

## Aoibhe Horan – Presentation Secondary School, Milltown, Co. Kerry

### Life is But a Dream for Monika Dukarska

Monika began rowing with Killorglin Rowing Club at the age of 16 when she moved to Ireland from Poland with her family. “I got introduced to rowing in my first week at the Intermediate School Killorglin. I was tall and skinny, and as height is an advantage in rowing, I got asked to join Killorglin Rowing Club. I decided to give it a go and I haven’t looked back since.”

In 2019, along with Aileen Crowley, she qualified the women’s pair boat for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics at the World Rowing Championships in Linz, Austria. Then lockdown hit and the Olympics were postponed until 2021. “During lockdown I learned that it is very important to slow down and take care of yourself. As a high-performance athlete I’m very driven and goal orientated and sometimes I ignore the need to rest or detach from the intense performance driven environment.”

When the Olympics finally rolled around, Monika says it was the experience of a lifetime. She raced in the women’s pair event along with Aileen Crowley. They finished 4<sup>th</sup> in their first heat of the games. They narrowly missed out on a place in the A/B semi-final, however, they managed to reclaim a spot by coming 3<sup>rd</sup> in the repechage. They finished 5<sup>th</sup> in the semi-final and raced in the B final, coming 5<sup>th</sup> placing them 11<sup>th</sup> in the world. “Japan was spectacular even though we didn’t see much of the tourist specific sites. It was a privilege to line up for Ireland at the Olympic Games, as it’s the biggest sporting event in the world and comes around every four years. I think getting to the Olympics would be my biggest achievement so far. I think competing at such a global and rare event, as it only comes around every four years makes this more valuable than racing at a World Championship or World Cup event.”

Thanks to the success of Irish rowers in Rio 2016 and more recently Tokyo 2020, rowing has gained popularity as a sport in Ireland. According to the Rowing Ireland website, there are almost 4000 registered racing members in more than 70 clubs and universities around the country with the overall rowing community expected to be at two or three times that number. However, getting to the Olympics was no mean feat. With big interest and few spaces, it is an extremely competitive sport. Getting the seat in the boat and keeping it is not easy. “Usually, we train two to three times a day. My usual day at the National Rowing Centre would [start at 8:00am](#) and [finish around 11:00am](#). After that, we might have a weight session, which would probably take place [from 1:00pm to 2:30pm](#) and then we would be back in the centre again to do another aerobic session [around 5:00pm](#).”

“Rowing training takes up a lot of time as it is an endurance sport, so we are required to do a lot of kilometres to build our endurance base. A typical week would consist of 220 kilometres of rowing.”

In this busy world of international sport, it is still important to find ways to relax and wind down. “I really enjoy going out and meeting my friends for brunch or coffee. I also enjoy walks with Fiadh, my chocolate Labrador, and she is always up for a good run around or a game of fetch.”

Balancing full time education and an international rowing career isn’t a walk in the park. Having previously achieved a masters in innovation and design, Monika is currently studying for her PhD in education. “I think my tip for managing a busy schedule while studying and rowing would be to be very well organised and plan ahead, as the saying goes ‘failing to prepare is preparing to fail’ and by being very well organised will give you an opportunity to do very well in both academia and sports as you will optimize your time.”

As an international rower, Monika has gained wisdom and learned a lot about herself and life during her time rowing for Ireland and I think we can learn something from what she has to say. “The piece of advice I would give to my younger self would be to pause and acknowledge and appreciate the things I have achieved. I think what I have done over the past few years is to chase after the next goal or the next challenge, rather than stop and acknowledge all the things I have achieved to date and perhaps celebrate it a little bit more.”