming, and when did you realise you wanted to take it to a high-performance level?**

I started swimming lessons when I was little then joined the swimming club at age 7 as I enjoyed swimming. I went on to compete competitively from an early age but it was only a couple of years ago that I first qualified to compete nationally and this motivated me to push myself further.

- 2. How did you feel when you found out you had been selected for the Deaflympics team?**

I was honoured and so excited the thought of being able to represent my country at a sport I'm extremely passionate about.

- 3. What motivates you to keep pushing yourself in training, even on the tough days?**

My coaches are great at keeping me motivated, but I am really competitive and constantly strive to improve and I know this means I have to keep pushing myself in training consistently. Like most sports you have to commit to improve.

Deaflympics Experience

- 4. Can you describe the moment you arrived in Japan. What was going through your mind?**

It was a long flight, but we had been advised on keeping hydrated and to keep moving. It all became real when we arrived, I was excited but also nervous as I wasn't sure who else would be swimming and where I would be in the rankings.

- 5. What did it feel like stepping up to the starting blocks representing Great Britain?**

It was a fantastic experience, but I was also very nervous. There were lots of cameras and big screens with my face on! The finals in particular were very nerve wracking as we had to walk out to music, wave at the cameras and there were a lot of spectators including on one day the Emperor, Empress and Princess of Japan.

- 6. What was the atmosphere like in the pool compared to other competitions you've been in?**

The pool atmosphere was so friendly and extremely supportive from the people in the stands across all the different countries.

Medal Moments

7. Can you tell us about one of the races where you won a medal, what made it special?

My first gold medal in the 200 IM was particularly special because it was my first race and I went into it not expecting to win so when I did, I was quite shocked and proud of myself. It was nice to know that my hard work and training over the past year had paid off.

8. How did you celebrate after winning?

Unfortunately, I could not celebrate straight away as I had to go through anti-doping which took quite a long time! It was really the next day that I could fully appreciate my achievement and celebrate the success with my team and family.

Challenges & Resilience

9. What challenges have you faced as a deaf athlete, and how have you overcome them in your sport?

When I swim, I don't wear my hearing aids so I struggle to hear any instructions and feedback from my coaches. To overcome this, I have a physical copy of the set and the coaches talk loud and repeat if I need them to. In addition when I race I struggle to hear the start noise so I use a light which flashes to set me off.

10. Was there a moment during competition where you had to really dig deep? What helped you stay focused?

On the last day I had already done 5 days of constant races and I knew that in order to do well in the 3 races I had that day I would have to dig deep and focus. What helped me to do this was knowing that I could come home with even more medals and prove to myself it was all worth it

Team & Support

11. Who has supported you the most throughout your sporting journey?

My parents are definitely my biggest supporters they have sacrificed lots to help me reach my goals and to give me every opportunity to succeed.

12. What does it mean to you to be a role model for younger deaf athletes?

It means a lot to me to know I have had an impact on the deaf community and hopefully inspired young deaf athletes.

Cultural & Personal Highlights

13. What was the best part about being in Japan outside of the swimming?

I loved the culture it was very respectful and clean as well as not being too noisy in public which is lovely for a deaf person!

14. Did you get a chance to meet athletes from other countries? Any memorable conversations or friendships?

Yes I did meet athletes from lots of different countries however communicating with them was not easy given the language barriers however I now have a network of contacts from around the world.

Looking Forward

15. What are your next goals in swimming after the Deaflympics?

My next goal is the British Championships in London in the Spring. There are also the Worlds deaf championships next year.

16. What advice would you give to others who want to follow in your footsteps?

I hope that in the future it will be easier for athletes like me to get funding and support. However, I would say train hard and stay committed to the sport.



