



My name is Thejes, I'm 19 and last year I joined the University of Oxford to study Theoretical Physics. I've been swimming since I was 10 yrs. old, starting with swimming lessons. When I started secondary school at age 12, I joined Gateshead and Whickham Swimming Club and swam all through my school years.

I've never had natural talent for swimming, I'm short and probably the least buoyant person you'll meet! But one thing this has taught me is that hard work is a great substitute for talent. I knew I wouldn't become a pro, but the thing that kept me in the sport for so long (even when my friends started moving on) is that I absolutely love swimming! I just love the feeling of working on myself to create the best performance I can.

Regardless of whether I perform or not on the day, I learned to love the process of bettering myself. When it finally came to stepping on the blocks and racing, watching the hard work payoff is the most satisfying and quite an addictive feeling! During my A Levels, especially when it came to university applications, I began to cut back on the number of training sessions as the schoolwork was getting quite intense. During this period, although my swimming performance started to drop, my mindset toward training completely changed. I knew I had no pressure to perform so I went into every training session just giving my all. It probably wasn't obvious since the times I was hitting weren't at my best, but I think the last couple years of my swimming journey have been the most transformative in building my mental resilience.

I still remember the 32 x 25m underwater test sets we did once a month. This test is one of few that physical fitness doesn't play a big of a role in how successful you are. This set is a test of pure mental toughness and discipline and is one of the few I managed to do well at. In fact, every time we did this test, I made it a point to improve my score from the previous time I tried it, whether I was at a better fitness level or not. Swimming has been a massive part of my teenage life and has taught me so many valuable lessons from a young age that I wouldn't have learnt elsewhere. The discipline of waking up early in the morning before school and working as hard as you can, while the majority of people our age are still asleep is an incredibly empowering one. Also waking up early to work on something which you're really passionate about, while fitting it around non-negotiable tasks like schoolwork are the foundations of success. Additionally, I can remember countless times when my coach has written a set on the board and in my head, me thinking 'there is no way I'm going to get through this' and I did.

You learn a great deal about yourself and what you're capable of in that moment. I obviously wasn't aware that this was what I was actually learning when I was 13 and started training seriously, however upon reflection these are probably the most valuable lessons any child can learn. There is no doubt that I have been able to use what I have learnt from swimming and implement it. Even at university, I'm surrounded by people who may be more talented than I am, and this a reflection of my swimming journey. Although I may not be the smartest, I'm studying a course which I am extremely passionate about and this is getting me through the challenging times. I'm sure I'll face plenty of adversity in my life and swimming has taught me to overcome this. Whatever I achieve in the future, I know my swimming experience will certainly have a part to play. I have my coaches, teammates, and the swimming community to thank for this.