

1 EARLY DAYS

I didn't wake up one morning and say I want to be a race walker because most people haven't heard of race walking – in fact a lot of people in Athletics may not have heard of race walking unless they've been introduced to it so ... its kind of ... you need ... clubs and people to be open minded and try these different events that are available and then obviously the support to obviously hold onto people so ... I see a lot of ... in my event, if you haven't got the coaches there then you'll struggle to hold onto athletes cos there's no support cos its very important ... not just focusing on athletes issues but on the coaches, the volunteers that help behind the scenes.

2 DESCRIPTION OF TECHNIQUE

I guess to the average person in the street who may never have seen someone doing the event it looks quite weird how ... it looks like you're wiggling your bum But there's two rules to race walking that distinguish it from running. The first rule is the contact, which basically means that in your normal walking cadence, by the time that your back foot leaves the ground, your front foot has to be on the ground. And the second rule is basically the straight leg rule, which is that when your front leg lands, your leg needs to appear straight from the point where it lands to where your leg is vertical. So they are the two rules that are kind of judged in the event. And if you like, the idea is – like any race – is to try and get from A to B as quick as possible. So if you like, the cadence is simply speeded up. Which makes it look like you're wiggling because you're actually opening your hips up and you're trying to Because you're limited on the contact You're trying to have as big a stride as possible whilst maintaining a high cadence.

My coach always used to say to beginners to explain it – as an example – of trying to catch a bus. If you are walking to a bus stop and just think about your normal walking, and then you think again about you're running a bit late so you're not allowed to run but you try and walk a bit faster. And then try and teach the person what did you do differently, so And most of the time people will have established that what they've done differently is they've moved – they've twisted their hips to make their stride bigger. And if you like, that's kind of teaching people the very basics and gradually building it in before you say you need to have one foot on the ground at all times or It's a gradual learning curve.

3 YOUR BROTHER DOMINIC IS ALSO A RACE WALKER

It helps being a twin – I've got an identical twin brother – so we've grown up as best friends, which is good. A bit like marmite – you either love them or hate them! So a lot of support from each other and obviously the competitive streak is probably a large reason for my success is having someone to challenge the whole time. The level we are at requires a lot of training – approximately 150km a week on average – spread across about 12 sessions. So I train twice daily. In terms of footwear, if I was to change my shoes as often – when they're worn – then you're talking 3 to 4 weeks a pair of shoes would last so, getting on to a dozen pair of shoes in a year which can get expensive if you're paying £70 to £80 for a pair of shoes.

You need to be good at time management. A lot of dedication to get up for training at 6.00 in

the morning so you can get the session out of the way and get to work. And again training when you get back in the evenings. You've always got to have a goal to aim for – my goal is obviously London 2012 and hopefully Championships is a stepping-stone towards that.

4 RACE WALKING IS AN INTERNATIONAL EVENT...

I've been a member of the GB Athletics Team and also the England Athletics Team for quite a long time. I mean I think my first international for GB was in 199 – so 10 years this year – so, and throughout the time we have regular training weekends specific for certain event groups. So they'll be a sprint training squad, they'll be an endurance training squad and they'll break them down into a race walking event so – we have a lot of links with various universities and institutions across the country.

We have a bi-annual event which is the World Cup of Race Walking and then the year that it doesn't occur we have the European Cup of Race Walking. So, I mean the last few editions of the World Cup of Race Walking there's been in excess of 70 countries taking part so its ... and that's specifically race walking There's a large number of countries that do the event. The same as ... I mean in Athletics in general you're talking in excess of 200 countries that take part in athletics but obviously some countries focus on maybe on some events and not on others and vice versa so ... but I think if you were to compare the race walking to other events – say like pole vault or long jump – you know if you were to look at that event individually, then you'd find that there's probably quite a large uptake in race walking across the world but perhaps not as much in this country as there was 40 or 50 years ago.

