

Women in sport: insights from gold medallists

Helen Richardson-Walsh interview

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I almost think that experience in injury can actually make you stronger mentally. Because when I went through my first injury, I actually learned quite a lot about myself as a person and as a hockey player.

Before my injury, I probably wasn't the best trainer, but through my injury because you can't skip anything. You have to do your exercises, you have to do A, B, and C that your physio tells you. It makes you really focused and able to set goals.

I found goal setting really helpful, and it helped me not only through my injury but also later on throughout my whole career. So, I definitely became a stronger athlete and hockey player from being injured, and that was certainly from a mental aspect as well.

I would always visualize myself on top of that Olympic podium. When you're going through really hard training sessions and really boring, dull training sessions, because rehab is just the most dull training ever. It really helped me to have that very strong focus on why I was doing, what I was doing.

Another thing that I used for my back surgery, was I wrote a blog. Because of my past injuries, I knew that I was going to isolate myself, I knew that's what I did as a person. And so I decided to write a blog to make myself speak to people. And I put it online, and the amount of support I got from people that I didn't know, the hockey family was incredible.

But also another thing that I was hoping I would get from it was the support of my teammates which I knew they would anyway. But for them to support you, I knew I needed to give something and with me opening up and talking about what I was going through and quite a candid fashion. It helped that dialogue between the two parties and it really helped me in my recovery.

My advice to anybody who is injured and going through an injury would be to be kind to yourself. You will experience emotions that you possibly have never experienced before, and you don't want to experience, and you may feel as a person that you're changing or it's not who you are. But just be kind to yourself because that's the injury talking in a way.

I think it's so easy to say be positive and it will be OK, but you're going through a difficult time. And that's important to accept it's a difficult time. It will be tough and there will be challenges along the way I don't think it will be a smooth ride. But if you accept that and almost expect that in a way, then I think when those challenges come, it's a lot easier to deal with.

I think when you're in the injury sometimes really difficult to think I know this could be a positive outcome but once you do get through it, and you do get back into the sport that you love then, it really can have a positive effect, and you can come out much stronger physically and mentally and knowing yourself a lot better as well.