

1 EARLY DAYS

I started sailing as a result of my dad being posted to Cyprus – he was in the air force. And the RAF had a sailing club at that time which people could join. They really taught me how to sail. When my father got posted back from Cyprus, he was posted to RAF Bawdsey so I was sailing at Deben Yacht Club.

I decided I would do a part time job to fund my sailing a little bit and on the first day, in the first hour doing a part time job, the roof that I was working on collapsed. I fell through and one of the girders fell on my back and broke it. But accidents happen and you've got to move on. So 9 months in Lodge Moor Hospital which is in Sheffield, which is a spinal injuries hospital. I had a lot of time to think of where I was going to go with my life with paralysis below the waist. I really wanted to get back to sailing, I loved the sport and I needed to sail. Unfortunately Deben Yacht Club wasn't accessible so I had to find another club. I actually joined Alton Water Sailing Club. But to try to get back into sailing, I bought a Mirror dinghy which my dad – which he kindly adapted it slightly, because you have to move your weight from side to side, the boat was very weight conscious – there wasn't much success with our weight on board, not moving very quickly. But in 1980 I was really lucky because the Seamanship Foundation were sponsoring a new trimaran design. I had the chance to do some sailing in it. I loved it and they asked me to go round and demonstrate it in various sailing centres to promote it – which was excellent. With the Challenger Trimaran, they started introducing National Championships, We did the English Championships at Farmoor, the Scottish Championships, which was at Strathclyde Loch, and the Irish Championships, which were in Kinsale, in Ireland. I really did enjoy sailing that and was very successful. As a result of that, you get recognised to maybe sail for the British Sailing Team – so I think that's where it first got started.

2 FIRST MAJOR INTERNATIONAL EVENT?

The first major International event was the World Championships in 1990, which was in Assen, in Holland. And the boats that were being sailed were UFO's. I had 2 other crewmembers with me at that time – Kathy and a guy called Jim Conway. With these particular boats, because all of the people had to have a disability on board, they restricted us to all sitting in the bottom of the boat which was a lot of fun but after the winds had picked up, there was a lot of tangled legs in the bottom and various angles that we were sailing at but a great deal of fun. All the boats were identical and we just drew lots as to which boats that we sailed and then you did a series of 5 races and I think I finished 4th overall which was quite amazing in a fleet of 23 for my first World Championship.

3 1992 – BARCELONA WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Chance to go to Barcelona, Spain for the World Championships at the same time as the Olympics and the Paralympics were on so it was in the Olympic Port in Barcelona. The boats that we were going to be using were local boats which were Raqueros – which again was like a dinghy but they decided that they would put a keel on the bottom of it. So it added a little bit of lead and provided a little bit more stability. Unfortunately, it had two options – it would either give it stability or snap off the centreboard – then it would be really exciting. But we – the crew I was sailing with was Chris Eaton and Brian Clark and we had

to draw lots to decide which boat we were going to pick. And we picked boat number 13. We thought well that will be really lucky! Well we hoped it would be lucky.

Spanish –very clever. Had been sailing this particular boat for years – had divers on their team to clean the bottoms of their boats – we never had anything like that. The Olympic Port was very grubby at that stage. They had to Hoover the racecourse before we went racing each time and if we managed to take a gulp of water – that wasn't to be recommended. The Spanish were very good downwind but we were better upwind and going upwind it's far more tactical as well. So I think that was very good racing. Totally unexpected that we would win it. It helped us a great deal that we were the dark horses in the event because people tend to follow you around if they think you're going to be successful. They obviously didn't worry about us being in the event until we started doing well and by which time it was too late. As a result of winning the gold medal in Barcelona for the World Championships, I got nominated for the Helmsman of the Year and Yachtsman of the Year – BT Yachtsman of the Year. It was a great honour to be nominated but then to actually receive both awards – prestigious awards – was absolutely superb. Really pleased with that.

4 1996 – ATLANTA PARALYMPICS - PREPARATION

The thing that I do remember is we had to get all the practising on waters that would be similar to Lake Lanier which we knew something about from the rowers like Sir Steve Redgrave, Matthew Pinsent– it's a big inland water – manmade lake but absolutely massive. And we thought that the closest to sailing in those conditions – it had a tree line all the way round it so the wind would come swooping over the trees and the drop down onto the manmade lake. It's very difficult to see a pattern of wind across the water when it would do that and I believe that the wind would change through 180 degrees quickly so you had to have lots of wind indicators on your boat to actually show what was happening. But the other thing that was significant that we were told about was the humidity which was up to 90% during the day which was incredible which meant that we had to drink probably about a litre to a litre and a half every hour which is great but when you are actually on board a boat which doesn't actually have anywhere to go the loo it can present a little bit of a problem. But we were just perspiring so much so we actually did some work at Chichester – there's an Institute at Chichester where they had an humidity chamber that we actually worked and did some training in the humidity chamber to get used to the sort of climate that we were dealing with where everything tended to be saturated and soggy. But we designed special little rucksacks to go on our back to take water which was the drip fed all the time whilst we were sailing so you didn't have to worry about reaching for bottles of water. But it was hard work with the humidity.

