

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

KATIE

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J Right then J, before we start discussing athletics, it would be useful for me to get a bit of background information on you, so I wonder if you could maybe start by telling me a little bit about yourself - maybe your age, where you live and what it you do just now.

K OK, em, I'm 20 years old. I live, em, with my parents in Bearsden. Em, I'm a full-time student at Glasgow Eally, Ealedonian Uni and I'm studying optometry, em, about to go into my final year in September. Em, I don't have a part-time Kb or anything, never have. Em, that's about it really.

J Do you have any plans for once you leave University?

K Em, well, when I finish next year I've still got a pre-reg year to do, so you still have to work like before I'm actually qualified optician, so I'd like to get that out of the way and then, em, I've been offered a Scholarship in America so I might do that for a year, I don't know, I'd like to take a year out anyway, just to try running, full-time, see how it goes, just see how it goes after that. Nothing definite yet, but that's....

J OK. Apart from athletics then, what other sorts of things do you do in your free time?

K Em, just go out with my friends, em, nothing really, I don't have a Kb or anything, so just...

J How would you describe your social life?

K Em, well it has been, it's not like, I don't go out like every weekend cos I can't cos of running and stuff. Running has kind of stopped me doing quite a lot of, you know, nights out and stuff like that.

J How do you feel about that?

K Em, it doesn't bother me that much cos I mean it's my choice really. I mean, I could if I wanted to go out, but you know it doesn't, and but I still get to go out and see my friends and go and do other stuff so it's not a big sacrifice I don't think.

J OK. We'll move on to talking a bit about athletics now. So you're an 800 metres runner. Have you always done that event?

K Pretty much yeah. I started off doing cross-country when I first started and then I probably did like 1500 metres, I did that for a while and then, yeah pretty much always done 800s though and then the occasional 400, but 800 is my main event.

J OK, I wonder if you could describe your training structure for me a bit. What I mean by that is maybe if you could tell me a bit about how many coaches you have, not who your training partners are but how many training partners you have, the people that are involved in your training.

K Right well I train 5 times a week, em, twice on the track and just now I'm actually just training by myself because, em, the girls I train with are just through in Glasgow at Uni so I only train with them during term time, but the other two girls I train with, one of them who does, em, 1500 metres, the other girl does, em, 800 metres as well. Em, but during the summer and during the holidays I'm just training myself, so...

J How do you feel about that?

K Em, I don't like it actually at all, em, well I used to always train with Hazel and that was fine cos we were like the same kind of pace and I liked that, having someone to run with and then last year she left the training group and I didn't like that at all cos I just wasn't used to, you know, running myself, you know, and when we were down I was always looking at what she was doing and I think she was looking at what I was doing and it was just strange at first, and then, it's just weird when new people join the training group just cos you're just not used to running with them and it just changes, just you know. Em, but I'm used to running with Jne now, that's fine, but em, em, so I got used to training with her, but like she's good for the long stuff but for the sprints and stuff I'm still kind of by myself and I would rather....I mean, I have spoken to my coach about it and he's like, he'd like me to run with maybe with boys or something cos that might be better, but just now, I don't know really. We have discussed trying to get other people, you know, cos there's all of us down at Scotstoun and we're all training ourselves and it just seems stupid, we should really just get together.

J OK, how would you describe your relationship with your coach?

K Em, well he's pretty good. I mean, he's been my coach since I started running so that's for like, the past 10 years, em, so, but, you know, there's something.... He doesn't seem to take advice from other coaches, like sometimes I think, you know, he just has, everything has to be his own way and I don't like that cos, you know, I think, everybody's trying to help, if you want the best for your athlete then why not, you know, everybody's trying to help everybody else, and that, I mean I have spoken to him about it and he's like, "well, you know, if you want to do my training, I want it to be my training and nobody else's and if you want to do someone else's training, then, you know, go and train with them," but still, you know, I get on well with him...

J Uhuh, so how do you feel about this side of him then?

K Em, I don't know, I don't think he'll ever change that's the thing. I mean he does say, "look you know, feel free to go and train with someone else if you want," but I wouldn't want to I don't think, I feel as if I get on well with

Andy, but, I don't know, it's just a thing that's always, I suppose it's getting, it's like, I don't know, I've spoken to, Hazel always speaks to me about is as well and she's like, "you shouldn't be doing this, you shouldn't be doing that", it's just the things that people tell you that I shouldn't be doing, and I'm just like, "well I'm quite happy just now", but, you know, maybe in the future, I don't know.

J You mentioned there when other people tell you, "You should be doing this, you should be doing that", is that something that you find quite stressful?

K Em, yeah, I mean, I do, I do, I'm a person that does care what other people think a lot and, em, yeah, it does, it bothers me actually, em, cos well I don't speak to Hazel that much but like just when we're away at competitions and stuff she sometimes brings it up, you know, em, things you should be doing and stuff like that, and even training, she like thinks it might be a good idea, if, like we could do some sessions together and stuff, so, yeah.

J So you said that you've been involved in the sport for about 10 years now, so what age were you then?

K I was primary 7 when I started so I must've been about 10 or 11 or so

J You've been involved in it for a long time

K Yeah

J How did you get involved?

K Em, it was a primary school cross country race, we all went up to the high school to do this cross-country race and I did quite well in that and my friend, she was a member of Vicky Park anyway, and she was like, "Oh just come along," and so a couple of weeks later I went along and I've just been going ever since. So, that was how it started.

J So it was really just through a friend?

K Just through a friend.

J Do your parents or anyone else in your family have much of an input?

K Eh, no well we're all a sporty family anyway, obviously we do all sports and stuff but nobody's done athletics, I'm the first one, so...My twin sister as well, she used to run as well, but not so much anymore.

J I didn't realise you had a twin

K Yeah, we're not identical, we don't look anything alike

J What would you say then have been your main achievements during your athletic career?

K Main achievements? Em, well, when I won the AAAs Under 20's, indoors, em, and, getting my first British vest, that was that year for the indoors as well, and then getting selected for the European Juniors and World Juniors as well, em, I didn't run particularly well in either of those occasions, but, eh, and just, well my PB's 2.06, I did that at the BME last year, em, and, eh, winning the Scottish Indoors, I won the Indoors the past 3 years, em, and I came 2nd the last 2 years in the outdoors, in the Scottish, and I think that's about it.

J You've told me a bit then about your main achievements, I wonder if you could maybe tell me a little bit about your progression from the start of your athletic career.

K Em, well I started out doing cross country races, em, just for the club and then, em, I moved on, it was the track season, I moved onto like 1500 metres I started out doing and that's, I got my first run for Scotland, em, in the Scottish Schools' International and that was for 1500 and then I kind of switched to more 800 metres and I've just been doing them ever since I was about 15 or something, I switched to 800's and then, em, so, I won the Scottish and Scottish Schools', both for age groups under 15's and under 17's 800s and then, em, first year under 20 I won the AAA's and, em, that's when I got my first British vest, em, and, I can't even think now. Eh, I won the British Uni's as well actually that year as well indoors, em, and I got selected for European Juniors, that was my second year under 20 I got selected for the European Juniors, I ran the qualifier 2.07 and then the year after, which was just last year, I ran the qualifier for the World's which was 2.06, so, and now I'm under 23, still doing 800's, so...

J OK. I wonder if you could maybe think back to the goals that you set at the start of this season. Can you tell me what they were?

K Yep, I've not actually achieved my goals for this season, but, em, they were to run 2.05, which was the qualifying for the European Under 23's, and to get selected for the European Under 23's, that was my main aims, my other aims were just to, em, be a medallist at the Scottish and a medallist at the Under 23's AAA's and a finalist at the Senior AAA's.'

J How far off your goals are you?

K Em, well I've only run 2.07 this year, so, quite far

J How do you feel about that?

K Em, not good cos you kind of think, "Oh God, is that it? Am I never going to run fast again, you know, is that the last time I'm going to run a PB?" So, and you begin to start doubting yourself and doubting your training and just doubting everything that you're doing. But then also it gives you more

motivation to like go and train hard again in the winter cos I had such a long season last year, I didn't finish until October so I never really started my winter training 'till end of November, you know, I didn't really get a good winter's training so, you know, that didn't set me up very well for the summer, em, so, in a way, not achieving my goals, OK, it's really disappointing and stuff, but, em, it makes me want to train really hard this winter to run faster in the summer.

J I wonder if you could think back to a time when you did achieve your goals, or maybe when you had an excellent performance like when you said you won the AAA's Under 20 indoor. I wonder if you can think back and describe for me how that felt.

K Em, well, at the race, em, last year where I ran my PB, that was where I ran the qualifier for the World Juniors, and, em, that was right at the end of the season and it was like in a way I'd almost given up hope of getting the qualifying, I was just like, so going into the race I was really relaxed and ,em, just, almost not caring, I was just like, "Och, I just may as well just run," you know, and when I got the time I was just like, you know, cos before going into the race as well I was beginning to think, "Oh no, I've not run the qualifying I was beginning to just think, "I'm not going to do it," doubting myself and everything and then after the race I thought, "Oh God, you know, maybe I'm not so bad after all," you know, and training must be doing something right and I just felt, "you've got your confidence up"

J What went through your head? What sorts of emotions did you feel?

K Em, what sorts of emotions, I was just, happiness, just em, just, I can't even think now. Em, I think I was pleased for me, and for my coach as well, just for, you know, I was glad that I'd proved to other people I could do it as well, you know.

J In general terms, I mean this year you haven't been able to meet, but in general terms do you meet them?

K Yeah, I've met them every other year, this is the first year I've not actually met my goals so it's quite, not a nice feeling at all, cos, I'm not used to not running a PB. Each year I've run a PB every year, this is the first year I've not, so...

J I know how you feel!

K It's horrible cos I've never really had, like other people have had injuries and stuff, you know, so that's a reason why they've not achieved their goals, but I've never really been maKrlly injured so, I don't really know why I've not achieved my goals really.

J Do you ever doubt your ability to achieve your goals?

- K Yes, quite a lot. Well, my coach always sits down at the start of the season and says, “Right this is what we’re going to do”, and stuff and then, you know, you think, “Right that’s fine, we’ll do that” and then maybe after the first couple of races I think, “Oh God actually, I’m never going to be able to,” like cos I’m quite far off, you know, you always have a slow start to the season or something, “I’m never going to get these targets”, you know, so I do doubt myself quite a lot, but when I get nearer the targets or when I’m in a good race or something I think, “now’s my chance”, so...
- J What problems have you encountered along the way while you’ve been trying to meet your goals?
- K Em, what problems, what just with training?
- J Just in general
- K Em, I suppose well I didn’t have a good winter’s season, winter’s training last year so I think that was a problem for me not achieving my goals. Also just, em, with exams and a lot of Uni work and stuff I think that does affect, well it’s obviously going to affect me I think cos other people, like to me I think, well, Uni’s quite important to me, to some people, it’s not as important to some people as it is to me and I like, I’m quite a conscientious person, I like to, you know, study hard and things like that, so, em, em... Also just when the training group, like last year the training group changed, I think that affected me as well, just when you’re changing who you’re training with, em, that definitely affected me as well, em, just em, sometimes when I start to doubt as well, eh, what I’m doing, some of the training sessions I’m doing I start to think, “why am I doing this?” And just em, maybe not even not getting the right races, not getting the right conditions to run, em, that could also affect me not getting my goals. I think that’s about it.
- J You’ve managed to escape the injuries that most athletes get?
- K Yeah, I’ve been really lucky actually I just, I don’t know why I don’t ever get injured, I don’t know what it is, I’m just a lucky person. I haven’t had any maKr injuries, a few niggles, yeah and that sort of thing, but...
- J Oh lucky you! I’d like to talk now a bit about what your reasons are for taking part in athletics if you can tell me a bit about that.
- K Em, well I still enKy it and I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t enKy it.
- J What do you think it is in particular about it that you enKy?
- K Eh well just, I just think there’s no better feeling than when you’ve ran a PB or even just had a good training session, I just think it’s really, I just love that feeling when you’ve ran well or won a race or whatever, it’s just, I just really like it and, you know, I just like meeting loads of new people as well, things like that, em, and also it keeps me fit, em, and, you know, I want to keep going until I feel as though I’ve achieved everything that I want to achieve, em, until

I'm satisfied I've done the best I can kind of thing, so yeah, I still enKy it, still want to keep going.

J To sum up then it's, your reasons for taking part in athletics now are, em, because it's like you're longing for this feeling of having run a PB, it's, and meeting your own targets, going as far as you can take yourself . Also the social aspects of taking part in the sport and also because it keeps you fit.

K Yeah, yeah, I just enKy keeping fit

J How important is that to you, keeping fit?

K Oh very, I never want to be unfit. I see some of my friends who are unfit and think, "God, I would just hate that," and exercise makes you feel good, I mean, you know, where I've not been training or I have a break from training, like when I go on holiday or something, you know, I just I want to get back to training, I just hate the feeling of not doing, not exercising. That's just the way I've always been brought up, you know, my whole family's been sporty and stuff so.....

J I'd like to get an idea now of how important athletics is to you, well I've already got an idea, it sounds like it is pretty important to you, but maybe to get a bit more of a, sort of, specific idea, I'd like you to imagine that your life is a cake. How big a piece is the athlete part of you?

K Em, it's probably about a half, I would say, maybe just under a half, but I would say pretty much yeah, a big part.

J What makes up the other pieces?

K Em, well, University makes up quite a big part as well and then just, socialising as well and, that's about it really.

J So I get the sense then that it really is important to you

K Yeah, I would put running before University as well, well, still, I don't know, I want to keep them both going just now but then when I finish, if I could make it in running I would rather make it running than make it as an optician, so, yeah.

J Have you ever considered how you might feel when your athletic career comes to an end?

K Em, well I've never considered it really cos it just seems such a long way-a-way, but em, I think as long as I've achieved everything that I want to I'll be quite satisfied, but anyway I'll still want to keep, I'll always keep fit and keep running and stuff but not obviously competitively for ever, but em, when I finish as long as I've done everything that I want to do then I'll be quite happy.

COMPETITIVE STRESS:

J I'd like to move onto the second part of this interview now and discuss your experiences of stress as an athlete. Now one problem here is that different people have got different perceptions of what stress actually is so I'd like to give you a definition to make sure we're on the same wavelength. So I'd like you to think of stress as referring to those occasions where you've felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation that has had important consequences for you. OK, so I'm interested to hear about not just the major sources of stress, but the little niggly things as well. To help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, we'll split our discussion into three different areas from which stress might arise, em, so we'll talk about stress in competition, stress in training and stress from the demands and specific features of the sport. Now obviously stress may also arise from different aspects of the sport so I'll give you a chance to discuss these at the end of the section. OK, so I'm just going to do a wee bit of talking here again.

Let's start with competitive sources of stress. I'd like you to take some time to think back carefully to a competition which you found stressful and can remember well. To help you identify as many sources of stress as possible I'd like you to go through the different stages of the competition in your mind in as much detail as possible and just really try to think about how you felt during, even the days before the event, during the event and how you felt after the event. To trigger your memory you might want to go through the things you did step by step such as getting to the venue, your registration procedures, warming-up, talking to your coach, waiting for the gun etc. Recall all the things you saw such as the other competitors, spectators, your coach, team selectors, and all the things you heard such as hearing your time, other competitors' times and try to remember how you felt physically and emotionally as you experienced these things and identify what caused stress for you. OK, so do you think you can select a competition to discuss with me?

K Em, well, the most recent one I can most think of is probably the Senior AAA's outdoors this year, em, and I ran badly at that and, em, and it was like a good chance to get a good time so that was first of all important for me cos, you know, I was going to be in a fast race and, em, it was just a good opportunity, em, so well before hand I just went down with my parents, it was just me and my Mum and Dad that went down, and, you know, I don't like it when it's just me and my Mum and Dad, cos they don't, you know, I prefer it when there's someone else like Hazel, if I go down with Hazel, you know, then that's someone else who's like in the same situation as me who understands everything else that's going on.

J Right, would you say that that's a source of stress for you when there's not....?

K When I'm just there myself? Yeah, definitely cos I hate being by myself but I like it when someone else is there, cos, you know, I don't have to go and like

stupid things, you know things like going to declare and get my numbers and stuff and I have to do all that myself and I just prefer it if someone else is there with me, just cos I don't know where to go and if it's a big competition and there's TV cameras there and all that and I think, "Oh God, I've got to get it all right, don't want to do anything wrong". So, yeah, that stresses me out, quite a lot. And then I found out I had Kelly Holmes in my heat and I thought, "Oh my God!" But in a way, that wasn't so bad, cos, you know, I wasn't expected to beat her or anything, you know there's no pressure on me or anything, but, I still thought like, "Everyone's going to be watching this race cos Kelly Holmes is in it, everybody'll be watching," but, eh, that was stressful as well, and I just wanted someone else to be in the race that like was my standard, cos I don't want to come last, so, yeah, my coach wasn't there that weekend either as well

J Is that stressful for you?

K Yeah it was quite stressful for me cos like he always talks to me before hand and, you know, tries to calm me down and, you know, tells me all the right things, but em, you know, I just spoke to him before I left at training and he was just like, you know, "do your own thing," and all the rest. I hate it when he says that. I want him to tell me what to do I'm like, "Oh no, what if I've done the wrong race and stuff," em, so yeah that was quite stressful not having him there.

J You mentioned there, em, you mentioned there that in a way it was quite nerve racking, the fact that Kelly Holmes was in you race and you said, "Oh no, are the TV cameras going to be on and is everyone going to be watching?" and you also mentioned earlier that you are the type of person that worries about what other people think, do you think this contributes quite a lot to your stress?

K Yeah, definitely cos the first time I ran in Loughborough, that was the first time I'd ever ran when there were TV cameras there and I was so aware the whole time of TV cameras being there. I couldn't even concentrate on my race, I was just like, "Oh my God, people are watching!" Yeah I do, I worry about what other people think cos, I want, you know, I want, em, what am I trying to say? Eh, like if I run bad, I feel as if I've let other people down as well, not just me, you know I feel as though, I feel as though people have got expectations of me as well and that they, you know, expect me to run well and if I don't, then....

