

1 EARLY DAYS

I started dwarf games in 2000 and went every year but then of course power lifting came along and I stopped going every year. Before that I did athletics – running, javelin, shot, discus and football, basketball and hockey and sometimes swimming. Usually I came first, second or third

I didn't really train all that much I just went along. Sometimes I trained at my High School. I really liked the games because usually I have to look up to everyone but there you just have to look "normal" which is quite good.

I think some people don't mind if they are dwarf but I do think some people mind the word "dwarf", I don't mind – I am what I am!

When I was at school, one of my old coaches came – he was there to do an Army talk – and he kept watching me. I thought why is he staring at me? Then he came over and said that because of my height, I'd be good at power lifting because my arms are quite short. I said no straight away, I didn't want to do it. Then my friends said you should so I went to the club one lunchtime. I was a bit nervous but did just little weights – like the bar – and then kept progressing from there.

They wanted me to go to competitions but I said no because I wanted to watch my brother play football.

2 TRAINING

My weight cap is under 40kg. If I'm 40.1 I go into the "under 44kgs category" which means I have to lift more weights.

I have to watch what I eat. I can have a bad day but mostly I have to have "good days"! especially leading up to competitions, I have to have good days because I don't want to be over my body weight. Sometimes it's hard, like when you go past a shop where they sell chocolate things and I'll think, "Oh, I'll go and get that" but then I think, "No, I mustn't!"

When you go into competitions the referees check your equipment and make sure everything is OK and then you go and get weighed and make sure you're under weight. So before that you don't have anything like the previous night or in the morning until you've been weighed and then you just scoff your face!

I have to train three times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. It takes about two hours to do one session. And then there's the fitness work in between as well. I use a Wii Fit – I do the step-ups for between 10 to 30 minutes. I also use a gym at our house – running, walking, biking and rowing

I do my "heavy" sessions at the sports centre. I do about 87 sometimes 90kg on a good day. At home I do about 67kg because I tend to do "reps" which help me out a lot. "Reps" is where you repeat a lift say six times then have a break then do it again.

Usually I'm the only girl at the Spartans Club. I've always been a bit of a tomboy really. I've been playing football with the boys, love getting muddy and messy – always done that so it doesn't bother me that I'm the only girl, just get on with it.

DANIEL COLLINS – one of Zoe's coaches

I think she was naturally strong. She used to compete in the dwarf games in events like shot put so strength has always been a natural asset of hers. Also, dwarves tend to have the same amount of muscle fibres as able-bodied people but on shorter bones so they have a greater potential to grow. Most of the best power lifters in the lighter classes in the disabled side of the sport are dwarves. They have increasingly dominated those classes.

It's an explosive movement. If you watch Zoe when she lifts the empty bar (weighs 20kg) you can see how quickly she moves that bar. It's not a squeeze, it's not a muscle contraction, it's an explosive movement totally different than what people perceive it to be. Most power lifters do an equal amount of speed and power training. Not the case if you went back 10 to 20 years when it was all heavy lifting – nowadays there's a greater emphasis on the technique of speed.

ZOE – talks about MEDICATION

We always go on the web site and check out every thing. Obviously if it's banned, we don't take it. So we have to go back to the doctors and ask for something different because it's banned.

Every day you have to schedule an hour a day when drug testers could come along. They could come any day. For example if I set aside an hour today, they may not come but they could come tomorrow. It's hard sometimes to figure out what time to put down because you have to do this even when you're on holiday or when you're going out, or training. They need to know where you will be at that allotted time. For example if you are staying at friends you have to say where you are staying. If you are not available if they call, after the third failed visit you are not allowed to go to the Olympics.

Once I had a problem with my finger. The doctor gave me some antibiotics that messed up my weight because I was having double the dose I usually have, this led to water retention – I didn't go to the toilet. Luckily it's starting to get back to normal now. Usually I weigh 39 kg but when I was on the antibiotics, I was 41 then 42 and I wasn't eating much really.

When I know I've had bad days or when I had that medicine, I would weigh myself every two minutes! I was so obsessed with it. I was annoyed because I wasn't eating much, I was doing all the fitness work and it still wasn't going down.

3 SELECTION

Louise Pennell (one of Zoe's coaches) told me I would be good so she got me to enter competitions. My first was at Cardiff, The UK Bench Press Open in 2008, I lifted about 40kg. Then I carried on – won the 2008 Best Newcomer in the Wheelpower Sports Awards. It doesn't matter what disability you've got, I compete against wheelchair athletes and

people with cerebral palsy, it's all about the weight that you are. Coaches watch you and can pick you for other events. For example at the Commonwealth Event you had to lift a certain weight.

The first time I represented GB was in 2009 and went to France. I was quite nervous doing that because it was also my first event abroad but it came out all right – I came second and lifted 60kg. When I went to America – New Jersey – I had three good lifts. It was one of my proudest moments because I don't usually manage three good lifts. I came first with a lift of 67kg

In January 2010 I got two awards at Cardiff – first with a lift of 80kg and also won Best Junior Female award. Last week I went to Stoke Mandeville and lifted 85kg, which was a personal best, and also a British Senior record and European Junior record. I came first overall and also received a trophy for being the most improved female lifter. I'm really chuffed with it as well! I was very nervous going up for it. It was however good to look at everyone in the audience clapping and cheering for you. Steve Canning then gave me a letter saying that I'd been selected to go to the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in October 2010.

DANIEL COLLINS – one of Zoe's coaches

Zoe would be among the absolute best at able-bodied power lifting. The difference between able – bodied and disabled power lifting is that in able-bodied lifting, people compete in bench shirts whereas Zoe is lifting more weight than most people lift in the equipped shirts. The British record at able-bodied at Zoe's weight is about 40kg. Zoe lifts around 85kg.

4 THE GAMES

5 FUNDING

Going to Malaysia and Delhi this year, so I'm travelling the world, which is good for someone my age – not many people get that chance. I get Sports Aid that helps me, Optua help me and we do some fundraising in my village that helps a lot.

6 LONDON 2012

DANIEL COLLINS – one of Zoe's coaches

Her strength is by far and away ahead of anyone else in Europe but the next thing to work on is to take her to the next stage where she competes at a world level.

ZOE

I'm really excited; hopefully I'll get to go in 2012. Don't know what is going to happen because you can get injuries very quickly so you don't know what's round the corner. Just try and concentrate on what I have to do. I think I've grown up a bit more now and this has helped me a lot. I don't know what I'd do if the sport wasn't there. Sometimes I think about that. What if I didn't have the sport, what would I be doing because it takes up most of my time – training, fitness work. Then I think what would I have done if I didn't have power lifting?