

Women in Sport

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Sports Article

I felt as though my stomach was going to explode with the butterflies fluttering inside me due to the excitement of getting dropped off at the football pitch for what felt like the first time all over again. My pigtailed swayed in the wind as I ran onto the pitch towards the familiar dugout, my long socks pulled up as far as my knees and my gum shields tucked inside them, beside my ankle. The size one, blue and white football boots with my initials on them, that I received for my birthday made me feel like a professional footballer. I wore my black and amber shorts, tied tightly around my waist and my matching jersey tucked inside them. I was already breathless by the time I reached the dugout after sprinting all the way over with the excitement for the girls under 10s blitz. My teammates, who were all my best friends were already at the dug out with their amber jerseys on, they all clearly shared the same passion and excitement for football as I did. My coach, whose advice I was always grateful for, handed me my number 10 jersey, right wing forward, my favourite position.

After the warm up our coach called us in and gave us the all important game plan, I listened so carefully, getting my mind into the game zone. While walking towards my marker my excitement disappeared and was replaced by pure concentration, my focus was on the game completely. Every training, game or match I made sure to give my all, giving everything I could and afterwards leaving it all on the pitch. At half time of the all important blitz I went straight over to my dad and older brother who were watching on the side line, they always gave me honest advice on how to improve my game and I appreciated their viewpoints constantly, taking everything they said on board. Football is a huge part of my family, we would be out every night of the week watching one of us playing and I learned so much more from observing games than I did actually playing them. Myself and my siblings often kicked around in the garden which definitely toughened me up for my games.

I made my way back to the dugout to get a drink of water, my face as red as a tomato and my pigtailed now hanging on loosely. Our coach gave us encouragement to get back out there and give it everything, which is exactly what I did. When the referee blew the full time whistle, we were devastated. Losing is never a good feeling but it's an experience everyone must have and use it as an opportunity to learn from. The journey back home was much less exiting as I of course felt disappointed, but when dad got the message that I have another game next week, my hopes were lifted again, excitement building once more for yet another under 10 girls blitz.

I dragged my feet while I made the all too familiar walk from my house to the football pitch. I carried my size 6 grey football boots and water in my hands, dreading the thought of yet another game. My gum shields were tucked inside my short, ankle football socks. My high, tight ponytail swayed in the light breeze as I made my way towards the clubhouse. I sat down, awkwardly in the dressing room, feeling as though I was out of place and out of my depth. The Women's Senior county championship games are always intense, although I am still under 16 there isn't enough interest for my age group to have a team so I had no choice but to play up. We just about manage to field 15 players for the senior games. The coach handed me my number 10 jersey and I felt the glare from fellow teammates as I'd taken someone's position once again. The pressure built up inside me more and more as we made our way out onto the pitch for the warm up. I can't afford to have a bad game, I need to perform my best at all times.

The coach called us in to give us the game plan, he was already negative about the game, constantly reminding us how unlikely it is that we would win. I no longer receive advice from management but constant criticism on my playing. My head was in a pessimistic state as I headed over to my right wing forward position, standing next to my marker who was at least twice my age and size. The lack of supporters is also something that has a negative effect, when I have been so used to watching the big crowds at my brother's games, it feels as though we are not taken seriously. I played my best but people, including myself are always going to find the faults in the game. I put on my runners and carried my boots in my hand as I walked back home glad it's over but absolutely dreading the next game.