J Can you think back to a time when you didn't run well and you felt that other people had expectations on you and what was going through your mind?

K Em, probably when I got selected for the European Juniors, em, I'd only made the B standard qualifying but they still selected me just on the grounds that I had run some good races and so I felt that I had to prove to them that they'd made the right choice in selecting me and I put loads of pressure on myself and I found out before hand all the times of all the other athletes that were running and they were all so much faster than me and I kind of felt, " I

shouldn't be here, what am I doing here? I'm not entitled to be here," and stuff and I ran a terrible race and I just felt terrible after cos I just thought they'll be thinking, "My God, why did they even bother taking me?" and I felt as though I'd let them down and stuff.

J Is there anybody else you feel that you let down when that happens?

K Eh probably my coach as well cos he does put in a lot of, I mean it's just his own free time coming down, coaching me. He does put in a lot of effort, so I feel as if I let them down, just, yeah. I mean he says, "Look," he always says, "look it's only yourself you're letting down, it's not me," you know, but I still feel, that's the way I feel.

J OK, can you think of any other sources of stress that you experience during competition then?

K Em.....well apart from, well it's just really the....well when you have to run a....when it's a good opportunity, a good race. I think that's stressful, when I've got a good chance to get a good time or...

J Is that before the race or during it or, what exactly is stressful for you then?

K Em, before the race. I never find during the race, I never find a race stressful when I'm actually running it. Well unless, actually sometimes when I go through the first lap, you know, you always need to, I only ever run, well I always run fast times when I've run fast first laps. I can't run like a slow first lap and then run a fast second lap. Sometimes during a race if I see like the lap time I panic and go, "Oh my God, too slow!" I probably do find that, well, I don't think I find it stressful but probably, yeah, probably deep down I'm panicking. Em, then also sometimes when I run too fast for the first lap, that panics me. I think, "Oh my God, I'm going to die!" Yeah, you just need to get it just right. But it always just depends on how I feel really, cos you know, sometimes I run the first 400 and it can be slow, no if I run, sometimes run fast and like I feel good, you know, it's fine that I've run fast. But sometimes at 400, I just know at 400, whether it's going to be good. I can just tell.

J I think I interrupted you there when you were talking about before a race, sometimes you feel stressed if it's a big race, if it's an important one. Could you tell me a bit more about that?

K Well if it's a big race I just, em, I always get stressed over the stupid wee things like, you know, getting my numbers, or even just getting my tracksuit off in time, things like that....., em, well just having to run a fast time. I always think, "right I have to, you know run the right..." I get worried about whether I'm going to get boxed in, you know, I worry about my lane draw. If I get lane 1 I panic, I think, you know, I have to go off either really fast or really slow so I don't get boxed in and, you know, things like that, em, so just the tactics, how am I going to run this race, em, you know, am I going to take it on or am I just going to...., cos you never, sometimes you have a sort of plan in your head and as soon as you start running it just like, "Oh God, this is just

not going to happen,” cos like, so, yeah you have to be so aware of what other people are doing. You have to totally think about, it’s just not yourself. You have to think about what other people are going to do and things like that, so that gets me stressed.

J OK so, if you could maybe think back to a time when it was an important race and you’re describing these thoughts that are going through your head. How exactly are you feeling physically would you say?

K Em, sometimes before a race I feel really tired and I start to feel really lethargic and think, “God, I just can’t even be bothered running,” and I’m warming up and I think, oh you just feel, yeah, you just feel really tired and..

J Is that something that you interpret as being a good thing, or...?

J Well, em, some of the best races I’ve ran is when I’ve felt really awful before hand, and I don’t know whether it’s just because I kind of I feel terrible, you know, and I just don’t put any pressure on myself cos I just think, you know, “I’m not going to run well anyway cos I don’t feel good,” but em, the race when I ran my PB at the BME last year, I was so relaxed before that race cos I don’t know I just felt, “Well I may as well...”, you know, I don’t know how, I just had a completely different attitude to that race than I have to any other races. I was just like, you know, just totally Kking before hand and having a laugh before hand and just, I just went out and ran, I didn’t really think, you know, about all the times and all the tactics and all that kind of stuff and, so, yeah...

J You mentioned a few times there about putting pressure on yourself, I wonder I you could maybe elaborate a little bit on that for me

K Em, well I don’t think I realise that I put pressure on myself, but I think, I mean I must, I must do, cos you know, I want obviously for myself and also for other people, for my coach and everybody, to run well, em and so, it’s mainly at the races where, you know, my coach is like, “Well this is a great opportunity”, you know, “for you to run,” “This is it, this is my chance,” you know, and it gets to every race I go to and I think, “Right I’ve got to do it now, I’ve got to do it this time,” em, and I just keep putting more and more pressure on myself. Each race if I don’t do it in that race then it’s always the next one. Yeah, it makes you feel, just...

J You mentioned also earlier about, em, there are times when you’ve doubted your training. Is that something that goes through your head before a competition?

K Yeah, yeah it does actually, when you get there and I think, “God have I been doing the right stuff? Have I been doing enough speed work?” You know, if it’s going to be like a sprint 200 which is quite often 800 metres running it is, you know, em, and I don’t know if I’ve done enough of that and, you know, just things like that, em, yeah you do, I always, especially when, yeah I was thinking actually at the, em, the Senior AAA’s this year, “Oh come on, all

these people are so much better,” and just, you know, have I done enough training, you know, have I been doing the right training?

J And how does that make you feel when these doubts are going through your mind?

K Well it just, it makes me more nervous, em, and it does make me doubt myself. I think, “Can I actually run this fast?” em, and yeah, that’s about all.

J OK so far then you’ve mentioned, concerning your stress in competition, you’ve mentioned worries about what other people think, you’ve mentioned letting other people down before a big race, we talked about the small sources of stress like getting your numbers, getting your tracksuit on, em, the pressure that you feel that you’ve put on yourself, em, also tactical aspects in the a race, em, the way you feel before the race in terms of feeling lethargic and tired, and em, your doubts about your training. Can you think of anything else?

K Em I don’t know, just if there’s, just against, if there’s someone that you’re the same, similar standard, especially if it’s a big Ehamptionship, just, you’re rivals just, “Can I beat them?” You know, just seeing them warming up, “Oh God they look really good or something,” you know, and I do, yeah, I worry about just other people in the race.

J How do you feel if a rival beats you?

K Em, well it depends how like close we are in times, like if they’re better than me anyway I kind of think, “Oh well they were meant to beat me,” kind of thing. I know I shouldn’t think like that, I do, em, but if I’m better than them and they beat me I would not be happy, it would just make me feel, em, I don’t know, just feel as though, I can’t think of a word to describe how I’d feel. I’d be really disappointed. I don’t know how else I would feel.

J So that’s something you worry about before a race?

K Yeah

J What about after the race? You’ve talked a lot about during and before the race. Are there any sources of stress you could talk about after the race?

K Em, well if I’ve ran a bad race I get stressed about if my coach hasn’t been there or if my parents aren’t there and I have to phone them and tell them what’s happened. It’s all the questions, “Oh what went wrong?” And sometimes I just don’t know. Sometimes I’ve just had a bad race and it just annoys me when they say, “Well what did you do wrong? What happened?” and stuff and I’m just like, “Well I don’t know. It just went wrong,” you know, sometimes you just have an off day and I just can’t, you know, and my coach is always questioning me saying, “How did you feel at this point? Could you have gone any faster at this point?” Just all the questions, that just gets me stressed, I’m like “Just leave me alone!” Sometimes yeah, you just

want to be left alone, you know, em, so just yeah, when I have to go and speak to people and tell them how I get on, I don't like that.

J So in a way there's two sources of stress there, there's like having to go and speak to other people and going through the race again when maybe you just want to forget about it.

K Yeah, sometimes it is good if something did go wrong, you know, cos then you can put it right for the next race, but, sometimes I just don't know, sometimes I just have a bad race and...

J And then it's stressful people also coming up to you and asking you questions when really you just want to be on your own.

K Yeah, and people say "Oh", you know, "hard luck," and stuff and you're just like, "Oh, just stop it!" Again that's like when people have expected you to do well and you haven't done well and you think, "God", you know, they don't know what to say to you either cos they know you'll be really disappointed and they just don't, yeah and people don't know what to say to me either and it's just, yeah

J You talked about, em, sometimes you doubt your training before, in competition and how that can impact on your nerves. Are there any other aspects of your preparation that can impact on your stress?

K Em what just in training? Or just...?

J I just mean like, you know, in competition when everything's going through your mind, the doubts you're talking about and you're doubting, "Well have I done the right training?" I'm wondering if there are just any other aspects of your preparation which like you may be doubting.

K Oh right, em, sometimes I just think about eating the right things or even, enough, cos, em, sometimes, like, you know, I always eat like three hours before a race I normally eat, but then sometimes, you know, if it gets delayed or whatever I think, "should I get something else to eat and I get really hungry and think, "Oh no I've got no energy, I've not had anything to eat for so long", and things like that get stressful I think, "God I really need to eat something, but then I might be sick," or you know, whatever. So I do, that yeah worries me, em, and just whether I've had enough sleep, sometimes I can't sleep the night before, like just cos sometimes normally I'm in a strange place, you know, a hotel or whatever and I just never sleep that well and the next day I'm really tired and I'm like, "God, I've not had enough sleep," and all the rest, and even sometimes if I've had a long Kurney down, you know, on the bus or something, you know, and that's not been good preparation and that, you know, I've just been sitting on a bus for the past ten hours or something and that, and I think "All the other athletes, they've not had that, you know, they're just, you know, ten minutes from their house or something," em, yeah and I think, "Oh God, I'm at a disadvantage," you know, and that makes me stressed.

- J Any other sources of stress in competition?
- K No, I think that's all, that's about it, quite a lot actually!
- J That's been really helpful, excellent. Shall we move onto the next stage then?
- K OK

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

- J OK, this is sources of stress in training, em, I'd like you again to think back in as much detail as possible to stressful training sessions you've had and again isolate what you've found stressful, em, what I'm thinking here is that from my experience of training, I would say that sources of stress I experience during, for example the winter, are totally different from those I experience during the summer. Is that something that you would agree with as well or....?
- K Em, well probably just because in the winter I've got University work, so that's probably why I get more stressed in the winter, but in the summer, you know, I've got ...So in the winter I'm probably more thinking better around exam time, I'm thinking more of, em, like in my exams and stuff, my mind's not totally on running all the time. But in the summer I've got like competitions and stuff.
- J Well if you would find it more helpful you can maybe tell me about the sources of stress you experience in winter and then move onto summer or if you just want to talk in general, it's up to you.
- K Em, I'll just, I'll start in, well I'll just talk in general actually. Em, well in winter, as I said before, I do have lots of Uni work and stuff, especially around my exams, you know, I'm thinking, "Oh God, I should be back studying and my mind's not totally on training and I'm just wanting to get it done really so I can get back to studying, or you know, if I've got an exam the next day I'm like, God, trying to go through my mind all the things I've got to remember and I'm running round thinking like, "My exam's in...instead of what I'm actually doing. OK, em, other sources of stress would be, well just in my training group, em, like last year, em, I'd been training with a girl Hazel for a couple of years and just, you know, got used to training with her and then she left the training group because she didn't agree with, she didn't think the training was working for her or something, and then started training with another coach and that stressed me because I wasn't used to, you know, running myself and I was just, like I said before anyway, just seeing her down doing her training, she was doing training and I was doing training, you know, that was just stressful. I was thinking, "Oh God, is she doing better training than me?" you know, what's she doing and she was looking at me watching what I was doing and stuff like that, and then, em, just when new people Kin

the group as well, you're just not used to having other people in the training group, em....

J In what way is that stressful for you?

K Em, just because, I'm not used to, well I got used to running by myself again and then when someone else runs with you like, when I started running with, em, a girl Jne, she's like faster than me over like em longer distances and I wasn't used to that either, her like always being ahead of me and stuff, I was like, "Oh no!"

J How does that make you feel then when she's ahead of you in training?

K Em, well it puts you down cos, you know, you're not used to it, cos it always just, me and Hazel were always the same - even paced - and we always used to just, finish at the same time, but like, she's like more of the longer distances, you know, it gets your confidence up in training when you're always like running well, when you're ahead, but when someone else starts getting ahead of you, you think, "Oh God," you know, it does put you down, em, cos you're just not used to always, not winning, but you know. Em, but like that's just the long distances. In the faster stuff, like, she's not very fast over the faster stuff so like I'm running myself and I just, you know, you always like to have someone to, you know, push you on just that wee bit further or you just kind of end up settling into your own wee pace and, you know, so that's quite, that's not when you're killing yourself. Em, and I also just don't like it, sometimes I come down and it's just me and my coach that come to training and sometimes I don't like that cos I like, you know, I like to come down to training just to chat to my friends and stuff like that as well and when it's just me and my coach it's just all running, running running, you know.

J In what way is that stressful for you?

K Just because, em, I don't know. I just find it stressful when it's just, like I prefer it when it's not just me he's coaching, when there's like other people and I just, you know, it's always like, "How are you finding that. How are you finding this?" you know, I prefer to sort of like, you know, chat about other things in training as well, not just running all the time. Yeah, that just, I don't like it that much when it's just me he trains. Eh sometimes, em, he changes the training session at the last minute and I don't like that cos, you know, I've got it into my head... even if he just adds an extra, like if I'm supposed to do two 300's or something and then one night he says, "Right you're doing three 300's," I'm like well, "No, you told me two and I've got it into my head that I'm doing two and that's how I've prepared myself", and he says, and when you say I'm doing three, I just, I just, nah, I don't like it, you know, cos...

J What goes through your mind when he says that?

K I just think, “God, you told me last night I was doing two and, you know, I think, “Why is he suddenly changing it as well as if he’s not totally had it, cos, you know, he’s had it planned for like five or six training sessions in advance and it’s like, why’s he suddenly changing it anyway and sometimes I do ask, “Why am I doing this session?” and he goes, “Look just do it. I’m the coach,” kind of thing and I’m like, “Well I need to know”, you know, you need to know why you’re doing things, you need feedback and stuff, you need to know why you’re doing things and that stresses me out when I’m doing something and I don’t really know why I’m doing it, cos I do sometimes question why I’m doing stuff and he just, he doesn’t always give me a good answer.

J How does that make you feel?

K Well I sometimes doubt, I think, “Why am I doing this, why has he given me this to do?” you know, I think he should have a reason for me doing it and he must, I mean I’m sure he does have a reason but sometimes he’s just like, “Just get on with it”, kind of thing, and I would rather he told me what I was doing it for, what I need it for and stuff like that, so... And then sometimes I think I should be doing, like coming up to a race and I’ve not done much speed work and he’s getting me to do other things and I’m like, “No I want to be doing speed work, I’ve done no speed work,” and stuff and he tells me “Oh look your speed’s fine, you’ve got natural speed, you don’t need to do that”, and I think, “No, but I think I need to do it” and you know, I just think we’re not agreeing on things like that, but, that gets me stressed, em, just you know, that’s especially leading up to competitions and stuff, you know, eh, just tapering off, you know, have I stopped training at the right time and stuff like that... em, I can’t really think of anything else.

J I’ll just go over what you’ve said anyway, em, you’ve talked about, especially in the winter when you’ve got exams, it’s the pressure of trying to balance, I suppose, your training and your studying, em, you’ve talked about in your training group, em, problems when, your old training partner, your training partner moved to a different coach and you were worrying what she was, if you should be doing what she’s doing and vice versa, em, and then you talked about how it’s sometimes stressful when someone new comes to the group and if they’re ahead of you or behind you that can be...em, then you talked about when there’s a lack of the social sort of side of things in training, when it’s just you and your coach and you find that stressful, em, when he changes the training session at last minute and then you talked about, em, when you, doubt the sessions because he doesn’t give you a reason and then finally you talked about sometimes it’s stressful when, especially leading up to events, when your coach gives you a session that perhaps you don’t agree with, so that’s quite a lot there that we’ve covered. Anything else you can add to that at all?

K Em, no I don’t think so. I think that’s everything I can think of.

J Do you ever, I'm just going through what you said about stress in competition, you mentioned like the pressure that you put on yourself in competition. Is that something that happens in training at all?

K Em, yeah I suppose so. It depends eh if I'm doing, em, well not so much in training, but, em, yes, well sometimes if I'm to do like a time trial like maybe two fast 300's or something like that yeah, probably do, cos then you know, that sets you up, you run fast then you think, right that sets you up for competition, gets your confidence up for the competition, so I suppose yeah, I do put pressure in myself in training as well.

J How does that feel? What sorts of things go through your mind?

K Em, well just because I think, "Well if I run fast in training then, like if I have a bad training session or I run bad then, you know, does that mean I'm going to compete bad as well?" You know sometimes I've had a really bad training week and I've gone out and ran a really good competition so it just totally varies. It's not always that if I have a good training week I'll have a good competition, but em, I just think, you know, if I'm training well I should run well I suppose.

J What about, em, you talked about your worries about what other people think in competition. Is that something that you ever experience during training?

K Em, no not really because I suppose at first when Hazel left the training group, I was probably worrying what she was thinking about what I was doing, just, you know, cos I kind of, like if she didn't think the training was working for her so kind of in a way I was trying to prove that, no it does work. It's doing something kind of thing, em, so really just then or even when new people come to the group I suppose you're trying to prove, to say, "Look, I'm just as good as you!"

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

J OK, I think we've covered, finished with that section now, so we'll move onto the, em, final section on sources of stress, em, the demands and specific features of the sport. Again I'd like you to consider if there's anything in particular about the sport which causes stress for you. So I'd like you to think as broadly as possible about the specific demands and sacrifices associated with the sport, so we have already touched on this, em, organisational aspects as well such as team management, time-tabling of events, registration, declaration procedures, which again we've touched on, which may cause stress for you, em, can you identify any of these sources of stress?

