



Katie Dinwoodie



Katie Dinwoodie, 15, competed in athletics at the 2018 School Games National Finals, and won the 100m sprint 0.3 seconds ahead of her closest rival. Katie has been participating in athletics for seven years, inspired by a school sports day where she won one of her races and was advised by her school to take it up more seriously. As well as competing in athletics, Katie also plays netball and before back surgery in 2015, competed in gymnastics as well.

Katie and her family live in Lerwick (Shetland Islands), approximately 100 miles North of mainland Scotland and travelled over 600 miles for the 2018 School Games, her biggest competition to date. Living in such a remote location, travelling to compete is nothing new to Katie, as she often travels hundreds of miles to reach events in mainland Scotland, and sometimes even further afield. Travelling from the Shetland Islands is not easy, leaving the island involves either a 12-hour ferry or 1-hour plane journey to reach Aberdeen, followed by more travelling to reach the final destination. The travel involved means it can take up the entire weekend for just a few hours of competition.

In Shetland, sports clubs are few and far between with most sports having just one club, despite the growing popularity of athletics in recent years. There is a waiting list to join the athletics club, as the young people in Shetland are inspired by the success of its members. With a population of 22,000 people, less than 8,000 reside in Katie's hometown.

Katie's main inspiration comes from watching Usain Bolt at the Commonwealth Games which influenced her to begin competing. Her first competition, a local club competition, was followed by the District Championships where Katie competed in the North District which required her to travel to Inverness, a round trip journey of nearly 600 miles.

From there, success followed, and Katie hopes to compete in the Island games in 2019, an international competition run every two years. Joining Shetland in the Island Games include the Falkland Islands, Jersey, Gibraltar and the competition takes place in a different location each time. As Katie lives in a remote part of Scotland, her participation in competition is very much limited by her ability to travel to the various locations which often poses its own barriers because of her age. As a result, a huge commitment is also made by Katie's family, who give up entire weekends, often multiple in a row, to accompany and support their daughter in competitions:

"If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have got to things like the Celtic Games and the School Games because the rest of the club weren't going, and I can't travel alone."

A huge investment has already been made in Katie's sporting career, not just from a time and financial perspective, but also physically. The distance Katie travels to get to competitions has a big impact on her energy levels when it comes to competing and can be very tiring for herself and her family.



SCHOOL GAMES

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What makes Katie's story more remarkable is that in April 2015, Katie was diagnosed with a slip in the spine called Spondylolisthesis, and in August 2015 she had to have major back surgery. At that point in time, Katie was not only competing in athletics, but also in gymnastics and was due to go away for competitions in both sports. However, she was unable to attend and was advised to completely stop doing any sports to help her recovery. It took a long time for Katie to get back into sport. There was a time when she was unsure if she would be able to return to the same level she had been at as she had been very successful for her age group.

"It was tough to get back into sport. I found it really tiring but I had an amazing support network around me which helped me settle back in"

Being at the 2018 School Games National Finals three years on from surgery was very emotional for Katie, who wasn't expecting a win. Katie's hopes for the School Games were to enjoy the experience as it was the biggest competition of her sporting career to date. One of the key parts of the School Games was the Athlete Education Programme, where young competitors are paired with an athlete mentor to learn from their experiences, take part in workshops and look at life alongside sport, the stresses of social media during competition, and how to make the right decisions at the right time.

Katie's experiences have taught her a lot about some of the key principles of the Athlete Education Programme. Following the surgery, Katie now understands the significance of being physically fit which has helped her ensure she is more sensible with training. Before surgery, she would be doing more than 15 hours of training a week for both gymnastics and athletics. The surgery has helped her become more aware of her body and of recognising the impact and pressure athletes place on their body when competing at the highest level. She is more appreciative of the strain athletes place on their body which has taught her to take care of her body, recognising when she needs to rest. The Athlete Education Programme has reinforced what Katie has learned about herself and recognising what her body is capable of.

Having surgery just as she started high school was a huge set-back for Katie as she missed the social aspect of sport. However, one of the things that helps Katie stay so connected when competing in sport is the use of social media. Although social media has been criticised for being one of the key factors in the declining mental wellbeing of young people, Katie uses it to help her stay connected with friends she meets through competitions. This being especially important when living in a remote location, with fewer sporting opportunities, to be able to stay in touch with like-minded people.

The environment at the School Games has inspired Katie to continue with her ambition of going to university. In the future, she also hopes to improve her personal best and beat Shetland records. The School Games have provided a springboard for young athletes to compete at a higher level, with 200 graduates of the School Games competing in the 2018 Commonwealth Games and 56 of 382 athletes representing Team GB at the Olympic Games in Rio in 2016 having also come through the School Games.

