

I am number 17
Jack's Experience

For as long as I can remember, I have lived with haemophilia A, a rare bleeding disorder which means I have no factor VIII in my body to help with internal blood clotting. When I was little, I had a lot of bleeds into my elbow, knee and ankle joints, which are badly damaged as a result. I can't straighten my left elbow and sometimes I find it difficult to walk due to the pain in my ankles and knees. This didn't stop me from doing the sports I wanted to. I played football and cricket, but it was always swimming that was my favourite. The damage that had been done to my left elbow, left knee and right ankle meant that I was able to be classified as a para-swimmer in 2009. Little did I know where this chapter would take me in my life.

After taking up swimming at the age of four, I never dreamed that I'd end up representing Team GB at the London 2012 and that it would be the best experience of my life, one that I will always be grateful for.

I came fourth in the 100m Breaststroke and broke 3 British records – 50m Breaststroke, 100m Breaststroke and as part of the 4x100m medley relay team (twice in one day!). It was the most amazing moment to share with my teammates and my family who were with me every step of the way.

My condition does put me at risk of bleeding in the joints or on the brain, however I have never let haemophilia A stop me from swimming. I am proud to have represented my country in a sport where I was able to perform at my best.

London 2012 gave me the opportunity to go out into the world and speak about what life was like being a professional athlete and someone suffers from severe haemophilia A. I have been lucky enough to be invited to various events, including speaking in-front of 5000 people at a world congress in Glasgow, to touring round the country inspiring school children to be successful and be the best versions of themselves. What gave me the most gratification was speaking to other people in the bleeding disorder community, hearing their stories and relating to some of the struggles that they went through helped me massively, before this I felt like I was alone and that although people around could sympathise what I was going through, they didn't really know. Talking and listening to people who are now friends for life was incredibly special and it helped me out a lot!

Since retirement from swimming, my focus switched to my university studies. I was based in Newcastle upon Tyne, a place where I have so many happy memories. I used the same drive and determination that I had during my swimming career into my academics. In July 2019, I graduated with a first-class honours, and shortly after secured a job near Oxford.

I would have never been able to be as successful in and out of the pool without the wonderful support of my family. The first few years of my life were incredibly tough, but we got through together as a team. That why we call ourselves 'Team Bridge' no matter what one member of the family is going through, we always get through it with the love and support of each other.

Haemophilia A has and always will be a part of my life, it doesn't define who I am, nor does it hold me back from being the best version of myself. However, without haemophilia A, I wouldn't have been able to experience all the amazing opportunities that presented themselves, it also gave me the opportunity to inspire other people to talk about not letting adversity stand in their way so they can also achieve something truly incredible.

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