K I don't really know. I get stressed when I have to go away with a, like if I go away with the British team and I don't know anyone. That stresses me out as well. I'm not thinking about the race or anything, I'm just thinking, "God, who am I going to talk to? I don't know anybody," and things like that, em, I

can't really think of anything else, that's, that's quite a big stressful thing for me cos I'm quite a shy person anyway so that, I think, "Oh God, who am I going to talk to?" and things like that, em, I can't really think of anything else. I don't know, have you got any other suggestions?

J Em, let's go back to some of the things you've said earlier. I mean you've talked about the balancing of University and training and I'm wondering if...that obviously relates to the time demands of the sport. Is that something that you find stressful?

K Yeah, I do.

J In general terms would you say...

K Em, what do you mean?

J In general terms would you say that the time demands of the sport are quite stressful?

K Oh right, em, yeah, I suppose, but then in a way it helps me just manage my time better, just em, you know, cos like people who don't have anything else to do, you know, they kind of just put things to last minute, but it helps me like well I think, "Right, well I've got to go training, so I'll have to get this done another time." It does....

J Do you like having that kind of order?

K Yeah, I'm not a very organised person, so I suppose it does, it is quite good for me. I have to plan things, better like that, em...

J Do you ever experience any stress relating to the financial demands of the sport?

K Em, well I get Lottery funding so that's very helpful, yeah. I've had that for the past three years, two years, em so, that's really useful and then also I'm in, em, the West of Scotland Institute of Sport so that's going to be really useful as well cos I'll get use of all the, em, facilities at Hampden like physiotherapy treatment and stuff like that, so yeah, I've never really had any financial difficulties really.

J What about the organisational aspects of events, like timetabling, em, certain race procedures, em..

K Em, well I suppose I don't like it when a race is first thing in the morning, cos it's first thing you think of when you wake up, like if it's in the afternoon or later on in the evening, you know, I've got time to prepare myself, but when it's first thing in the morning I just, yeah, I'm not fully awake I don't think, I just, yeah things about eating as well when do I eat, you know, whenever my race is, you know, I have to plan it round the timetable and things like that so, yeah

J I think that basically covers that section as well. You did mention something about like the conditions – when I asked you earlier about, or when I asked your reasons for maybe not achieving your goals - you mentioned something about not having the conditions to run. Is that something that you may find stressful at times?

K Yeah, well especially if it's like my last race, my last chance to run a good time then you always really want it to be good weather, good conditions and you turn out and it's really windy and I'm like, "Oh no," cos that kind of almost straight away I thought, "well I'm not going to run a fast time, there's no way I can run a fast time when it's this windy," and yeah, so that does contribute a lot to stress, especially when I'm going for a time, not so much in Ehampionships and stuff, well I suppose in a way in Ehampionships cos tactics and stuff, you know, you don't want to suddenly take it on when you're going into the wind, you want to shelter behind someone and things like that so that does, yeah....

OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS:

J Em, are there any other sources of stress you experience as an athlete which we haven't covered?

K Em, I think that's pretty much everything. I can't think of anything else.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

J I'd like to move onto the final section now. In this section I'm interested in finding out if there's anything about you as a person that might be influencing the stress that you experience, em, generally as I'm sure you're aware, different people experience stress to different degrees and this due to individual differences in a number of factors such as personality, coping skills etc. I wonder if you could have a wee think and tell me what aspects of you you think influence the stress that you experience.

K Em, well I'm not a very confident person so that definitely, em, puts more stress on me I think cos when I see all these other people who are so much more sure of themselves and I'm just not as sure of myself as they are so that definitely affects me I think and also cos I do, em, worry about what other people think and care about what other people think as well, em, I want to do well just, you know, to show other people as well, not just me, em, and also...

J When you say that you lack in confidence, would you say that you, does that affect your thinking before a race then? Do you tend to think negative thoughts or..?

- K Yeah, I'm quite a negative thinker before a race and I do, like coach always tells me yeah it's all up in my head and stuff, like that's why I run bad races, em, probably quite a lot of it is just all in my head and he does say, "Look," you know, "you've got nothing to worry about you're as good as all them if not better," and he tells me all these things and, you know, I do believe him but, you know, I still doubt myself a lot and I still...I'm just naturally not a confident person, so I'll never, I don't think I'll ever change but that's just the way I am, but yeah it definitely affects competition.
- J And in general you're the type of person that worries about what other people think so how do you think that predisposes you to stress?
- K Em, because I'm not just thinking about myself, I'm worrying about other people as well so you know, I've got, you know, cos if you don't worry about what other people think, you know, you've only got yourself to worry about, because I do care what other people think then it's just a bigger worry, em....
- J We've talked about how important athletics is to you and you've said that obviously it is, it's like 50% of your life and you'd put it before University, it is important to you. Do you think in any way that could be influencing your stress?
- K Well yeah, definitely cos if it's important to you then, you know, you want to do well and if, you know, because it's like half my life basically then, you know, if I don't do well then what else have I got kind of thing. It's like such a big part of me that...and it's become such a big part of me and my family as well, I mean, it's not just me it affects it's like quite a lot of people, my coach as well, so, you know, I kind of feel as though I have to do well for all of them as well cos they're all involved in it now as well, so yeah, it's a very important part of...
- J What input do your family have in your training, well in you whole athletics?
- K Just in my whole athletics? Well they've become...my Dad is more involved in it. He now coaches like a group down at training as well, em, and he comes along to all the races with me and he drives me about to all the races and, you know, things like that they have paid for a lot of things and obviously all the travel and things like that before I was Lottery funded, they've paid and it's been a lot of money and yeah so they have become more involved, so, yeah....
- J Any other aspects of you?
- K Em.....
- J Maybe try and think about what other words you would use to describe your personality, you've talked about your lack of confidence. Is there anything else which....? Positive things as well.
- K Eh, don't really know, em...I don't know how else to describe myself but I don't think that affects me much at all, apart from when like I'm going away

there's big groups of people that I don't know, that makes me stressed, but not really competition or anything or anything cos...

J can you think back to a time when you were faced with a situation where you had to cope and tell me a bit about how you cooed with the stress that you were experiencing?

K Em, I can't think of a ...Like I just kind of, I don't know I'd say I'm quite a determined person like I never like to give up or anything, em, like cos I've never dropped out of a race or I've never not finished a training session unless I've got a really good reason like injured or something. Em, so I always like to...if I start something I like to get it finished, I'm quite determined to, you know, I would hate to drop out a race or something cos I think if you drop out once it just gets easier and easier to drop out again, so...

J Do you feel that your determination influences your stress in any way?

K It doesn't make me stressed. It just makes me more, it just makes me want to do well, you know, determined to do well and to like, you know, determined. Yeah, I don't really, I'm the kind of person I don't really give up in races I normally just, you know, fight all the way to the line. I'm always determined to just do my best I suppose each time I run.

J How do you think the stress you experience compares with other athletes?

K Em, well I'd say I maybe get more stressed than some athletes, just because I'm not a confident person, you know, if you're more confident then you're just not so many things bother you I don't think so yeah, probably I get more stressed than the average person, em, I don't know what else to say, em..

J Any other aspects of you that you think might influence?

K Em, I can't think of anything

J That's fine, don't worry

K Eh, no I don't know

J OK, that's been extremely helpful, I've got lots of information here. That's just about all I need to ask you then, em, before we finish, do you think there are any important factors you feel we failed to discuss in relation to your stress?

K No I don't think so I think we've covered everything just about

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

K Eh no, it's been fine, it's been very well conducted!

J OK, well thanks very much for your time and lots of luck for next season

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

ARRON

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J Right, before we start discussing athletics, it would be useful for me to get some background information from you. So to begin with, could you tell me a bit about yourself, maybe your age, where you live and what it is you do just now?

A I'm 28, live in Edinburgh, full-time athlete, still, just, em, yeah, I live with my parents, unfortunately I had to move back cos I'm skint and eh, yeah, that's about it

J OK. And what sorts of things do you enjoy about being a full-time athlete?

A Eh, not wearing a suit, not nine to five, not doing what other people tell me – well apart from Meg and my coach, just being my own boss I suppose, doing my own thing and trying to get better

J And is there anything about it that you don't enjoy?

A Training, I suppose, being sick and struggling and not running well and yeah, worrying about being skint and not being able to have a sort of normal life, boozing and birds and stuff

J So apart from athletics then, what other sorts of things do you do in your free time?

A Eh, apart from the booze and the birds, eh, nothing really just sort of relax. I don't have, I suppose I have a fair amount of free time. I don't actually know. There was somebody else asking me that, "What do you do?," cos I don't train till six at night and it's like, "What do you do during the day?" Eh, watch TV, read the papers, have lunch, hang around, do shit, just, don't do much, nothing of any note unfortunately, not very interesting

J So let's talk a bit about athletics now. I believe you're a 100 and 200 metres sprinter, is that correct?

A Yeah, more 200, I'm not so keen on 100's

J I'd like you to describe your training structure for me and what I mean by that is basically, how many coaches you have, how many training partners you have, just basically what the set-up is

A Em, yeah, I've got about two coaches. Davie Gibson's my main coach, he does all the track stuff. I've seen him for 12 or 13 years, since I really started seriously, em, I've got about seven or eight sort of training partners down at Meadowbank. They're quite keen, sort of 50 second runners, 22 second

runners, decent standard, em, and I see him on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays in the evenings and the I see Meg Stone for my weights four days a week: Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday and I also do two circuits on a Tuesday and a Thursday, so it adds up to about eight, nine sessions a week, Fridays off

J And how would you describe the relationship that you have with your coaches?

A Em, fairly good. I get on well with both of them. Em I don't know Meg quite so well. I've only seen her for about two years I think. I don't have the same attachment with her, but with Davie, yeah, it's quite a strong attachment with Davie, I do everything he says, I trust what he does, em, and yeah and I've seen him as I say 12 years, so it's a fair amount of time, he's brought me through and everything he's done for me has been good so far

J OK, so you've got a good working relationship?

A Yeah, he's my Granddad sort of thing. Don't tell him that though – Dad, older Dad!

J How did you get involved in the sport?

A Eh, I was kind of always ran. I used to play rugby and stuff. Rugby was my first love so I started off in that and they stuck me out in the wing cos I could run quite fast, eh, and my Dad used to be a runner, my Dad and my Mum, well to a certain degree, they maintain they were better than they were, but they used to do stuff. So we used to run when we were on holiday and stuff I used to have races with my Dad, em, School Sports at Primary School and then Secondary School and then just kind of Scottish Schools, Scottish Under 20's, British Under 20's.....

J OK so it was your decision to actually start taking the sport seriously?

A Em, I did it for a wee bit seriously when I was about 13, 14. I went down training at Saughton for a year or two. I was doing 800's then and that was more cos a friend that wanted to do it so I just kind of tagged along and then I drifted back into rugby and then it was Scottish Schools down here, down at Grangemouth and Davie was down watching another athlete he had running, em, he told his other athlete that I should come and join him and yeah, I did and he said he thought I could run fast and he's been right so far

J I'd like you to briefly talk me through your progression from the start of your athletic career if you can, maybe just tell me about your main achievements

A Em, from like when I was about 17 – when it was like a proper start? Em, Scottish Schools, second in the 100 – I could never with the 100 at Scottish Schools. I've got a bad thing about 100's, but 200 I won like Under 16's or whatever it was, Under 17's, Over 17's I think it was so yeah, so I won them and then Scottish Under 20's, all that sort of nonsense and then I was forth at

the British Under 20's in the 100 and the 200, in '91. In '92 I had a bad year and then '93 I had not a very good year and then '94 I had a sort of break through year, em, and '92, '93 I was still playing rugby so it wasn't 100% athletics and then I hurt my ankle in '93, decided to give up rugby, had a full Winter sort of 1994 and then I came out and did 20.71, which was a bit of an improvement, made the Eommonwealth Games Semis, em, then 1995 I didn't do much, 20.53 or something, didn't really do anything significant and then went to the World Students, '96 was my Finals at my Uni so it was kind of half and half between that and athletics but I was forth or fifth I think at the trials, 20.67, Scottish Native Record at the Scottish Ehampionships then I was full-time athletics after that, '97 sort of saw the improvement, em, Semi-Finals at the Worlds. I won the British trials, I ran 20.49, got a bronze medal at the 4 x 100 Worlds, bronze medal at the World Students, em and in '98 just kind of progressed again from '97 cos it was the second year full-time so em, weights improved, everything improved and then, em, yeah I had a good year in '98 – Europa Eup, British Ehampionships, won a gold medal in the 4 x 100, em, went to the Eommonwealth Games, did all that sort of crap. It was pretty cool and then I was last in the Final unfortunately, but it was a good experience. It was a good year, a very good year!

J So there's been quite a lot

A And then it kind of dies, that's it. It's like '98 and then Ehrhist, that seems years ago now, so yeah, that's all in the past now and then all the shit cracked off in December, Jnuary and then had two years to deal with that and then came back

J And what exactly was that?

A Eh, failed a drugs test in December, on December 1st. I got details of the drugs test on 6th Jnuary, came through in '99 and then it's been kind of ongoing, disputing it and arguing and then I had to do a full ban on it. It stopped last December, 2000, no, December the first 2000, yeah

J That's when it was cleared?

A That's, well that's, I just had a two years ban and then I came back last year but I was kind of rushed into the season, just kind of chasing it and then I was just not relaxed at all, all year

J Right, we'll come back to that later

A Yeah, stressful. Right, no problem

J As far as your achievements are concerned, what you were telling me about there, how satisfied would you say you are with them so far?

A Em, yeah, they're going in the right direction, you're never that satisfied, well you are satisfied but you can be more satisfied now cos I've got a bit of space and time. At the time it was just: done it, on to the next thing, done it, on to

the next thing as well, but now I kind of look back and think, “Oh, that’s all right,” so I suppose yeah, give it more time and then in the future I’ll probably be happy with them - only if I get back and do something else first though, I’m not finished yet!

J I’d like to talk a bit now about goals and targets in athletics. Are you the type of athlete that sets yourself goals?

A Yeah, I think so. I think most athletes do

J Yep, just checking, a few people have said that they don’t

A So why are they doing it then? There’s no point in busting a gut all Winter if you’re not aiming towards something, it’s too sore

J Yeah, that’s what I think, I would agree with that, em, taking this season then that’s now come to an end, could you tell me a bit about the goals that you’d set for this season?

A Em, because of the circumstances I suppose it wasn’t the same goals as I’d normally have, but just to get back to a certain level, to be competitive again, twenty and a half hopefully, World Championships outside chance, em, just getting back to enjoying my athletics I suppose

J So really getting, cos this is your first year back yeah? So really just getting back into the swing of it again?

A Yeah, just getting all the shit out the way as much as anything, doing all the sort of press and crap and stuff and then getting to a certain level where I was enjoying it and was competitive again and I haven’t quite managed it unfortunately

J Going back to a time before all this came up when you used to set yourself goals, in terms of level of difficulty, what sort of level of difficulty would you say that you tend to pitch your goals at?

A Eh, sort of realisable I suppose. I normally do it, but whether that’s the same, em, yeah I don’t say stupid things like, “I’m going to win Olympic Gold,” and stuff like that. I don’t agree with athletes that say that, em, I kind of look to what I’ve done in the past and sort of, if there’s a small improvement I could make, and that would get me to that level and then I could aim for that level, if that makes sense. If it’s like, say the World’s were won in 20.3 and I’d done 20.5 then I’d say, “OK, that’s realisable that I can win the Worlds,” but if I’d done 21 then there’s no point in me saying, “I’m going to win the World’s”

J What I’d like you to do now is think back to a time when you achieved your goals, or maybe not necessarily achieving your goals, but had a performance that you were particularly pleased with, and if you can describe how that felt for me

- A Eh, eh, everything sounds crap. It felt good, em, yeah it's just, it's more what other people think. I think winning the European's is my proudest achievement, em, but I didn't run well. After the race I didn't feel that, oh I'd won it but I didn't feel that it was my best race, but, and it's more what other people gain from it I think, it's all the pleasure it gave my coach and my parents and all their friends and that's more satisfying seeing what other people enjoy I suppose. It was good, but it was just onto the next thing onto that
- J Right so what I'm hearing is it's quite a good sense of achievement for yourself but also perhaps you take a bit more from what other people take from it, like other people that are sort of close to you
- A Yeah, I like keeping folk happy I suppose, you know, it's nice. My parents have been supportive and stuff and then sort of seeing some sort of return. I don't know, they take pleasure in it. They like being proud parents I suppose and coaches, they've worked hard together for years to get to that. It's good fun, it's good fun being somebody as well. It's quite cool. It's very right that athletics is sort of eh, there's a hierarchy. If you suddenly win a race, all of a sudden these sort of famous people speak to you and stuff and you're like one of them almost and it's quite cool
- J One of the Boys!
- A Yeah, like all of a sudden you're welcomed, "This is good," that was part of the good bit
- J What about time when you had a performance that you weren't pleased with or you didn't meet your goals, that you were particularly unhappy with
- A Most of this year, em, yeah, just frustrating I suppose, annoyed and there's nothing you can do cos it's too late by the Summer, unfortunately one of the good things about athletics is if you haven't done the work in the Winter, no matter what you've just got to battle through it, there's no quick fix. It's not a nice feeling, but yeah, it's frustrating and you've got to the point you want to give up, what's the point?, em, "What am I busting a gut for this for?" eh, "I'll go and do something else," em, yeah, it's not nice and you're better being on your own if somebody's trying to pick fights with you, well not like physical fights but folk trying to console you and stuff and it's like, "F*** off!"
- J I can relate to that!
- A They're being nice and you're like...I've been bad at that, I always, parents or friends or something
- J Do you ever doubt your ability to meet your goals?
- A Yeah, occasionally. I just, yeah, you get various....you know what it's like, you have positive days and bad days

