ITF WORLD CUP - BRIGHTON OCTOBER 2012-

MY EXPERIENCE

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This summer, while everyone was watching the Olympics in London, my focus was on another sporting event taking place in Brighton in October. While Olympic athletes were taking a well-deserved break and enjoying their victories, for me, the challenge of the 4th ITF World Cup was only beginning……….

I am 15 and my journey with Taekwondo started 9 years ago. I joined Rivervalley TK Club in Swords and in 2010, I became a Black Belt. I am a member of the Irish Taekwondo Association which is part of the International Taekwondo Federation (ITF). This year’s event was my 3rd international competition following the 2008 ITF World Cup in Italy and the 2012 European Taekwondo Championships in Slovenia. The ITF World Cup 2012 - a 4 day event with 44 countries - was the best in my opinion.

My parents and I arrived in Brighton on Wednesday the 3rd of October. I was nervous so I was glad they were there. At the opening ceremony I was excited but couldn’t help thinking about competitions that hadn’t gone my way. I was worried I wouldn’t perform, that nerves would get the better of me. Before the individual events, I chatted to my coach Stephen Cooley and he calmed me down. He has been by trainer since the start and knows me well. He told me to do my best and reminded me about the progress I’d made in the months before the competition.

I know I put myself under pressure for these events - that’s down to my competitive streak but the atmosphere was very relaxed. I think that’s because the World Cup gives everbody from blue belt upwards a chance to compete at world level. For that reason, teams mixed easily - my team mates and I chatted with teams from Norway and Israel even though we would be competing against them. I’m sure that the atmosphere at the World Championships will be more serious, as only black belts fight against each other there.

Even with my nerves settled, day one was tough and I was beaten in my two individual events. Day two was better. I competed in ‘Individual Sparring’ in the +60kgs, aged 15-17 category. In round one I faced a Norwegian girl. We fought for three minutes and she beat me by one point. I was disappointed but I knew I had done my best.

On Saturday, I was really happy with my performance in the ‘Flying Sidekick’ event. I had to jump over a tape at 150cm and kick a target without knocking down the tape. I got over the height of 150cm along with another 5 girls. The tape was moved up another 10cm and I caught it with my back leg. I was disappointed to have missed out but my confidence was growing.

Finally, the day I was most looking forward to came; Sunday’s team events. I was on two teams. The first was ‘Patterns’ where 5 other Irish girls and I performed together. We first beat Norway 5-0. In the second round we defeated Slovenia by the same score; we were through to the final against Argentina!

Our second event was ‘Sparring’; there were six of us from clubs in Dublin, Cork and Meath. In the first round, we easily beat Scotland 6-0. Norway were tougher in the next round (we were still hurting from our defeat to them in the European championships) and we were determined not to lose again. I was last to fight and the pressure was on; the score was 4-4 and if I failed, we wouldn’t get to the final. Luckily I won 4-0! Nerves set in as we faced the favourites Poland in the final. We won the first fight, drew the second and lost the third. It was down to one more fight. My teammate Sarah was up, she dominated throughout and we came out with gold. We were thrilled.

The closing ceremony took place that evening and to top it all, Ireland was awarded with the ‘Best Overall Association’ trophy. I was so proud! It was also announced that the next ITF World Cup will be in Jamaica in 2014. Holding on tightly to my two medals, I couldn’t help thinking about what I could achieve there. Next time, I thought, I’ll get that individual medal!

Next day we flew into a quiet Dublin airport- the thousands of fans Katie Taylor and other Olympians are used to is a long way off for my teammates and I. Still, I don’t think I could have achieved what I did without the support of friends and family. I’m back training and the seaside town of Brighton seem a long way off. Funnily enough, Jamaica feels a whole lot closer…….