We worked out different systems for moving around the boat – I stayed static on a block of polystyrene which was quite light. But also we experimented with the mid crew member losing some of his weight which was because he was an amputee – taking off his leg which was a serious saving in weight. So he was on a constant diet because he was quite a heavy duty, muscle man to try to pull the main sail in which was a big sail and I was responsible for the jib which was also not so small but – no, good team work together and we gelled as a team. So we were reasonably confident for building up to Atlanta.

1996 – ATLANTA PARALYMPICS – PRE GAMES REGATTA

Most of the countries we would be competing against in the Paralympics were in the event. The Americans were favourites for the event, purely because the boats we were going to be using and the amount of practice they had obviously been doing in the craft. There was only

one class of boat at that time – and it was a Sonar, which was a 23 foot keel boat. It's a Bruce Kirby design – same person who designed the Laser. It's a 3-man boat – you have a skipper, mid crew and forward crew on it, a main sail and a jib – you didn't use spinnakers. So the boats were all provided by the host country. I like that idea because it's then... all the boats are identical ... it's then based on your sailing ability. I think people are getting far more mobile actually and the degrees of disability – mine's paraplegia so my mobility in the boat is quite restricted so in order to improve the performance of the boat when I was sailing in Atlanta, the two other guys I was sailing with – Tony Downes and Andy Cassell – were both amputees. That is an amazing amount of mobility because once they've got their artificial legs; they are as able as an able-bodied sailor and very mobile. We won the event at St Petersburg... which was a shock to the Americans really because they had got some top sailors – in fact most of the top sailors in the world were there but the Americans, because it was on their waters, was certainly a little bit of a downer for them.

1996 – ATLANTA PARALYMPIC GAMES

During the racing I remember that our coach was really good, he just left us to get on dealing with the sailing while he dealt with the analytical and political systems that were going on. Because it was incredibly hot. Sometimes he would go down with a shore crew to rig the boat up prior to us going down there to save energy really and we would stay in the air-conditioned tents right until the last moment. But the winds were absolutely very fickle and very, very light – very fluky sometimes and because we were favourites for the event we had a gaggle of boats attached to us at most of the starts so our starting wasn't as good as it should have been which meant we had to actually make up time a great deal. The 2 or 3 top teams competing against us – that was the team from Armenia, which was bizarre because it's a land locked country. Fortunately for us they were not very familiar with the rules at all so most of the time they ended up bouncing off other boats which led to them being protested out but they were incredibly fast sailors. Americans – again obviously done a lot more practising with it but never really showed a lot of consistency. The Canadians were doing very well right from the start and they were the ones to look out for but they did have a few setbacks with a few protests. It was really down to the last race. That was an interesting one because our coach had worked out that we needed to sail them down into about 9th place and to finish in front of them to win a gold medal because at the time they were actually in gold medal position and we were in silver medal position. And they were quite happy. It was quite strange. They obviously hadn't had the same information as what we had before the race and we were able to sail them all over the course and they would follow us so we were quite happy to be losing places, counting boats going down to about 9th place really. And they were following us, which was not to their benefit at all really. And then at the last turn, the wind had shifted. So we had spotted the wind shift – went straight for the line, beat them to the finish. They were already in 9th place so we were the gold medallists.

5 WHAT DOES SAILING MEAN TO YOU?

Absolutely fantastic sport. Sailing is an integrated sport so it can be sailed by disabled and able-bodied sailors provided that you get the right equipment and you do the adaptations to it. With that, there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to sail on equal terms.

No one-day is the same as another. It brought me to travel all over the world. Had a lot of fun, learned so much from other people. It's been great for supporting each other within a team but also it's been important for me to try to give something of that back. So as a result of Olympics or Paralympics, I've been involved with local charities within our area so I'm hoping that with our input in that, with the charity providing the equipment that if we did have

potential people for 2012 – for the London Paralympics or Olympics coming up – we could give people the support to sail locally and then signpost towards the British sailing team if that's what they wanted to do.

6 LONDON 2012

I sit on the board of the British Olympic Association as an athlete voice which is good because there are times when people forget that it is about the athletes. And I guess most exciting of all is that I am on the Sports Advisory group for LOCOG who are the organising committee for 2012. The group is made up of mostly athletes and anything that happens to do with 2012 whether its how the village is going to look or what's going to be in every room, the venues, the opening ceremony, the food. All the minute details to do with 2012 come in front of this group of people for the athlete's view, so we can say actually "You know the athletes wouldn't like that, they would like that. That's not a good idea." So we can give the real athlete view for it. And watching 2012 develop is just the most exciting thing and if I honestly thought that I could still swim I would be back in the water training for that, but I'd be way too old. But it's just so exciting to know that they are going to be coming to London and such a motivation to all our athletes over the next few years.