- J Can you give me an example?
- A Em, doubting if I'm going to get my goals, em, it's just, I don't know, I'm not sure. I suppose the Scottish race haven't got the confidence for these sort of, "Oh a wee white Scottish boy....." Been there, but em, and then if you have a bad session or something goes wrong, your weights aren't going well or you're on the piss and you wake up with a hangover on the Sunday, "I'm doing this....Looser!"
- J My next question is, what problems have you encountered whilst trying to achieve in athletics, which you've touched upon. I think I know what might come up here
- A Yeah well injuries as well I suppose
- J Right, I'd like to deal with the drug suspension first then. Right, you've talked me through the series of events that happened in relation to that. Could you have a think back and tell me what aspects of that were very stressful for you?
- A Em, finding out about it on the 6th was pretty stressful, em, a girl just phoned up and said, "You failed a drugs test, don't worry about it, you'll get the details on Friday," and it was like, "Ah right, fair enough," and then the letter came through on the Friday, eh, my Dad was away so it was just my Mum so I had to go and tell my Mum and that was pretty stressful and then my Dad phoned just as I was leaving. I was going training and my Mum was chatting to him and she was asking if I wanted to tell him and I couldn't. I just couldn't tell him so she had to tell him, em...
- J Why do you think that was that you couldn't....?
- A I just couldn't for fear of probably bursting into tears. I just got out the house, so I went and trained and I did a really good training session cos I was totally eh, angry. And then after that the next stressful bit would be, probably when it broke would be the next worst thing, because I wasn't in control of it. Someone else leaked something to the papers so they all kind of latched onto it and all of a sudden I had twenty folk in the lawn, phone ringing off the hook, people ringing the bell for about three or four days
- J So what was going through your mind at that point?
- A Eh, just horrible, just every time you switch on the TV or read the papers there was always...and then you can't stop watching about yourself or reading about yourself. It's weird reading the papers and then it's horrible. My parents were stressed as hell cos they were having to deal with it. I was just kind of hiding in the house so I didn't have to deal with it too much, but they were dealing with like the reaction of friends and family and they had to face the press when they went out to the car and stuff and it was the phone, there was about 50 or 60 messages every day, "Don't speak to us, speak to us. Do

this, do that,” eh, it was pretty stressful and then after that, em, the court had another hearing eh, in London and we thought it was going well. We thought they were going to try and look into certain areas, but I kind of convinced myself it was going really..... it didn't go well and I had to phone my parents and my coach and all that and that was kind of when it hit me again. It was quite stressful and my whole year was, my whole Summer was kind of finished, em, and then yeah, it's just been kind of ongoing since then. It's not been too stressful, after a bit it just kind of washes over you, you don't get too bothered about it. There's no point in getting too worried, you don't get too....before I was getting like, “Yeah, I'm going to get this sorted out bla, bla, bla,” and after a while I kind of realised you can't ever afford to get your hopes up too much, you've just got to, yeah f*** it, see what happens, but then that's not good either

J What impact would you say that this has had on your career?

A Em, quite a big bit I think, em, cos '99 was going to be, well hopefully, well financially be a good year, em, the 200 metres on the circuit so it was like big bucks, ten grand a race, plus appearance money, plus sponsorship, plus a race, em, but World Championships I was coming off the back of running well the year before. I'd run well there, em, and just it was just going ahead of schedule. It was just going better than I thought it would and then I was going on. I was going on 2000, that was the aim, go over there 2000, top five at the Olympics and then retire, that was always the aim, em, so it was kind of not how it happened and I'm still running now and I don't really, well I don't mind running now but I didn't want to. My intention was to have it finished in 2000 and they reckoned 20.1 or something I was going to try and break Wells' record which was 20.21, top five and then, see ya, go and play rugby or something, so yeah, it's prolonged my career, em, it's kind of stalled my career.....

J And what impact would you say it's had on your progression?

A Athletic progression?

J Yep

A Oh it's kind of stalled it cos I was progressing gradually every year and then the times I was doing, it was like: 71 in '94, 53 in '95, 67 in '96, 49 in '97 and, 35 in '98, it was kind of the end of the year

J And what exactly would you say has caused that?

A Well the not running for two years and just not being bothered and not training as hard could, and then I injured my foot as well so it's just been kind of, sort of eh, catalogue of things again that have gone towards f***ing it up a bit, but....

J And how did you feel at the time about the prospect of your career coming to an end?

A Eh, in some ways it was good. In some ways I thought, "Eool, f*** it, I'm out of here," eh, "I'll go and do something else," but then people wouldn't let me a wee bit. There were people that were like, "Oh you can't go out on this note and you've got to come back and show what you can do, what you're capable of," and all that crap, em, but it makes sense and I know myself that I've got to do certain things, but yeah, I wouldn't be happy running away, in a sense it would be running away from it in a sense and that's not a good way, not a nice way to live your life

J What other problems have you experienced then?

A In athletics? Nothing major. It was stress free up until that point. I was just rushing through it. I liked it. It was nice. I want to go back to that, em, nothing major, injuries

J OK. What would you say your reasons are for taking part in athletics?

A Eh, cos I'm good at it, cos I win em, sometimes, or I used to, em, just yeah, yeah you do get good at it I suppose, you enjoy it, it's nice, nice beating folk, even in training it's nice beating folk. It's a bit sad, a bit pathetic actually. I don't think I'm that competitive, but I probably am

J So you must be getting something out of beating other people or out of winning. There must be something connected with that that particularly....

A Getting something out of it, yeah, it's just beating them isn't it? It's just beating them. I like that! It's conquest, it's like, "Yeah!" Yeah that's quite sad isn't it? It's more making them feel bad than making me feel good! Oh, it's not nice, not good, not healthy.....sick

J Any other reasons?

A Em, the reason I'm still....The reason I went full-time was just to kind of, yeah, see what I could do in it, and also I didn't really want to work, nine to five and I can get away with doing it this way now, making money and I enjoy the people I train with, you know, I enjoy the company, I enjoy my coach, I enjoy, yeah, travelling and making some money out it, not a bad life

J I'd like to get an idea now of how important athletics is to you, so if your life was a cake, how big a part would you say the athlete part of you is?

A Em, bigger than it used to be I think unfortunately, em, bigger than I'd like it to be. Before it was just what I did on the side sort of thing, but now it's kind of, it's harder to get away from being an athlete cos that's what I'm known as now and I'm more known, more people speaking to me and stuff and now I'm, known as the athlete, but before when I was just a runner, it was just kind of, you were that and you did that on the side but now I've got this whole persona

thing I suppose kind of thing, people chat to me about it all the time, so I don't quite the same.....I'm not able to relax, get away from it quite as much as I used to

J Would you be able to put a percentage on it?

A Em, no, I don't, yeah I suppose, it's hard to say what percentage of my life it is. I suppose it's all I do so it's pretty much 100% just now, but I'm still able to relax, I've still got friends out with the sport and stuff em, so it's not total, it's not like total life. I'm still able to relax and do what I like, do stuff

COMPETITIVE STRESS:

J I'd like to move onto the second part of this interview now and discuss your experiences of stress as an athlete, obviously we've already touched upon this. One problem here is that different people have got different perceptions of what stress actually is so to make sure that we're both on the same wavelength, I'd like you to think of stress as referring to those situations where you have felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation which has had important consequences for you, so to help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, we'll split this up into three different sections from which stress might arise: stress in competition, stress in training and stress coming from the demands and specific features of the sport.

Let's start with competitive sources of stress. I'd like you to take some time to think back to a competition which you found stressful and can remember well and I'd like you to go through the competition in your mind in as much detail as possible, thinking about all the things which cause you stress. Try to remember how you felt physically and emotionally as you experienced the event and identify what caused stress for you

A Yeah, how long before a competition are you talking about? A week before or....

J Em, it really doesn't matter, it's specific to you so whenever....

A Yeah, well it starts sort of a week before, em, you're more aware of every training session, you're more aware of, if you've got the AAA's or something like that, em, it's always in the back of your mind, so you're more aware of the thought cos you're watching to see how well you're running, so that you know how you feel and then you're more careful about what you eat, em...

J So what exactly, you're describing the lead up to the event then and you're saying that you're becoming more aware of your times etc. What exactly is it that's.....

- A Stressful? Em, if you're not getting the times that you want to be getting, em, that's stressful if you're not doing what you think you should be doing the week before
- J OK, and you mentioned as well, dietary concerns?
- A Yeah, you're just more aware of getting enough stuff in, carbohydrates and stuff like eating too much crap, em, getting enough sleep, that's another thing I'm kind of always scared and then you don't sleep as well cos you're stressed, so
- J Vicious circle
- A So yeah it's that and then yeah and then you normally travel down the day before and it's always nerve racking, make sure you've got all your stuff and not forget silly things and you're always sure you've forgotten at least one thing, em, and you travel down and you start thinking more about it, you try not to think more about it because you're just wasting energy, em, yeah and then you get down into the hotel and you start meeting who you're racing against and then you start all the chat and they look fit and then you think, "Ehrist", and "Oh no, he's running, she's running," this, that
- J So you mentioned there you start thinking about it. What exactly is it that you're thinking that's stressful?
- A Eh, it just is, what is specifically making me stressed?
- J Yeah
- A It's just the thought of the race, just the thought of having to get out and run, yeah just the race, just if it doesn't go according to plan, if I'm not in the position that I'd like to be
- J So would you say then, it's perhaps a bit about worrying about not...
- A Performing
- J Performing to a certain standard, or...?
- A Yeah, partly that, it depends what sort of frame of mind you're in but no, it's always, it sounds negative, but it's not negative, it's not like, "Oh God, Oh God." It's good stress though, it's kind of, gets you fired up and you have good stress and bad stress
- J Yep, sure
- A So it is good and it's exciting. It's part of the whole package and then yeah, normally go to bed and as soon as you go to bed that night before the race, you can't stop thinking about it and stuff and then I've always got to like put my kit out and make sure it's all there and silly things like that, em, and then you

always wake up in the morning and you always feel really tired. You always think you've not had enough sleep. My legs are always really sore it's like, "Oh no", I'm sure I must twitch more when I'm about to run. My legs always ache. You always feel dead heavy. You go down for breakfast, you can't eat as much cos you're stressing too much eh, and there's everyone else around you that you know you're racing against as well and it's just, it's horrible and then yeah, then you've got probably about two or three hours until you're running so you don't know what to do, em, so you go back to your room, buy a paper, watch TV, try not to waste too much energy, but it's hard when you're sort of nervous.....go down to the track, journey's always stressful, scary, nerve racking, get to the stadium, you see some crowds, em, pick up your stuff, go in, yeah, and you go into the warm-up area and that's quite enclosed normally, so everyone's around you, you see what they're doing, they start warming up earlier than you, you think you should maybe do that now and try and relax and have a bit of chat. I try and chat, a lot of folk kind of.....I think that's worse, it just makes you more stressed. I try and do what I do at training which is relax and chat and fart about, em, and then all of a sudden you find yourself in the call-up zone which is stressful as well. There's about eight of you all looking at each other, all shitting it, all kind of pacing and shouting and sort of blowing around and yeah, it's all....

J OK, we covered quite a lot there, em, you mentioned like I think this is probably in the hotel the night before or whatever, talking to other athletes. What exactly is it about that that's stressful?

A No, it's not stressful, just when you see them there and you find out other people are there and you find out what people have ran and stuff like that, and you find your lane draw out and they've got a better lane draw than you and you're in lane eight and that's stressful, just little things, it's not major things but it's just seeing that they're there and seeing that they look quite fit and just realising it's real I suppose and all of a sudden you're like, "I can't get away from myself, I'm in here. I've been spotted, there's no going back," and that's, it's not stress, nerve racking, nerve racking stress

J And what goes through your mind when you experience that kind of lethargic, painful legs sort of feeling?

A Shit. Shit! Eh, I've had it often enough to know it's just what it is. Often when you feel the most tired you run your best, I don't know why, but yeah, just, I've had it enough to know that's just what it is. It's still not nice and you still have to get up and do a bit of stretching and you always, and I think you're just more aware of your legs cos you know you're going to have to use them, normally you're more relaxed, yeah, it's not nice. I don't know why I do it actually, reading that it's like, "Aaah!"

J OK and then we get to the hours before the race so you've got your, say a couple of hours, you've had your breakfast and you're actually waiting to go down to the track I think you mentioned that you try and get a paper or whatever. What sorts of thoughts are taking over your mind at that point?

- A Just try not to think about it too much. I try just no to waste my time cos there's plenty of time to think about the race later, so.... I get a paper, read a book – sport or lifestyle or - watch TV, or sit and chat. It's nice to be around somebody, that's when you want folk, that's when it's nice, you've got somebody in sport and they know, it makes it....
- J And then the journey down to the track, it's getting closer! What goes through your mind at that point?
- A Eh, if you're running well it's like, "Get it on," if you're not then you just think, "F*** it, just keep driving past. I don't want to go in. I want to be somewhere else!"
- J Right, so it's like you actually don't want to go ahead with this race. It's like there's a big sort of fear associated with it. What exactly would you say that fear is?
- A Running shit I suppose
- J So again it's like fear of failure?
- A Yeah, it always is, but it's never a nice word failure, but yeah...
- J Fear of not making your targets then would be a better way to put it
- A Yeah, yeah. It's not nice, it's just part of it. I've done it enough now
- J And you mentioned as well once you get into the stadium, actually seeing, em, crowds. What's stressful about that?
- A It's just, it's just a bigger thing, it's more of a major meeting I suppose, you kind of....it's like is there someone else you can sneak in and do it and sneak out. When there's crowds there it's just like, "Oooh, it's big!" and yeah, just there's an atmosphere, there's a sort of tension. Everyone's kind of wandering around, just yeah, just, good though, it makes you respond, you respond to what you know
- J Right, this is interesting, this has come up before in quite a lot of interviews actually, the call up zone, a lot of people are talking about the stress associated with that. Could you tell me what that means for you then?
- A Em, it depends who you're in with. If you're the man there then it's all right. There is a hierarchy as well you know. If you're the best and everyone's looking at you and watching what you're doing, your like, and if you're not then you're watching every body else, em, it' weird, it's weird. It's a frame of mind. If you're running well and everyone's running it's like, "This is mine, it's not a problem," and I'm quite relaxed and I don't find it stressful and I like being relaxed cos it stresses out other people if you're relaxed. It's a big game, it's pathetic, so yeah, you chat away, it puts other folk off and it's like, "Why's he so relaxed?" "It's cos I'm good!" But then there's other ones that

you go to. I remember when I was younger what it was like in the World's in '97 or something, it's like Ato Boldon, Frankie Fredricks and Jon Drummond all these big black guys and there's me sitting and just, ".....sake," just shitting it, I was shitting it

J And what would you say was going through your mind at that point?

A What am I doing here? I was knackered. I'd run my race, in the heat I ran well and then in the second round I was flat out and I'd done everything I had, shot my bolt, I had nothing left. I was beat and I was like, "Oh no," and I was tired and they were all bouncing. They'd just jogged through the first two rounds so they were just, this is where you start turning on and I just, I was like, "uuuuuh"

J So would you say that's almost like a fear of being out your depth?

A Yeah, at that stage I did, in '97 probably yeah, but you've got to expose yourself to it, that's the way you learn, it's not nice getting taught a lesson

J OK, anything else in competition?

A No, that's about it. I suppose there's in between races and stuff when you've got to try and relax or if you haven't run as well as you should've in the heats, em, or somebody else runs better than you and you think, "Ehrist," that's stressful, well not stressful, it's more nerves, em, yeah....

J Anything else?

A No, stressful in competition? No, I'll probably remember something, "Oh I should've said that, Oh shite!" But eh, no that's about it. It's stressful sometimes being interviewed afterwards. If you've run well you're not bothered. You only get interviewed if you've run well anyway, so it's not really a problem

J What can be stressful about that though?

A Eh, it's nerve racking speaking in public. I don't like speaking in public. I never used to, I'm more comfortable doing it now, but I don't like having a microphone thrust in my, answering all these questions

J Why do you think that is?

A I just don't like it. I'm not that type of person..... quiet, or used to be

J You mentioned, going back to the idea of seeing the crowds, the bigger the event the more stressful it is and also you mentioned there that you're not the type of person that really likes to go public as such. Would you say that in a sense, to what extent would you say that you're the type of person that's concerned with how other people perceive you or what other people think of you?

- A Em, I don't know. I don't think so. I don't think I really, well sometimes. It depends, if you're on TV you want to run well cos you know everyone's going to be watching you back home and you don't want to look like a right numpty on TV. I suppose it is that way, cos you know the more folk see it I suppose the more folk read about it and stuff, yeah, but if you're running well it's not stressful. I stressed this year about it I suppose a little bit because more people were taking notice of what I was doing. They were more interested and then, they're only interested if you're running well which is fine. If you're running well then you don't mind folk being interested in how you're going, but when you're running badly and folk are interested it's like, "Oh!" it's a bit more stressful
- J So has that caused a lot of stress for you this year, the fact that in a way there's probably been more pressure on you because of your recent history?
- A Em, yeah, it was a bit more pressure. It was more eh, I had like photographers taking photos when I was warming up and stuff like that, em, following me into the like, arena, just like focusing on me and it was just like, "F*** Off! Leave me alone! I just want to run," and that was basically it so, it was a bit in your face
- J So that's then the media intruding on your warm-up. Is there anything else connected with that that caused stress for you this year?
- A Em, people's expectations maybe to a degree, yeah people just kind of assuming that you're going to pick up where you left off and to a degree I thought I maybe could, but I thought I'd get better. People just kind of think, "Oh you're crap," and then, and everyone wants to beat you more as well, well not beat you more, but take delight in beating you
- J Can you give me an example of other people's expectations and how that might be stressful for you?
- A Em, if you don't meet them and people, if you run and they expect you to run faster or you tell them the time that you ran and you're quite please with it and, "Oh Ehrist," "Oh right, thanks. I was quite pleased with that," and they're like, "Oh right, it was quite good"
- J And is that just people in general or is that like your coach or is it certain people?
- A Eh, no my coach wouldn't ever do that. He's always very positive. My parents are a little bit guilty of it, but they're only well meaning, they're not nasty. My parents have always been like that, they don't always say the right things at the right time
- J Is that pressure would you say in general from your parents or is it not as strong as that?

