

Paul Weston Triathlon Scholarship – End of Year Review Report
Rhiannon Middleton, June 2017

As the proud recipient of the Paul Weston Triathlon Scholarship (PWTS) in my second year of university (2015-2016), I had a fantastic experience being a scholar of this award, so kindly funded by both the Weston's themselves and the Performance Centre at the University of Birmingham.

Being selected for this award was an opportunity that enabled me to follow my passion for triathlon, alongside my academic studies, both of which were of equal importance to me throughout my time at university. Unlike many of the fellow PWTS scholars who faced triathlon as a new sport upon joining university, I had already competed in the sport myself prior to university. The opportunity to maintain and continue my training, as well as the level of competition I was competing at, was much further enhanced by the support and assistance of the Performance Centre. Ultimately, this scholarship enabled me to access support and advice I wouldn't have had such easy access to.

Some examples of the benefits of the award that I experienced included fantastic, ongoing physiotherapy support to see me through the various niggles and injuries I experienced throughout the year; as an athlete, this helped me return to competition stronger and more resilient, both physically and mentally. Sport massages, which were a God-send at the best of times and physiological support in the way of Alter-G usage; a highly beneficial machine to assist training sessions in a controlled environment and at a reduced body weight load – advantageous in situations such as building up the running training from a lower limb issue I previously experienced, providing confidence in myself and giving me the boost I needed psychologically. I also gained access to various workshops put on for the UBSport scholars of the university, which were hugely beneficial and informative. These included a series of psychology workshops focusing on an approach to training and competition and barriers obstacles that may appear detrimental along the way. Perfect to put into perspective for myself on race day.

Alongside the roll of Women's Captain for this academic year, I felt it was a great opportunity to show the club my talent within triathlon as an approachable and known face to the club. I thoroughly enjoyed my time on committee and carrying out the role of this responsibility amongst a team of great people, all with the same eagerness for triathlon and the club itself. As the current PWT scholar of the Triathlon Club, it made me proud to know I could chat to members, including those new to the sport or those already involved and share my knowledge of the sport, to improve their experience of and training within triathlon.

Just over half way through the year, I went along to an event with Louise Barron - the Triathlon Club's Head Coach - with the aims of promoting the sporting prowess of the triathlon club at the University of Birmingham to upcoming talented triathletes, coming through their education stepping stones with university being the next point of call. This was yet another great opportunity to present myself as a worthy ambassador of the university, in particular with this award specific to triathletes.

From a racing performance perspective, I put it down to the training focus enabling me to prioritise and periodise my weeks, in producing a strong performance for both the university and myself at the BUCS Duathlon, coming away with a gold in the team event. This was a great achievement and my second BUCS medal since being at university, topping the bronze team medal the previous year at the BUCS biathlon event.

My 7th place finish at the BUCS Olympic distance event in the Summer term, my first ever Olympic distance triathlon, was another success to add to my racing history and one I desired to build on over the upcoming few months as I approached the triathlon season in full swing post exams at the end of the academic year.

However, frustratingly enough, commencing my racing on the elite British Super Series for the up and coming season following a rapid fast paced race at the well-known infamous Blenheim Palace Triathlon, I experienced a stress fracture to my foot which meant an end to my racing season. It was an extremely difficult pill to swallow, especially seeing as I'd had a tremendous amount of support over the previous 8 months, but instead I focused on rehabilitation and recovery, which without the support from the PWTS award, would have been much more

of an agonising process for myself, significantly delaying my return to training. The use of the support services, including the aforementioned sport medicine and sport physiology support, as well as sport psychology, were instrumental to my comeback.

As well as the sporting benefits that one associates with such an opportunity as a scholarship, upon reflection at the end of the scholarship period, being awarded this scholarship made me, as an individual, much more aware of my sporting life from a holistic point of view. Not only did the award relieve financial constraints and some of the worries associated with that, but it also made me much more disciplined in myself; thinking further along the line of the actions I take, the consequences associated and to enjoy the moment as it comes. Having an allocated Performance Lifestyle mentor guided me through this entire experience and made these reflection points a reality.

Experiencing an injury to my foot that brought my racing season to a premature end put into perspective the ups and downs of sport - in particular triathlon - which is already incredibly tough, focusing on not just one but three different disciplines! However, the situations and services I was exposed to over the previous year as the Paul Weston Triathlon Scholar gave me an immense and invaluable insight into what I can get out of sport in general; not just the training aspect of it, but other elements that may not appear so apparent to an individual seeking the best of their ability and talent.