There is a lot of techniques that come from different countries which other countries use an example in my event – in the 80's – the Mexicans were very dominate in the event and there are a number of Mexican Drills which people use which quite often pass across to a number of different events – running as well – to use as a warm up. So I certainly have used some and again share our experiences. I do a lot of training closely with the Italians – one of my friends actually won the 50km Olympic title this year so it's my claim to fame! But again, we share experiences of what works best and

Just this weekend coming I've got a race in London – a 10km race which I'll be using as a kind of a tester to see how training has been over the winter period. But my first major race this season will be in the town of Lugano, Switzerland – beginning of March, which will be a 20km event. So it will be my first opportunity to try and get a qualifying standard for the World Championships later in the year in Germany. And, as I say, the other training I've been focusing on is 50km and they'll be a race I'll be doing in Slovakia in the spa town of Döbřichov at the end of March.

Obviously the National Governing body, Youth Athletics and England Athletics they offer support they have national coaches and funded weekends. If I represent Great Britain then obviously my trip is paid for, expenses are covered – obviously we don't receive payment to compete – it's obviously an honour to compete for your country. But if you like, costs are covered. Obviously what I would say is that anyone that I've worked for since my graduation up to working for a District Council – which I am at the moment – and my previous position, its obviously good to have an employer who understands that you need time off to go and race abroad. Even – due to the level that I compete at – it's little and often, its maybe 6 or 7 times a year – you're not talking about every weekend.

5 WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HELP TO PROMOTE RACE WALKING?

Its an area that needs to be addressed in terms of actually getting out there and showing members of the public that this is an event in athletics because I think the tendency is that athletics clubs tend to stick to main stream events that people maybe have been taught in schools. But I am aware of schools where they have people that have been involved in the event – where schoolteachers have tried to introduce their children into those events, I do think it is an area that people need to try and tap into, try and boost numbers. Whether that's going down the fitness route and maybe approaching people who go power walking or just general fitness and just seeing if they would be interested in just trying the events. Or going into schools is another option.

6 YOU MISSED OUT GOING TO BEIJING IN 2008 - WHY WAS THAT?

There's a selection standard – an A and a B standard and so this is set not just by the National Governing Body but by the International Governing Body as a standard and its then up to the National Governing Body to decide whether they use their standards or they adjust them slightly. But the idea is that you can take up to 3 athletes on an A standard or you can take an athlete on a B standard if you have no athletes that have qualified on an A standard. But I know that 20 30 years ago perhaps as late as the late 70's, there wasn't the selection standards – the A's and the B's – that you have nowadays. And it used to be the case of first past the post in the trials was automatically going irrespective of what standard they've done so. I mean if the selection had continued that way then I would have been at the last 2, possibly 3 Olympics because I've come second in the last ... I won last years trials and come second in 2004 trials but obviously we don't do it like that, we do have to ... it's not good enough to be just the best in the country you have to be of a certain standard as well. So that does make a big restriction on which athletes can go to certain countries

I've had some knock backs in the past and that was the biggest knock back you could get really. Its been difficult to pick yourself up and try and focus on the World Championships when the Olympics is the be all and end all in terms of athletics so...

HAS THERE BEEN A MAJOR INFLUENCE IN YOUR CAREER?

I had a coach who introduced me to athletics – specifically race walking – in 1994. He's actually based in Ipswich, in Suffolk but he unfortunately died in December at the age of 47. He would have been someone who I would have linked up with – he's left a massive hole in terms of all the work he used to do, the voluntary work with Orwell Panthers, the Disability Athletics Club as well as obviously a large involvement in my brother and my progression. If you like its another reason why I want to get the most out of my sport – try and make 2012 and do it, if not for me but for him and others who have supported us.

I've known him for along time Best part of 20 years – most of my life really. Certainly the last 15 years I've been working closer with him but he's also the sort of guy I'd see more as a mentor capacity. He can see when he's taken a person to a certain point and then the national coach would step in and then maybe with the programme. But he's the sort of person who would always phone up and ask how I'm going. That supportive kind of person who I think people need especially when you ... there are going to be tough times in training when you ask yourself questions and ask yourself why do I do this event? It's not – it's certainly not for the money – there is money for people at the very top level but for 99% of the people who do athletics it's not money you can make a living on. You know you have to

have a very different sort of mindset to someone who is going into a sport where maybe you can be a professional like football or rugby. But if you like my challenge is to get the best out of myself and be successful – especially with all the knock backs you can get.