A No, it's not that, they're not pushy

J Anything else at all? We've covered quite a lot, anything else pop into your mind at all?

A

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

J OK, let's move onto the sources of stress that you may experience during training. I'd like you to think back in as much detail as possible to stressful training sessions that you may have had and identify what's been stressful about them. From my experience of training, I experience different sources of stress according to the time of year and that may be the same for you, if not if you want to just talk in general again it's up to you, but you may find it helpful to talk about say Winter then Summer or whatever, it's up to you. OK, so tell me about sources of stress in training, if you have any

A Eh, yeah just fear I suppose before hand. I mean in the Winter it's more fear cos you know it's going to hurt like hell, eh, you're going to be sick, you're going to get lactic, em, it's normally 300's and 500's and stuff like that. I hate that shit, em, but that's not, I don't know if that's stressful even, yeah, a wee bit, but it's not bad and it's good after it, about half an hour afterwards you always get a high when you've finished and the endorphins kick in, but em, there's a certain amount of stress, you've got to keep people behind you I suppose, you don't want to get beaten, eh, some of the boys like Doyle and stuff like that winds you up everyday, but I do it to them. I kind of wind them up if I'm beating them, so they take it as well. It's frustrating, but eh, it makes you enjoy training I suppose, so em, that's the stressful thing in Winter. In Summer it would be just yeah, not doing the times, actually you get that in Winter as well, if you're not reaching your targets. It's worse in the Summer cos in the Winter you've still got time to work on it. In Summer it's a bit sort of, it's too late, it's a bit yeah, you can normally tell, but yeah pain's stressful

J So would you say that there's the fear of pain before the actual session and then the pain during the session as well?

A Yeah, but it's too late by then. It's not stressful cos it's just there. It's more stressful thinking about it. Running's not stressful, it's just the thought of it. It's the same in competition, it's just, once you're running it's fine

J Would you say there's the same sort of fear of pain before competition?

A No

J more in training?

A Yeah

- J Anything else in training?
- A Em, no normally the pain and not doing the times I suppose, em, and keeping folk behind you, no, there should be something else shouldn't there?
- J Well if you were asking me we'd be here all day!
- A No, it's not that stressful, it's not that bad..... yeah it is if you're doing something wrong I suppose
- J Is there any stress associated with that ever?
- A I'd imagine it would be stressful if you didn't have the faith in him, but I do, so.....
- J Anything else at all?
- A I never get that stressed out really

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

- J Let's move onto the next section now. This is about the sources of stress em, connected with the sport itself, the demands and features of the sport. I'd like you to consider if there's anything in particular about the sport which causes stress for you, em, also organisational aspects such as team management, timetabling of events, selection procedures etc. Can you identify any of these sources of stress?
- A Em, no. I don't get stressed about any of that stuff, there's no point, em, team management are there to just kind of help team bonding, eh, timetabling, well you can't really change it so there's no point worrying about it, eh, team management's the same, you can't really do anything. I only find stressful what I can control. If you can't then you're just wasting your time and your energy
- J What about the financial demands of the sport?
- A Stressful? Em, no cos I chose to do it this way. I mean, if I did part-time work which I could do and still train and, it's my choice I suppose. It's stressful, it's not nice to have to rely on your parents I suppose in that sense. I'm lucky in that way I suppose. If I didn't have my parents then it would be more stressful, em, yeah, but for me personally I'm not, em, they're quite good. I don't need that much money for training. My coach is free, Meg's free, that's all I need, and petrol, but yeah it would be nice to have money in your pocket and stuff

- J Do you ever feel any pressure, em, to meet like standards for Lottery or anything like that?
- A Em, no, more for competitions, more for selections for teams and if you get that then the other things come hand in hand, cos you get your travel and to get to the World's and stuff or the Olympics, so that's more the one where you, if you get that then money comes in off the back of it
- J OK so that's not something that you find particularly stressful?
- A No, it's not my focus. I don't focus on that. If you're running badly or you're injured then it's hard to keep on the straight and narrow. If you're injured it's like, "Oh, what's the point, I'm not going to be doing much anyway," and then if you're not running well it's like, "F*** it. Why am I running, what's the point?"
- J So what sorts of thoughts go through your mind?
- A Em, you get too....and you think, "Oh, I'm screwing up even more," or you should just, just, yeah
- J So would you say that you find yourself almost in a dilemma between, "Right, should I just chuck the whole thing, go and have a good time or should I..."
- A Train harder, yeah just kind of drifting along again as normal
- J At the beginning when I asked you about em, what you didn't enjoy about the lifestyle of an athlete you said, "not having a normal life," is that something that you could expand upon if there's any stress associated with that?
- A Em, probably less stress in some ways I was thinking there, well I don't know, if you think about it it's not particularly stressful, you've got no responsibilities, so I've got no stressful responsibilities. I don't have to work for anyone else. I don't have to be there at a certain time or do this, so it's less stress in that way, so there's more stress in the fact that it's not....it's kind of, it sounds w**** but it's a lifestyle you just kind of....when you pick up like running it's like... like folk work nine 'till five and then they'll leave their work and they'll go and get pissed and then the weekends, they've got their weekends off, they don't have to think about anything, but when you're in running or doing athletics, it's sort of like you've got Saturday and Sunday you're training, your training evenings, you've got to watch what you eat, you've got to make sure you get enough sleep, you've just got to behave yourself, you don't always get away on holidays when your mates are going July, August and you can't go because you're away running and you want to go September, October when they've got no money left, em, New Year, Ehristmas you don't get as pissed and have as much fun because you're, well normally you're running indoors or you're doing the New Year sprint, em, but yeah, it's just different I suppose. I mean I've never known any different anyway so I've always done it. I just imagine it would be more fun, but from speaking to them I don't think it is somehow!

J Not the next day anyway when you wake up with a hangover

A Yeah

J Right, we've covered those three sections then. Is there anything completely out with them that you'd say was stressful relating to the sport?

A No, that's really comprehensive

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

J I'd like to move onto the final section now and in this section I'm interested in finding out if there's anything about you as a person which might influence the stress that you experience. Obviously here I'm looking at things like personality differences, differences in the way that you cope with stress. What aspects of you do you think influence the stress that you experience?

A What aspects of me....?

J Is there anything about you as a person that you think may impact on....?

A Make it more stressful?

J Just influence it in any way

A Em, I suppose cos I'm fairly competitive and I like to win and do certain circles so yeah in that way then I put myself under more stress potentially than I would if I was kind of not bothered, I was happy to do certain times, but I'm not, so I do. I'm just not that kind of person I suppose.....em, I'm more laid back, I'm not that bothered. I'm kind of like, well sprinters are like, sprinters are manic piss attitude.....

J So in a way you're quite driven, you set yourself fairly high goals and that itself can put a little bit of pressure on you, but at the same time you described yourself as being quite laid back so that in itself can take the pressure off you

A Yeah, I do. I like relaxing. I like having nice food and wine and just chilling out and just doing shit

J OK, anything else spring to mind at all?

A Eh, this is deep! Em.....

J What words would you use to describe your personality?

A I don't know, em, yeah, relaxed, laid back, friendly, yep about that probably

J OK. You mentioned earlier that sometimes you have doubts and sometimes you lack confidence a little bit. Would you say that that's something about you which could influence your stress?

A Em, it's just the way I've always been I suppose. I associate stress with anything that's changed I think in a way, but it's just the way I've always been and always I always....I don't know, if something changes then that causes stress but if it just....I'm always the same person. I've always been this person so I don't find it stressful being this person I suppose, if that makes sense, so yeah, I mean yeah, you've got to question what you're doing to make you get better I think. I don't find that a problem, questioning your ability, most folk do

J OK. How do you think the stress that you experience compares with other athletes?

A Em, how do you compare? What level of stress? Em, I don't know. I don't know what level of stress they've got, everyone's different. It's just like, it doesn't matter what sort of level you're doing it at, you get nervous for any race. I mean I was nervous as hell for the East Districts last year. I didn't want to do it. I wasn't enjoying it and I just felt really sort of small and everyone was really close and yeah, I was probably more stressed out for that than I was at the European's, the AAA's or anything, so it's not the level of competition you're doing that stresses you out, so, I don't know....I don't know..... Athletic eh? Neurotic, twits!

J OK, just before we finish, something that's just come into my mind is that you mentioned that this year hasn't gone according to plan and I don't want to put words in your mouth but I'd imagine that that has been stressful for you. Could you maybe tell me a bit about that if you would agree with what I just said?

A Yeah, em, yeah, just kind of, I was rushed into this season, em, Winter training wasn't going that well. I went to San Diego warm weather and just, it was there I realised that I wasn't running that well, em, and I came back and I had to get back into it. I didn't really want to get back into it either, one because I wasn't running that well, two because my foot was killing me and three because there was more sort of fuss about it I suppose, em, and it's not nice. I mean if you're running well as I say, you can handle being taken notice of so yeah it was hard. I didn't enjoy it, even like, people give you second looks. When we were just going down to a meeting and stuff people were getting, you get double takes from everybody when you go to meetings and stuff. Even well wishers come up and say, "Oh it's great to see you back," and it's nice but...

J You just want it to go back to the way it was before

A Yeah. I just, the audience kind of came up and strived. It was nice coming from nowhere and surprising folk so, yeah it was stressful this year. I'm just

not running well myself and just, I just question why I was doing it I suppose, just kind of, “I’m not enjoying this. I’m not getting money out of it. I’m getting old now. Why am I doing this?” em, I didn’t feel I gave it 100% last Winter and I feel I’ve got to at least...even if I don’t run well this year I’ve got to at least be able to give up and say, “Look, I did everything within my power to make or break,” and I spoke to a friend, Jmie Henderson, he used to be an athlete, and he went through the same thing. He ran really well when he was a Junior, but the season or the year he was most proud of was in ’93 or something, ’94, or ’93 I think it was, where he said he put in the most. He said he did everything right, ate well, slept well, trained really hard and he did a 10.37 or something, which is good, but he did 10.21 as a Junior so everyone’s like, “Oh it’s not as good as you were,” and he said that’s the one he’s most proud of cos he’d done everything he could’ve to get to that, so it’s nice and he said he’s happy to say he’s at least done that...

J So in a way that made you think, “Well, give it another chance, or..”

A Yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely, yeah, hopefully

J Well lots of luck

A Cheers, and to you. It’ll be interesting to see what your 800’s are like

J A lot of pain I’d imagine!

A Yeah, are you going to do the indoors, or cross country, or...?

J Eh, oh, I don’t know, we’ll see what happens . Before we finish do you think there are any important factors we failed to discuss in relation to your experiences of stress at all?

A No, it’s been fairly comprehensive

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

A No, it was very professional, very thorough

J Right then, thanks again for your time and good luck again

A No worries, thanks.....

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

SOPHIE

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J OK then, before we start discussing athletics, it would be useful for me to get some background information on you, so to begin with could you maybe tell me a bit about yourself, like your age, where you live and what it is you do?

S I'm 21, eh, live in Edinburgh and I've just graduated in PE and I'm taking a year out to be a full-time athlete

J OK and who do you live with just now?

S I'm living with my Mum and Dad

J OK, so you're just about to start life as a full-time athlete? And how do you feel about that?

S Eh, just now quite nervous because I don't have a coach so em, I think it'll work out well for my athletics. I'm worried about being bored and things like that, so it's just a big lifestyle change

J OK, we'll probably come back to that later then. And do you have any plans for a future career?

S I would like to obviously do my probation in PE, eh, but apart from that I don't really want to be a PE teacher for the rest of my life so I've not really planned that far

J OK so at the moment your priority really is athletics?

S Yes

J So apart from athletics, what other things do you do with your free time?

S I spend a lot of time with my boyfriend, em, going out with my friends, just like to get out of the house really and meet up with people, stuff like that, go to the cinema, shopping, whatever takes your fancy

J Let's talk about athletics now. So I believe you're a 100 and 200 metres sprinter?

S Yes

J Have you always done that event?

S Yes I have

J I'd like you to describe your training structure for me. Now obviously you were just telling me about the fact that you've got no coach so that's going to be quite difficult...

- S I can tell you about what it was like and what I'm planning
- J If you could, yep
- S Em, really concentrate a lot on strength and conditioning so in the Winter I'll be doing about three weights sessions a week, about six track sessions, one of them will probably be a hill session
- J So you're looking at probably training twice a day on some days?
- S Yep
- J And you're looking at just having the one coach?
- S Well I've got one, em, working with Meg for my weights, but she's kind of, she's off with someone else now and em, another coach for track
- J And how would you describe the relationship that you had with the coach that you've just left?
- S Eh, independent I think is the way to describe it, cos sometimes on the track he tells us what to do and then, you know, we just get on with it. He left the personal side of it up to ourselves, but quite a good relationship
- J And you haven't left him for any relationship problems or anything like that?
- S No
- J What age were you when you first got involved in the sport?
- S Eh, I started in primary school doing relays, but I didn't join a club or really start doing athletics until I was about 14
- J And how was it exactly you got involved in the sport?
- S I got asked to come and join Edinburgh Woolen Mill after I'd run in Edinburgh Schools
- J I'd like you to briefly talk me through your progression then from the start of your athletic career, if you maybe just tell me about your main achievements
- S Em really, eh, nothing really happened until I was about last year Under 17, em, where I ran for Scotland, sort of won the Scottish Schools, things like that and then progressed through Under 20's. I changed coach around that time, em, I spent a couple of years just getting used to a new coach and then in my last year Under 20's I broke through in the indoor season and ran for GB Under 20's and then I've been in under 23 for the last two years and it's really all sort of working out since I've been Under 23 level

- J And how satisfied would you say you are with your achievements so far?
- S Very satisfied
- J I'd like to talk a bit now about your goals and targets in athletics, so taking this season that's now come to an end. Can you tell me a bit about the goals that you'd set for this season?
- S I hadn't really set any goals because I'd been injured last season, eh, so I wasn't really sure what was going to happen this year, whether or not I'd be able to get through the season without being injured, em, so anything that happened was really a bonus and I exceeded my expectations in getting to the European Under 23's and then getting to the World Students, so I was really pleased
- J I'd like you to think back to a time now when you achieved your goals or when you had like a particularly successful performance and describe how that felt for me
- S A successful performance?
- J Yeah
- S Eh, European under 23's when we ran in the relay and I'd been kind of struggling with sore legs and all the rest of it so kind of on the edge of injury and I ran in the relay, and I was so nervous before the race that I was practically crying, we knew that we had a really good chance and then I ran. I was on first leg. I've never ran first leg in my life before so I was really worried about that as well, but then it was definitely the leg that suited me. I ran really well. I got the best start I've ever had in my life and then we ended up winning it, so....
- J Excellent, and how did you feel when you won?
- S Absolutely fantastic, we were all part of it, so...and even though it was the relay, it doesn't take away that feeling from the individual
- J And what about if you've ever had a time when you've been really, really disappointed with your performance, if you can think back to a time and tell me how that felt for you
- S Em, I was really disappointed with my performance at the World Students because it was terrible, in the relay it was terrible and then in the individual it was also terrible, eh, I was just really....I had to get up really early in the morning to go and run so we had to get up at like six o'clock in the morning to be warming-up at kind of eight o'clock, which was really tough and also eh, we lost a lot of weight, like all of us when we were out there because the food was terrible, so it was a lot of stuff was taken on my hands and I knew that I'd been in form before I went to run a really good time and me and Helen both

managed to get past the first round and I'd run terrible, but, you know, it was all right and then when I got to the second round it was just awful. I was in lane one, didn't catch anybody. I was...just like felt totally embarrassed to be running. It was the World Students and I was like last in the second round

J But it wasn't your fault

S I felt like a lot of it was out of my control

J And how did you feel about, you said embarrassed, what other emotions did you feel?

S Just really disappointed cos we'd gone all the way out there and I knew that I would've been on form. I'd done five weeks solid training before I went with no competition so I knew I was right there, but the circumstances kind of took it away

J Do you ever doubt your ability to meet your goals?

S Em, not now. I haven't this season. Sometimes I do. I worry about other people like how they're going to run and all the rest of it, em, that's the only thing that probably gets in my way and makes me doubt my ability

J Is that like rivals or..?

S Yeah

J What problems have you encountered whilst trying to achieve in athletics?

S Injury

J Tell me about your injury history

S Em, I spent the last two years being injured all the time, so last season in about June I was running really well and I tore my right hamstring and then I re-tore it twice after that...

J In the same place?

S It was like just lower down, that's generally the way it goes, em, so that was me out for the season. I didn't get much help really. I didn't get the physio that I should've got so it put me out and then I got back into Winter training, doing really well and then I pulled my left hamstring, so this was about three weeks before the indoors and I just was so gutted. I spent the whole season being on the edge of injury on that same leg, so it was a problem

J And what impact did that have on your progression would you say?

S I probably didn't do, I couldn't do my training sessions from about the start of January onwards until about the end of April. I really got stunted in my

training. It wasn't until I found a really good physio who sorted me out that I could get some good training done

J Have you experienced any other problems?

S Em, what like?

J Just anything really that's affected your progression, or maybe not even your progression, just affected your training in any way or just your athletics in general

S It's affecting me now that I have to find a new coach and it's worrying me a lot about how I'm going to be able to progress next year cos I'm aiming for the Eommonwealth Games, but if I don't find the right coach then I'm not going to be able to make that turn with him

J OK, we'll probably come back to that. What would you say your reasons are for taking part in athletics now?

S Em, I get a lot of satisfaction from it. I really enjoy going out and doing something for myself, em, it's just, I feel like I'm not ordinary cos I'm going out and doing athletics and making something of myself I think

J So would you say it's almost like a sense of doing something different compared to other people

S Yeah, yeah

J Any other reasons?

S Em, don't think so

J I'd like to get an idea now of how important athletics is to you, so I'd like you to imagine that your life's a cake. How big a piece is the athlete part of you?

S It's probably...I think it's probably most of the cake because in everything that I do it all comes back to athletics, but athletics is what limits me in other aspects of my life, eh, everything I do has to be around it, especially going into it, doing it full-time

J Would you be able to put a percentage on it?

S Maybe about 85

J Have you ever considered how you might feel when your athletics career comes to an end?

S Yeah I have. I think I'd be totally lost, just now I don't know what I'd do really. I can't imagine myself going out to work every day and that being it. I enjoy going training and having that kind of life

COMPETITIVE SOURCES OF STRESS:

J I'd like to move onto the second part of the interview now and discuss your experiences of stress as an athlete, so just to make sure we're on the same wavelength with stress, I'd like you to think of stress as referring to those occasions where you have felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation which has had important consequences for you, so to help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, we'll split the discussion into different areas from which stress might arise: stress in competition, stress in training, and stress relating to the demands and specific features of the sport.

Let's start with competitive sources of stress. I'd like you to take some time to think back carefully to a competition that you can remember well which you found particularly stressful and I'd like you to go through the competition in your mind in as much detail as possible, even the days leading up to it, during it, after it, if there's anything at all that you found stressful if you could tell me a bit about that. OK, so can you select a competition to discuss with me?

S The Scottish Championships this year

J OK and what was particularly stressful about that?

S I'd em, I'd had, you know, it was all set and planned in my head that I was doing the Scottish Championships and then I got selected for an Under 23 match on the Saturday. The Scottish Championships were the Saturday/Sunday and this was on the Saturday in Liverpool, so I was really disappointed, obviously I couldn't really turn down this opportunity to go and run there but I was really disappointed that I might not get the chance to run at the Scottish, you know, cos for funding and things like that I felt that I really should be going out and supporting Scottish Athletics so that they saw that I was doing that, em, so anyway, people were giving me advice saying, "Oh just concentrate on that one competition", and all the rest of it, but I decided, em to run at the International on the Saturday and then come back up with my parents on the Saturday and run at the Scottish Championships in Glasgow on the Sunday. So I didn't run very well on the Saturday at the Under 23's I'd had relay practices, you know, I'd been there for about three or four days before that competition, so it wasn't very good preparation anyway for the Scottish. I didn't run very well at the international, em, ran in the individual 200, didn't run very well at all, probably it was my worst run of the whole season and then in the relay, ran and my legs felt really tight after I'd run, so on the Sunday when I turned up for the Scottish Championships I knew that I could win it, but at the same time I had sore legs, I didn't want to injure myself because the Under 23 AAA's were the next weekend and I didn't also want to lose to other competitors, em, so warming-up my legs were quite sore but I just managed to get through it, em, I decided that I was going to run anyway even though I was probably risking myself a bit, em when I got to the call-up room for the final, I felt very self-conscious. In Scottish athletics I feel

this year especially, people don't speak to me as much as they used to, em, I find it very stressful. I felt like I had a lot of pressure on me to perform well. I felt like everybody was looking at me in the call-up room, em, luckily it all turned out fine and I won it, but I was kind of relieved

J OK. It sounds like there were quite a lot of stressful events that happened during that period. Let's go back to the Saturday when you were running in the Under 23 match. You said, one of the first things you mentioned was that you'd had a poor preparation for that cos you'd had all your relay practices. Was that something that you found stressful going into that race?

S Yeah, I found...relay practices always end up annoying me because you're expected to go out and athletics is an individual sport but in a relay you have to go out and put the effort in in practise, but at the same time it mucks up your preparation for your event and I do find it quite stressful

J And then you said that your performance was poor in that actual event, running in the individual event. What sorts of stressful emotions did you feel?

S At that time, em, I was really disappointed because in the race there were about five other girls who I was going to be running against at the Under 23's AAA's, and I felt I had a lot of pressure on me going into that competition cos I knew I'd be running against all those girls and I had to prove myself and then I didn't manage to do that, so in some ways...well I went to the Scottish Championships and ran a PB cos I knew there was no reason why I ran crap. I didn't have any injuries, I just didn't run well at all and I knew that I had something in me and I proved that when I went to the Scottish Championships, so that gave me a bit of confidence going into the next weekend

J OK. And you said on the Sunday that you felt you had sore legs and there was a risk of injury as well. What stressful emotions did you experience in relation to that?

S I think if I'm risking myself which I've done quite a few times this year, I feel really uptight, all I can think about, all I'm concentrating on is the pain that I have in my legs, eh, I can't think about anything else and I find it really hard to get into the race beforehand

J And then you mentioned the sort of fear of losing to other competitors. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

S Em, in sprinting I think especially there are a number of people that I don't think I get on with that well and I just...people used to speak to me but they don't speak to me now which I'm not very sure why, em, and because of this I have a bit of dislike for them and I don't want to get beaten by them. I feel that they're all out to prove something against me and I don't really like it

J And then being in the call-up room, you mentioned that notion again of other people's reactions towards you. Can you tell me a bit more about that one?

S It's stressful going into the call-up room because you're sitting there, you just can't concentrate and I felt that everybody sort of turned round and looked at me and it was just...I worry a lot about what other people are thinking about me and I don't like it if I think that people don't like me, you know, they were chatting away to each other but they weren't speaking to me and I found that a bit off-putting

J What other sorts of competitive pressures do you experience? You talked about when there was the important relay that you were in, you were so nervous before it because you knew you had a good chance and it was almost as if there was pressure on you to perform well that was, you know, talking about the relay run that you'd had. Would you say that having pressure on you is something in general that you find stressful in athletics?

S Yeah, if I feel that I have to perform for somebody else, I find that puts a lot of pressure on me and if you're going out and running a relay you're not just running for yourself. If you don't run well, then you're letting the whole team down and in Ehina I felt like I'd let the whole team down because we'd had a lot of problems in the run-up to that event. In the relay practices I didn't really agree with the guy who was in charge of the relay was treating us and this had caused me a lot of stress before we ran, and then the girl that I was running into, em, we'd done eight practises and managed to get the baton in the hand once and that was very stressful so obviously in the race that was in the back of my mind, em, we had the Ehinese people in our race putting us off, like the, all the people in the stands were all like ??? and then when I never managed to get the baton into Abbey's hand I was gutted . I felt like it was my fault and I felt that the team thought it was my fault, even though I know that Abbey had made a mistake as well by going off too early, but, you know, you get a lot of frustration out of it.

The team managers definitely cause me a bit of stress, if I don't like the way that they're treating me

J OK so you talked there about the pressures to perform for other people in relays. Is that something that you ever experience in the individual events?

S Not really because in an individual event I might let down myself. If I don't run well it's my fault. I don't have any affect on anybody else. I didn't run well in Amsterdam at the Under 23's, em, in the individual but I wasn't bothered. I was bothered, but not as bothered because I wasn't running for anybody else. I was running for myself

J You talked about some of the worries that sometimes go through your head before you race in relation to risk of injury. Are there any other worries that go through your mind during the warm-up or in the lead up towards the race?

S Em, not really. Because, you know, injury's been such a big part of my life for the past few years I think that's what I think of when I race.

J You mentioned that you're the type of person that is concerned with what other people think. Does it make a difference then if it's a big audience or if it's a particularly big event?

S Em, I'm actually quite an extrovert runner in that I perform better if there is a big crowd, em, if there's people out there. It's more the people that I'm running against that I'm that I am concerned about what they think

J So it's really just the fear of being beat by people you don't want to get beat by

S Yeah

J Any other competitive pressures you experience at all?

S No

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

J Let's move onto the next section then, sources of stress that you may experience in training. I'd like you to think back again in as much detail as possible to stressful training sessions that you may have had and isolate what you've found stressful, and if you find it easier you can just tell me things in general or if....from my experience I would say that stress in training for me depends on the time of year, like in Winter training's harder than like in Summer so there are different sources of stress, so if it's easier for you if you want to tell me about Winter and Summer, it's up to you, just whatever

S Em, Winter I quite enjoy training. It is definitely harder, em, I'm usually very tired and if I'm in a bad mood then I don't train well, em, but I really enjoy going out and knowing that I'm doing something. I'm usually quite motivated in training, em, when it comes to, sort of, the competitions, indoors I'm really rough, you know, getting into that and then going and doing the indoors, em, but I don't find training all that stressful....and then you're like going away warm-weather training, maybe when it comes to the Summer I do get stressed because I want to train well, I want to train fast, otherwise obviously that puts negative thoughts in my head for winning and competing

J Right so that's when perhaps you're doing time trials and things?

S Yeah, probably be in the Summer that I get the most stress out of training

J So what sort of worries do you experience then in relation to that?

S If the day before or the last training session I do before a competition I used to have this superstition, em, if I trained badly I always ended up running well, em, and I used to get really stressed if I'd had a good session before I competed, then I'd think, "Oh my goodness, I'm not going to run well at all",

and I wouldn't and I think that it was all completely mental, but I've just kind of come out of that now and I don't really think like that still

J Anything else at all?

S I don't think so

J Do you have any particular kind of session that you dread?

S Eh, one session that we used to do with Walter called "Runs to Destruction", and it was just terrible. We used to do three to thirty, three to forty, three to fifty, three to sixty and then as many to eighty until you'd died and then you'd have a rest and then you'd do it all again, and I didn't like it because it took forever and we were running just continuously and it was just terrible, so

J So was that stressful for you at the time?

S Yep. I don't like doing sessions if I know they're going to push me and I want to be off doing something else

J Have you ever experienced any stress relating to training partners or your coach – relationship issues?

S I think, well I got on very well with Walter. Perhaps, you know, in a way he'd kind of come to training and be like, "This is what you're doing", and you wouldn't get an explanation why, em, one problem that we had was that him and Meg didn't get on at all, so Meg was doing our weights and track was getting a bit difficult. Walter wouldn't really involve us if he had problems with people, but Meg wasn't very professional about things like that. She'd tell you stories that she shouldn't be telling you and things like that

J And obviously that...did that create some stress for you?

S Yeah, because I used to think very highly of Meg. She did a lot for me when I was injured last year, but em, she went down in my estimations because of her relationship with Walter

J And for you what sort of stressful emotions did you experience in relation to that?

S I felt quite guilty for liking one of them or agreeing with something that they were doing or I felt guilty if I wasn't agreeing with what they were doing and, you know, listening to them talk about each other

J And have you always agreed with your coach's training methods?

S Em, not always

J Has that ever created any stress for you?

S Eh, it used to cause me stress when I was younger. He used to turn round and tell me that I was too fat and that I needed to lose weight and everything and I just used to get really pissed off with him, em, but he's grown out of that a lot and he, I think he's matured quite well and he was getting much better

J And how did you feel when he made comments like that?

S Em, just really like bad about myself and it caused probably a lot of problems in my personal life because I used to think about it all the time and stuff like that

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

J I'd like to move on now to the final section on the sources of stress. This section here is dealing with aspects of the sport itself which you might find stressful, so I'd like you to think as broadly as possible about the specific demands and sacrifices associated with the sport, and also organisational aspects such as team management, timetabling of events etc. So can you identify any of these sources of stress?

S Is it about, well, just like athletics is all of my life is that kind of what it is?

J Uhuh, yeah

S Em, I find that when I was at Uni, I found it quite stressful being an athlete. I loved going training and being in the athletic surrounding, but out with that it made it very difficult to have a good relationship with my friends who don't do the sport, em, I found because it made so many restrictions on my life I couldn't go out and do things that I might've wanted to go and do, em, just little things like that I think, just really restrictions, but once you get into your head that that's what you want to stick to it if you want to do well

J So is that really to do with the time requirements of the sport and....

S Yeah, and obviously if you're going away a lot, em, I don't really like travelling, em, so I find that quite difficult as well

J What's difficult about that for you?

S I don't really like being away from home, em...I think I get quite home sick. When I'm away warm-weather training or whatever, I think if I'm bored or whatever I'm just used to being at home, eh, I don't like going away travelling to competitions in England when I'm going to be away for five days or whatever because you just get really bored

J And you mentioned before something about team managers. Do you think that was...when you were talking about the guy that was running the relays in Ehina. Is that something that you experience in general in athletics?

- S Yes. I find it very....I think, there's too much politics in Scottish athletics, eh, I fell out with one of the coaches at Loughborough because he wanted me to do a relay practice and didn't want me to obviously race in my individual event. I think they're just not very accommodating to the athletes. They just think of like themselves and they don't really take on board individuals
- J And is that something that you experience more within Scotland?
- S Eh, yes definitely, em, I've found that at British level, they're absolutely great. The team managers all work together and they're actually, they're quite good, em, when we went to the British Students it wasn't a usual group of team managers and for us we obviously thought they were just there for a holiday and they weren't taking any interest. It was like we were there for them and they weren't there for us, em, which is quite discomfoting actually with my lack of experience. I feel that's what it comes down to. The less experienced you are then the more problems
- J Anything else?
- S Don't think so
- J Anything relating to the financial side of the sport?
- S Eh, I think it's quite expensive to be an athlete and for me I'm lucky in that my Mum and Dad pay for me. I don't get any funding or anything like that, em, so it's taken out of my hands that I've got that financial backing behind me. It doesn't really cause a problem for me
- J You mentioned that you didn't get much help with your injuries. Is that something that you found stressful? Who were you looking for help from?
- S Em, I found that Walter wasn't very good, Walter wasn't very good. Walter wasn't very good dealing with injuries. If you were injured you couldn't train and he didn't know what to do with you, so he wasn't much help. Meg made three suggestions to me. It was basically Scottish Athletics I'd turned to to get support and they were quite limited in their, em, in the physios that they gave me. They just really didn't have a clue at all and because of that it put me out for longer that I should've been out for, em, and when I did eventually get..... I was seeing a guy who was quite good but he wasn't a physio. He was a like masseur guy, but he fixed me up fine. Everyone was like, "Oh yeah, he's really good", but why did they not suggest them to me in the first place? Some of the physios I went to see, their advice was terrible and, you know, it just put a lot of stress on me cos I couldn't go out and compete. I couldn't train, em and I just felt that no-one was really helping me

OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS:

J Are there any sources of stress that you experience as an athlete that we haven't covered?

S I don't think so

J Do you ever experience any stress relating to like environmental demands – the weather, anything like that, the specifics of the track that you run at?

S Well, I think that Meadowbank is quite nice because it's got a little indoor track to train on and it's just nice there. I really like the atmosphere, but now that I'm going to have to change coaches I'm going to have to train somewhere else and now I'm worried about that. It's causing me a bit of stress because one of the coaches that I might be going to trains somewhere that I really don't like, em, Livingston, and it's crap there.....

J OK, so obviously this for you at the moment, at the present moment it's very stressful for you because you're having to change coach and I would imagine that there a whole lot of different sources of stress associated with that, you've just mentioned one of them being the fact that you might have to train at a track that you don't really like. What else about this move is stressful for you?

S Em, the fact that all the coaches....if I ask for advice they give me advice in their favour, then if there are other people then they slag off all the other coaches, tell me that they're not going to be any good for me and everything when it's, you know, they should be more objective when giving advice. Walter's been actually very good because he made the suggestions to me and I have gone out and got advice from other people, em, but his suggestions are the ones that I'm going back to and he's been very supportive, so he's the one person I think, you know, whatever I decide to do he'll stand by me

J And you mentioned a bit about the worries about the transition, you've got a goal for next year – the Eommonwealth Games - and you talked about how finding a new coach could be stressful for you in case they don't, don't work for you. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

S Eh, I really need to....obviously when I went to Walter it took me about two years to get used to his coaching. I didn't really make an improvement in that time. I feel myself that next year I'll make an improvement because I'm going full time from having a lot of changes anyway, em, personally which, I think'll have a good effect on me, so in some ways I think whoever I go to I'm going to improve next year anyway because I want to, em, coach wise, if I don't chose the right coach, if he's not doing things which are suiting me, I'm not going to make as much an improvement as I want to or that I need to make and if next year I don't do as well as I want to, then, you know, it'll obviously be upsetting because I'll know that I've not made the right choice

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

- J Let's move onto the final section now. In this section I'm interested in finding out if there's anything about you as a person that might influence the stress that you experience. So as I'm sure you're aware, the things that influence the stress that someone experiences are things like, em, personality factors, the way that you tend to cope with stress, things like that. So I'd like you to have a wee think and tell me if there's anything that you think influences the stress that you experience, anything about you
- S I think in a stressful situation I will do my up most to hide the fact that I'm stressed. I don't like to show people...you get athletes who obviously have got this feeling, have got that feeling and they'll sit and tell you about all these terrible things that've happened to them and I hate that. I just don't do that because it annoys me when people do that. I just think, "What's the point?", so in some ways because I don't think I should be telling other people because I think it's not up to them to listen, I do hide the fact and I think I can do that quite well, just somebody once said a couple of years ago that they thought I was really scary to run against, em, I think that's....at the time I was just like, "I don't understand this at all because I think that I'm, I always chat to people, em, I'll always make an effort just to be nice and all the rest of it," but maybe it's because I seem really laid back people see that as being threatening, em...
- J So in what way would you say that the fact that you tend to hide your stress and come out and be really friendly at competitions, in what way would you say that that influences your stress?
- S Em, I think it actually lessens it a bit. I might be in my head, if I'm really nervous or whatever, em, if I hide it a bit and just relax, then it does go away. Of course there are situations when you're completely stressed and you can't hide it at all, like when I was in Amsterdam, and I was sitting practically crying, but I think that was because we were in a team so you have three other people around you to support you and they're saying, "Don't worry," you know, they were like trying to bring me up again, but usually I can do that myself which if you just relax and focus on what you're doing I think that you can
- J Anything else about you
- S Em, I don't know
- J You said earlier that you were the type of person that tends to worry about what other people think. Do you think that could influence your stress in any way?
- S Eh, If I'm in a situation where I feel like people aren't being nice to me in a competition, like in the call-up room if people aren't speaking to you or even after the race, things that they say to you, it really riles me a lot and that causes me stress in that I begin to dislike the person, em, I'm not going to name any names, I dislike this person and I can't stand running against them. I hate being in that situation, it really gets to me if I am and it just makes me even more defensive, em, they just annoy me, so I don't know what they set out to

do, but they might go out and think, “Well, I can put them off this way and this way and that”, but em, I don’t think it does work. They don’t put me off, they just make me more annoyed and more determined to beat them

J And you said before that obviously athletics is very, very important to you, you said that it makes up probably about 85% of your life. Would you say that that in any way could influence the stress that you experience?

S Em, it could do because I’m, I’ve got so much pressure on myself because I put so much into it. If I don’t compete well, em, or even train well, then it’s really disappointing because I put so much into it

J How do you think the stress that you experience compares with other athletes?

S It’s probably about the same. I think most athletes probably feel the same, em, but they’d never say that to each other, that they felt the same or wouldn’t discuss it because it’s very individual, you know you have to, you know, keep up your front, em, but I think I’m mostly the same

J OK. I think that’s about all I need to ask you so before we finish, do you think there are any important factors we failed to discuss in relation to your experiences of stress?

S I don’t think so

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

S No

J OK, well I’d just like to say thanks very much for your time, thanks very much for your honesty and good luck for next year. I hope it goes well

S Thanks

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

KEY

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J Before we start discussing athletics, it would be useful for me to get some background information from you so to begin with, could you tell me a bit about yourself, maybe your age, where you live and what it is you do?

K Eh, I'm 21. I've just finished being a student so I'm still in the student lifestyle without having to work or anything and eh, I live with my parents in a wee tranquil village down near the airport, eh, bumming about at the moment, not got anything to do other than training

J So you don't have a job or anything like that at the moment?

K No, nothing like that

J And do you have plans in the future to get a job or..?

K My plan at the moment involves training and not much else

J Oh right, OK. Apart from athletics then, what other sorts of things do you do in your free time?

K Eh, I am a computer geek. I spend a lot of time on the computer playing games and stuff, eh, that's all I do

J Really?

K Yeah, I mean when I say computer stuff it can be anything – talking to your pals, eh, watching movies, playing games

J So what about your social life. How would you describe that?

K Eh, I don't drink anymore, much, well, Oban last week was the first time I drank in about three months, so I go out every other week or so but not too much

J How would you describe your social life then?

K Eh, infrequent but fun

J And is that something you're happy with, or...?

K Yeah. I see my social life as running as well so like all my pals and stuff are at running, competitions and people I train with as well, they're my pals so that as well

- J And have you sort of cut off going out and things because you want to take athletics more seriously?
- K Yeah, I deliberately stopped drinking as much because of that. I mean before when I was actually at Uni, a couple of times a week I'd be out drinking and stuff, but now its cut back, that's another thing why my social life's cut back because I've left Uni and now all my pals are away off all over the country doing jobs and stuff
- J Right, so we'll start talking about athletics now, so I believe you're a 400 metres sprinter
- K That's correct
- J Have you always done that event?
- K Eh, when I started off I was a sort of multi eventer, every other year I did a different best event. I used to do long jump, triple jump, em, 200's as well, high jump even, stuff like that, then eh, I started running for the club, started running 400's for them. I can still do a lot of events, but 400 metres is one of my best
- J I'd like you to describe your training structure for me now, what I mean by that is, do you have a coach, a training group, the people that have an input in your training, if you tell me a bit about that
- K Well I have a coach and our group consists of about four or five sprinters, young lads about 16/17. They can all do middle 11's, something like that and we've also got Dave who's an 800/400 metres runner so eh, I do a combined session usually, a lot of short stuff to start off with, with the sort of younger lads, then I'll do the longer runs at the end with eh, Dave, so eh.....
- J And how would you describe the relationship that you have with your coach?
- K Eh, aye he's more a sort of pal than a coach. I can have a joke and a laugh with him. I mean he's only 26, so he's round about my sort of age. He can be strict though. He does get in his moods and stuff, em, gets upset when you joke and stuff...
- J So do you feel you have a good working relationship with him?
- K Oh yeah, definitely
- J And how often do you train?
- K At the moment I train, I train about five and eight times a week
- J So sometimes you're training more than once a day?
- K Yeah, usually on a Sunday

- J OK. And what age were you when you first got involved in the sport?
- K Eh, I believe Primary seven I started off. We had the sort of Geely Darby between the five schools. We each pitched in a team. It was the first time I'd been in a proper school type race and it wasn't till I got to second year that I started doing track races. I waited until about second year actually, eh until I went along to Kilbarchan Harriers – my pal told me about it so I went along with him, just to see what it was, and eh, I actually started off doing long distance, cross-country type stuff, like going out on eh, fartlek sessions or a long distance run or something, and then when the track season came round I just got, they put into a few races and I found out I was OK on the track
- J I'd like you to briefly talk me through your progression now from the start of your athletic career
- K Eh...
- J Tell me about, like your achievements
- K OK well I started off Under 15 level before I realised that, I saw the rankings booklet. I was eh, in the top ten anyway, so I realised I was OK at it, and eh, I started winning loads of competitions in Renfrewshire and stuff like that. At that age it was like a really big competition that I always won medals in. One big competition I remember is the Young Athletes League, we got into the Final, and I actually I came home with a big, a clutch of medals. Have you seen the medals you get for the...?
- J No
- K I was so proud. It was brilliant – big huge heavy gongs, eh, so then I started looking at the rankings and how I could get better. I always looked at the people above me, eh, I realised that my age group was really good for the 400 at that time, em, I was doing really good to get in the top five and then Under 17 level I managed to get to fourth in the rankings, but I never got picked for any School's stuff at all. I was absolutely raging at that and eh, I was really trying my hardest to get picked for the school team, the go away stuff, cos I never had the experience of a big competition until then, until much later on than that, em, in the Under 20's it just all picked up for me, eh, I ran really god times. I got picked for the British team before the British team before I got picked for any Scottish teams
- J Oh really?
- K Yeah, yeah. In fact, I had to actually let the SAF know that I was running fast cos they had a team going down at one point, eh, we were at a meeting with, there was an SAF official. My coach went up to him and he said eh, "Excuse me, you know you've got a team going down at the weekend here? Can you put my athlete in because he is actually running faster than anyone else there," and I managed to get into that, em...

- J How did you feel about that at the time, that SAF didn't really seem to know much about you?
- K I was a bit annoyed at it, but SAF is not the best organised
- J OK, we'll come back to that later then
- K Right, OK
- J OK, so where did you go from there? (Got in the British team)
- K Eh, I went down the AAA's, got into the Final, and eh, I was sixth or seventh in the Final I believe, which is all right, eh, that was my first big competition. That whole year was a big, a complete leap cos I'd just been used to running a few Scottish Schools' races and then all of a sudden I was going into big competitions with people taking.... buckets behind you, people taking your clothes away, things like that
- J So when you made this huge breakthrough and you suddenly found yourself with a British vest, what sorts of emotions were you experiencing?
- K Em, disbelief at first. I actually, when I got the letter through, the selection one, I didn't know what I was selected for cos it was very, em, ambiguous, the letter. I didn't know whether I was selected for the Scottish team, the British Uni's team or the British Junior team, so eh, it took me ages just to get it into my head that I....it wasn't until I was like actually sitting in the airport waiting on the plane to go down to England that I sort of realised, "Wow, British team!" and then I was, when I was down there I was wondering round and I saw all these faces like Daniel Eaines and ? and stuff and I just realised, "Wow," eh, I was....I still can't believe it actually
- J How satisfied would you say that you are with your achievements so far?
- K Em, about 80% satisfied, because I've not really done much in the last year or two that I'm happy with. I want to get back to eh, low 48's, which I hope I should achieve sometime by the end of this year
- J OK. I'd like to move on now to talking about your goals and targets in athletics, em, I wonder if you could tell me a bit about the goals that you'd set for this season
- K This season it's a bit difficult because I've had my exams and my Finals and my graduation stuff at the start of the year. Training was on a hold so my whole season has been shunted to a target right at the end, so eh, low 48 is my goal and that should eh, get me a look in on a Scottish selection
- J OK, so you can't really say at this stage whether you've achieved them or not?
- K Yeah

- J In general terms though would you say that you tend to achieve your goals or do you not?
- K I try not to set, well I don't set real goals for myself. I see how I feel on the day and that's about it. I mean I have rough aims like, "I want to run 49 today," eh, I've not really had any competition this year anyway to be able to set a goal for myself, it's all been league matches, eh, when I, big races usually I, like the British Uni's, AAA's, things like that, my goal for myself is usually getting to the Final and once you get to the Final it's just, just do it, just do what you can.
- J Yeah, yeah, sure. OK, so in general terms you don't really set yourself goals, maybe just more like on the day you just see how you feel and then set yourself a target on that day?
- K Yeah
- J Explain to me how you felt when you had a really good performance or actually when you got selected, the emotions that you experienced then, I wonder if you could think back to a time when you didn't have such a good performance or you failed to meet a target that you really wanted and if you could maybe tell me about the emotions that you felt then
- K Eh, I think I'll have to go to a British Uni's race there, em, it was Bedford, yeah, where I was just, suffering a bit in the heat and I went off too hard and I ended up fifth or something in the second round of the semi's, which, and I knew I could do much much better cos it was quite easy to get into the final and eh, I was shattered after it. I was really annoyed cos I was shattered and I shouldn't be shattered cos I didn't run that well, and eh, I was just disappointed cos everyone was there expecting me to do well and stuff and then....
- J Do you ever doubt your ability to meet your goals?
- K Eh, a lot of the time in training, yeah, especially on early morning training sessions because, I don't know if you're the same, in morning training sessions, all your bones, all your muscles are aching and sessions where I can barely run more than a jog and I actually jog the whole session and I really think, "Oh I can't keep up all this training cos it's just, it's killing my legs, it's killing my shoulders, it's killing my arms," but once you start getting into it you start thinking, "No, I can keep this up."
- J Yep, I can relate to that. What problems have you encountered while trying to achieve in the sport?
- K Eh, well disruption through injury. I used to be a skier. I started skiing at the age of four and was skiing right the way through to 16, 17 and my knees got totally messed up. When I first injured my knee I was 15 or something like

that and I had an operation on my left knee. My right knee needs physiotherapy every now and again and eh, it's keeping them operational

J What impact would you say that that's had on your athletics?

K Well, my training, I've never had a solid year of training more than about two months worth, so it's just been fragmented and I just want to get a whole Winter in of actual training, eh...

J How do you feel about that, that it breaks up your training quite regularly?

K I know that if I train properly I can achieve much more than I already have, just by training up to eight times a week, and eh, it's really frustrating cos I also get colds as well quite a lot, like especially after 400 metres runs. I always get a cold on a Sunday night, especially if I've been racing on the Saturday

J OK, so you seem to get quite frequent colds and you've obviously got some quite serious injury problems. Is there anything else that interferes?

K Oh eh, University...

J To what extent does that impact on your training then?

K Lots, I sort of stress about my exams quite a bit and when I'm stressed I can't do anything, I'll just sit there, like I've got studying to do but I can't study and just sit there doing nothing, it's like a couple of months off your life. I have to go training as well and when I'm studying as well I tend to eat a lot, and eh, this year I put on a stone over exam time and that really hurt my training a bit

J How do you feel about that?

K Eh, kind of frustrated cos I've never been this fat in my life

J You're not exactly fat

K Well, to me I am, but...

J Is that something that you find stressful?

K Yeah, putting on weight and losing it. Losing definition of muscles and stuff and, it makes you feel unfit

J OK. Any other problems?

K Eh, maybe about a year back when I was actually trying to work, I was pretty skint, eh, I couldn't keep it up because I was working, I was on my feet for about nine hours at a time at work. When I finished I didn't want to do anything, I just wanted to sleep sort of thing, get to sleep and by the time you

woke up, it was time to go to work again because of the shifts I was working. I could only train maybe once a week, but it was really frustrating and really, it took it out of my legs as well just from standing about

J So how was your performance during that time when you were working?

K Rubbish, disappointing

J And is that something that you felt quite stressed about at the time?

K Yeah because just, I like to have.....I like to be able to just relax and rest for a bit, but when you're working it's like, you've always got to work and then train and in your day off you're running, you've got a race, there's always something going on and I feel I have to have maybe one or two days a week, just to do absolutely nothing, sit down and watch the TV or something

J OK. I'd like to talk now about your reasons for taking part in athletics so I wonder if you could maybe tell me a bit about that

K Em, well, I started off obviously because I was quite good at it, but I stayed for the sort of friends and stuff like that, all the people I know. About 60, 70% of all my pals are from athletics

J When you say you're good at athletics, is it important to you that you're good at something?

K Eh, yes, eh, but it's not very, very important. It is, I wouldn't keep on doing athletics if I wasn't doing well I don't think. I'd certainly keep in touch with all the athletics people, but I wouldn't keep on doing it if I wasn't achieving what I thought was a good level of racing

J So why do you think doing well's important to you?

K Eh, it's a measure of fitness, it's a measure of I don't know, it's just to feed your ego isn't it? I like being better than other people. I don't like other people being better than me, so

J So it provides you with a sense of...?

K A sense of achievement, a sense of being good at something, but it's not, it's not a real main driving reason, it is one them

J Any other reasons?

K The possibility of being famous, yeah? The possibility of being on TV and.....I don't know, I can't think of anything else

J OK, that's fine, interesting. I'd like to get an idea now of how important athletics is to you, so if your life was a cake, how big a piece is the athlete part of you would you say?

- K Is this Battenberg cake or...?
- J It doesn't matter, a big round cake
- K Right, eh, about 45% roughly
- J What makes up the other parts?
- K 40% is computers, em, what are we at – 15 left? Eh, other people
- J So athletics is your number one then?
- K Yeah
- J How important would you say it is to you?
- K Right, it is important to me. It is what I do, but if I wasn't enjoying it for even a second I would do something else. I would just try another sport – basketball, tennis...
- J Would you say that for your personal image it's important that other people see you as an athlete?
- K Yes, seeing me as being sort of fit and tall if that makes any sense, being able to sort of walk down the street knowing that you're an athlete cos I don't know, it feels good
- J And you like to perceive yourself as an athlete, that's what you do, that's what you are, an athlete?
- K Yes

COMPETITIVE STRESS:

- J I'd like to move onto the second part of this interview now and discuss your experience of stress as an athlete. Now one problem here is that different people have different perceptions of what stress is so I'd like to kind of standardise that and make sure we're on the same wavelength, so I'd like you to think of stress as referring to those occasions where you've felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation which has had important consequences for you, so I'm interested in finding out about the minor sources of stress as well as the major ones. To help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, we'll split the discussion up into three different areas from which stress might arise, we'll talk about stress you might experience in competition, stress in training and stress coming from the demands and specific features of the sport.

OK, we'll start with competitive sources of stress. I'd like you to take some time to think back to a competition that you found stressful and can remember well and I'd like you to go through the stages of the competition in your mind in as much detail as possible, thinking about how you felt even in the days leading up to the event, during the event, and after the event, going through the things that you did step by step to see if that can trigger your memory, you know such as, your warming-up, registration, getting into your blocks, waiting for the gun all that sort of thing. Try to remember how you felt physically and emotionally as you experienced these things and identify what caused stress for you. Can you select a competition to discuss with me then?

K Eh, I suppose the British Uni's 1998

J Uhuh, Bedford?

K Bedford yep, no Bath

J I think it was, yeah Bath yep

K Eh and it was really my first big competition away out of Scotland. I was doing the 400 and I was absolutely petrified. Travelling down and stuff in my mind I was seriously considering not doing it, just feigning an injury or something like that

J What do you think it was, what was it that you were worrying about?

K Eh, just getting beat, getting beat badly cos I had absolutely no experience of how fast people might be down there and eh, well I don't know it's, in the first round, eh, after a lot of stress in warming up I managed to, I won the heat quite convincingly actually, so eh, I was like, "That's pretty good, I've reached my goal, I've got passed the first round," so eh, in the second round I was stressing about being last cos I was watching other athletes and stuff and there were some really good athletes in there and so I was like, "Oh no, I really don't want to do this, I'll just, I'll run this as if it's a Final in the Semis," so I did and I came fourth I believe in my semi and after that I was like, "I don't care about this and that any more," I didn't think I'd run that well, "I don't care about this anymore, I don't want to be in the Final. I won't get in the final." In my head it was, "I won't get in the Final", so eh, so I was aware of, in my head I wasn't in the Final so I was just having a good day and then they announced that I was the slowest qualifier to get into the Final and I was like, "Oh no, I don't want to do this," and again I was considering not turning up for the Final

J So what was going through your mind at that point - when you found out that you got in the final?

K I was out my league, out my depth completely

J And what exactly do you think about being beat and being out of your depth that's specifically stressful for you?

- K It's partly the fact that I have to run so hard that the pain at the end will be absolutely unbearable
- J So it was fear of pain for a start then?
- K Yes definitely, and partly because if I was beat that badly I'd look, not stupid but pretty rubbish, eh, just appear to be, I don't know, appear to be feeble
- J When you say that there was almost like a fear of looking bad in front of other people, is it important to you what other people think about you, is that important to you?
- K Yeah it is, not vitally, but it is a major part of running
- J When you say that it is quite important to you what other people think and you said that you have concerns regarding that, like before a race, what is it that other people might think exactly that's concerning you?
- K Eh.....
- J You said that appearing feeble is that...?
- K Yeah, I don't know. When I, when I'm warming up just at the start of a race and I'm looking around me at all the other athletes and they all look sort of professional, you know with....see like just with tights on, using blocks and I'm, you know, you've seen what I'm like, I'd wear long shorts if I could. To me, being an athlete is looking like that is being an athlete, you know what I mean, looking or running well as well is my image of an athlete
- J So is that then what you're saying is you find it stressful when you perceive other competitors to look very professional?
- K Yes, at the start of the race
- J What goes through your mind when you see that?
- K Eh, I usually make a list in my head of people that are going to beat me and the list consists of those people with blocks, that's about it, just people looking professional and I think, "Oh no," I don't know, cos I've never seen them before as well, "They're going to beat me, they're going to make me run hard"
- J Going back to this notion of worrying about what other people are thinking, would you say that it's almost like you're trying to impress other people?
- K Eh, I don't know about impress, certainly just appear, appear up to their expectations of you
- J What's at stake if you don't appear like that then?

- K It's a
- J Difficult question
- K Yeah, just a sort of status symbol or something
- J So in a way would you say it's a fear of losing your image as a highly talented athlete?
- K Yeah in a way
- J And who are the people you're trying to create a good impression to? Is there anyone specific or...?
- K No, it's just general....I can tell you who it's not, it's not my pals or the people I'm there with, people I know, it's not them, it's just the audience as a blur and just people in general
- K And you said earlier, em, that you didn't want to perform at a standard that was lower than other people's expectations. Do you ever feel that other people put expectations on you?
- K Eh, yeah, quite a bit yeah
- J Anyone in particular or?
- K Well my coach'll always say, "Today you *are* running 49.2, you *will* run it like this"
- J And how does that make you feel?
- K Well he's the one I expect it from, so he knows what I can run, so I take his word for it but he's putting reasonable expectations on me or he is saying it to push me or whatever and that's the reason he's saying it. Other people.....
- J Do you perceive that as being pressure when he says those things?
- K Eh, a small amount of pressure, yeah, but because I see it as being a reasonable request then I'll, I won't see it as being too much pressure
- J Anything else that's stressful at competition?.....How do you feel physically before a race?
- K It really depends on the race, some of the better races I've had, it's eh, you know how you get the adrenaline flow and your legs get sort of wobbly? I feel that's the best way to race, because other times you feel really heavy before a race and that's, I hate running like that....
- J So would you perceive that as being stressful when that happens?

- K Yeah, if you're in your warm-up and you're feeling like that, to try and get knee lift when you're just feeling a bit heavy and you're thinking ahead to the race and that's worrying, eh, same if you encounter a wee nigggle, same with an injury....
- J What goes through your mind when that happens?
- K It's going to snap half way. I've got a really bad right hamstring which I really have to stretch really badly. It feels as if it's going to go a lot of the time during races. It's one I can't stretch properly, no matter what I do, I can't stretch. I'll stretch my full leg for about five minutes and then I'll come back, that really starts to get into your head and like goes into another one of your doubts over your race. Sometimes when it goes well it goes really well
- J You said that, em, sometimes in training, you don't like training if it's in the morning. Is that something that you feel in competition as well?
- K I'm just not a morning person, I really amn't. I'm so lazy, like just trying to go to sleep. I need about ten hours sleep minimum. It's just getting warmed-up. I prefer to race after I've been up for maybe about 6, 7 hours
- J So would you say that a race that's early in the morning is stressful for you?
- K Oh definitely
- J How does that make you feel then?
- K Eh, really nervous, races in the morning I find, if I've got a race in the morning I can't get to sleep at night properly. It'll take me about a couple of hours to get to sleep
- J What's going through your mind when you're trying to sleep?
- K Eh, it's mainly the pain of what I'm...I've got an idea in my mind of what I'm going to have to run, how fast I'm going to have to run, how I'm going to feel after that. It's usually, "It's going to be so hard tomorrow," and then I'm mostly thinking, "I'm not getting to sleep therefore I'm not going to have any sleep therefore I'm going to be tired for running," so it's progressive of that
- J It leads on to one thing and then another. So that's two sources of stress there you've touched on – the lack of sleep itself starts to worry you and going back to this pain idea as well, sounds like that's quite a big one with you, yeah?
- K Yeah definitely
- J What about in terms of preparation before a competition. Do you tend to feel pretty prepared, or...?
- K Em, training or warm-up?

- J Training, nutrition, rest, mental preparation, physical preparation...
- K Right, eh, usually before a race I don't feel as if I've done enough training, that's usually because I haven't, but these days I'm training a lot and I do feel, it gives you an extra confidence boost. I've never really experienced that much before, but this year I've done, going into competition, I've done the training, why shouldn't I, why shouldn't I get 49, why shouldn't I get 48? So that's, I used to be really bad with that. I used to go into competition thinking, "I haven't done three days training in the last month. I've not run last week, it's going to be so sore," eh...
- J And those thoughts were stressful for you?
- K Oh definitely, definitely
- J You mentioned as well earlier something about pacing and that was at the British Uni's in Bedford. You said that you went off too hard and you felt that you mucked up the race because of that. Is pacing something that you tend to worry about, or...?
- K Yes, oh definitely. Pacing is, it should be really simple cos it's just one lap, there's only so many variations you can do and you should get one way you can run the race and that should be you, but I find it takes me three or four races to actually work out how I run a race every season at the start of the season. It takes me three or four races just to work out how I should be running 150, striding here, kicking here, whatever. That's what I found eh, I was racing on Sunday and eh, I ran 22.5 for the first 200. My PB is 22.2, so the last 50, my knees were coming about that high, that was one of the sorest races I've ever had, puking after it and I just, I try not to think about racing too much before I race. I try not to think about how I'm going to run it because nine times out of ten, once I get into the race I'll run differently, depending on who's outside me, who's inside me, who I'm racing against, so it's not something I really think about. My coach will always say to me before, "Run that first 200 as fast as you can and then try and hold on"
- J So in what way is pacing stressful for you?
- K Because wondering if you can hold on for that last 50, it's just thinking about if someone's going to come past you
- J What about pain during the race, obviously with 400 it is a painful event, would you say that the pain that you experience during the race is something that you would describe as being stressful?
- K Yes, but only for a short period of time, during and after. For about ten minutes after you can't walk. It's not stressful after it, even during it, it's just, just get on with it
- J You've talked a lot about sources of stress relating to before the race and during the race. What about after the race – any sources of stress there?

- K After the race it usually depends on how well your race went. One of them is just, if you did really badly and then everyone comes up and says, “Oh well done. Good effort,” that sort of suggestion, cos you know that that’s the confirmation that you’ve not done that well. It happens to everybody
- J What goes through your mind when someone comes up to you and says, “Oh well done”
- K Eh, “Why did you say it? Why didn’t you just say, oh that was a crap race you ran there eh?” I mean there’s some people that say that to me. I don’t mind them saying that to me, but.....
- J OK, let’s go over what you’ve said anyway, see if you can come up with anything else. We do have quite a lot here though. Em, sources of stress in competition: fear of being beat; fear of being out of your depth; fear of the pain; looking bad in front of other people; seeing other athletes looking professional; expectations from your coach; feeling heavy prior to a race; feeling niggles prior to a race; having to race early in the morning, the night before, not being able to get to sleep, pacing – fear of not holding on in the last 50 metres, the way other people respond to you after a race. Can you think of anything else at all?
- K Eh, there’s one thing – I can never have my parents watching me at a race. I really don’t like, I find it stressful having them watching me
- J Why’s that do you think?
- K Eos I don’t want to look bad in front of them cos they think I’m some super athlete or whatever and I don’t want them turning up to watch me, but they do it anyway, like they’ll come and they won’t tell me that they’re there, just sit down somewhere and I’ll give them into trouble for coming up like after the race or whatever
- J What input do your parents have in your training?
- K Eh, quite a lot, eh, I mean, they support me a lot, they give me money if I have to go training or if there’s nobody there for me if I need a lift to training or to a race or whatever, but, they don’t really know much detail of what’s going on or what I’m racing or stuff like that. I keep them in the dark, no, they’re quite supportive, but....
- J Is it important to you that you impress them?
- K Yeah
- J Have you always been like that?
- K Eh, yeah, definitely, I don’t know it’s just, my Dad always expects me to do well at sports cos he was a big sportsman as well

- J Do you feel like they're placing expectations on you?
- K Yeah in general, their expectations is a general one. They do, they really do
- J So not just in athletics in other areas of your life as well?
- K Yeah
- J And is that something that you've perceived all your life – when you were younger as well?
- K It's yeah, something I've just taken for granted, just to be good at stuff, academic, sports wise
- J So how do you feel if you're not good at something with respect to your parents?
- K Eh, not too bad usually because they are quite supportive, but I will I definitely feel, oh, you know
- J Yeah. And do they convey that to you? How do they respond to you if you're not performing to a level that you'd like to?
- K Eh, they'll definitely be like, "Better luck next time," but my Dad'll usually joke about it and say "Oh that's rubbish. Why aren't you running 43 or 42?"
- J So they don't criticise you. It's more...
- K It's not serious, they'll be supportive and whatever, rather than take the rip out of me
- J So would you say then that your parents are, whether it's intentional or not, they're representing quite a big pressure as well?
- K Yeah
- J Anything else?
- K Eh, not, well, I don't know if it's appropriate, but it's you know how I do the 4 hurdles? I hate actually going over the hurdles. I'll never even practise a hurdle before my race
- J Why's that?
- K Because, I don't know it's fear of just hitting one and smacking my leg off or injuring myself or...I just, I can't do them before a race. I don't even practise them in training, I'll just...
- J So again it's this fear of not living up to...

K Yeah, hitting one, going down. I've only done that once and I don't want to do it again. Do you remember that? Do you not? The Under 23's, down, where was it...?

J Oh yeah, yeah

K I hit the second last hurdle

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

J OK, let's move onto the second section on the sources of stress then, sources of stress you may experience during training. I'd like you to think back again in as much detail as possible to stressful training sessions you may have had. From my experience of training, I would say that sources of stress vary according to the kind of training I'm doing at certain times of year, so if you would find it helpful to discuss sources of stress in, for example, Winter and then talk about Summer, feel free to do that, or if you want to just talk in general, it's up to you

K Winter training, eh, I find it stressful because it's very difficult to tell your progression, to tell how well you're doing cos you know if you're doing weights, sit-ups, whatever all Winter and then find once you start the next season you're just a crap 400 metres runner, but you're a good shott putter or whatever, there's no way to tell how well you're doing and it just....

J And in what way is that stressful for you?

K It's what I want to know is that I'm getting better at my event. I would hate to think that I was doing all that training and it wasn't helping at all, so I'd actually prefer if some of my training was just to see what I'm running 300's in such and such a time

J Anything else?

K Winter training, definitely getting colds and the way that disrupts your training because sometimes you just train too hard you can become so easy to pick up a cold

J So it's getting the balance – not training too hard and maintaining your health. And what goes through your mind if you do get a ...

K It's just how weak I'm becoming, how, it's like slipping away, you know, trying to hold onto the fitness you had. I don't really find training itself very stressful because my training group, it's a bit of a laugh, it's just all your pals

and just go out and have a joke and a laugh with everyone. Stress doesn't come into it that much

J OK. That's fine, em, what about some of the things you mentioned in competition, I'm wondering if some of these things might apply to training as well, like the fear of pain. Is that something you experience in training?

K Eh, to a very small degree yes. I know in training that I can always pull up if I'm in absolute agony and eh, I can always slow it down, there's no, no reason why I have to run absolutely flat out all the way. I can always just jog the last 50 and just say, "Oh, I was nearly there," and my coach'll readjust my training accordingly

J Are there any sessions that you dread because of the pain associated with them or is it just not something that you find stressful in training?

K It's, I don't find it stressful at all

J You mentioned as well when we were talking about competitive sources of stress, the expectations that you perceived from your coach. Is that something that you ever find stressful in training?

K Yeah, when he gives me a time and says, "Do this 150 in 17 seconds," or whatever and you do it in 18 and a half and I feel that I've let him down a bit, so you try and run the next one in 16 and a half....yeah he's got a lot of expectations for me in training. He always, he often gives me sessions, I don't know if he does it deliberately, sessions that he knows I won't complete, he'll go, "six sets of three times 150 at 400 metres pace," and if you think about that...

J Yeah, heavy!

K And I don't know, he always, I think he always sets the bar a wee bit high. I don't know whether that's deliberate or not

J So is the fact that your coach tends to do that quite stressful for you?

K It can be yeah. He does it about once a week. It's stressful to think that he thinks I can do that and I can't do that, so I'm not really wanting him to...

J And I suppose there that's your own expectations again as well?

K Yeah

J Do you ever experience any stress relating to your training partners at all?

K Eh, not really, no, we're all sort of good pals

J Do you always agree with your coach's training methods?

- K I hardly ever agree with my coach's training methods, but they seem to work
- J Do you ever experience stress relating to that lack of agreement?
- K Eh, sometimes yeah, sometimes I think, "Why's he doing this? I don't feel as if this is going to help me at all. I don't feel as if I'm getting better at 400, it's not helping my endurance," stuff like that. He's always got hidden reasons for doing stuff
- J OK, anything else you can think of at all?
- K The stress of having to go training, just dragging yourself out the house everyday
- J In what way's that stressful for you?
- K Just cos sometimes you just want a rest. I want a rest all the time and eh, it gets you so.....it gets so boring sometimes because I'll sit in the house for ages, "Training, I've got to go training," especially in the Winter as well when it's dark. I don't know why that makes a difference. It feels so miserable. It's dark, it's cold and you've got to go training
- J OK, any others?.....Is that it?
- K Yeah

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

- J OK, I'd like to move onto the final section on the sources of stress then and em, if you could consider if there's anything in particular about the actual sport which causes stress for you, so what I'm getting at here is like the specific demands and sacrifices associated with the sport, also organisational aspects such as team management, timetabling of events, registration, declaration procedures, that sort of thing, which may cause stress for you. Can you identify any of these?
- K Eh, it takes up a lot of time. I found that I couldn't like seriously do University or athletics at the same time as exam time, studying, stuff like that, or even a job or training at the same time, so eh, it's just stressful the time it takes up, especially if you've got something else on, em....
- J You mentioned at the start of the interview that you found it stressful when you were younger not being selected. I think it was for the Scottish Schools'. Is that in general something that you find quite stressful, like the selection procedures?
- K Eh, pressure to get selected, especially when you are doing the times but you're not getting to run, so yeah

- J How do you feel about that?
- K Oh I don't know because I'm actually, I'm used to it. I'm used to not getting selected, but I really like getting selected, it's just...
- J Do you feel that the selection procedures are fair?
- K Eh, I've no idea how they do it, but it's difficult not knowing what time they're looking for, maybe if they set times say 48.5 it'd be less stressful, but when you run, you try and run your best, you're not knowing what they're trying to select for, what times, and even if they're going to see your race, so
- J OK, anything else in this section?
- K The financial costs, yes, definitely. I'm so skint at the moment. I'm living off my parents. They're just helping me out with training or whatever
- J Is that something that you've always found quite stressful?
- K Yeah, I've never had the best financial instinct in the World
- J What about the timetabling of events. Is that ever something that's caused you stress?
- K Eh, I think so yeah, especially when you're, with some events when you have to go on the bus or whatever to the track right at the start of the day cos everyone else is going then, and your event is last and you're sitting there all day and you start off in your mind with one doubt and because you're down at the track you're seeing who's running or whatever, and you start to think of like, you've got hours and hours and hours just to start thinking, "He's here, he's going to beat me, he's here, Oh my....I'm sitting about, my legs are starting to go," and eh, if you start thinking about it too much, then you're finished before you even start the race. I like just getting to the track, 40 minutes before, warming-up, running and that's you
- J Any others?
- K The sacrificing of other activities. Like I said, I used to be a skier. I really enjoyed skiing. I used to go up to, up North every other week in the Winter and eh, away abroad, but I can't do both because I will mess my knees up, I will injure myself going skiing, so it's always something I want to get back to after athletics, when I'm older, but I really enjoyed skiing and I can't do it anymore
- J And that's quite stressful for you
- K Yeah. I can't, I like other sports as well. I want to do volley ball, I want to do tennis, but I can't without the fear of injury

J Sure. Any others?.....What about, em, environmental demands, like the weather conditions or the specifics of the actual track you're running on, or the venue?

K It's always deserted. Like at Linwood, there's hardly anyone there. Running on your own is really stressful because you've no one to run against, you've no one there to support you or whatever

J Is that something you experience during training?

K Yeah

J And how exactly is that stressful for you?

K Because there's no one there to support you, there's no one there to sort of run against, eh, it's just stressful because well, "Why am I doing this?" you start having doubts because there's no one there to say, "Oh you're running well, you're catching me"

J OK. Anything else?

K Not that I can think of at the moment, no

OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS:

J What about in general then? Do you feel that there are any sources of stress that you experience as an athlete that we haven't covered, that don't come under these sections?

K Lack of sleep. That's one of my main sources of stress

J In what way? Can you elaborate on that for me?

K I have a really strange sleeping pattern. It shifts about a lot. I do sleep a lot of the time and more often than not I'll be getting up and going straight to training, whether it's at 7 o'clock at night or 11 o'clock in the morning and eh, I've no idea why, just it feels so tired and so, I want to get it over and done with and if I'm doing a training session when I'm that tired I won't give it my all, I'll just, I'll get through it and just go home and go to sleep and eh, I feel like training sessions like that are just a big loss

J So what is it specifically about that that causes stress for you?

K Eh, I think it's because I know the training session's going to be more uncomfortable than it would be otherwise. It's just going to be a lot harder, it's going to be, I'm going to feel tired all the way through it and I'm not going to enjoy it at all

J Right OK. We've certainly got a lot of sources of stress here then that's some really good information thanks, anything else at all?

K Not that I can think of

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

J I'd like to move onto the very last section then. In this section, I'm interested in finding out if there's anything about you as a person which might influence the stress that you experience. As I'm sure you're aware, generally different people experience stress to different degrees and that's often due to differences in obviously personality, coping skills, so I'm just wondering if you can draw upon any of these sorts of things, em, about you that you think may influence the stress that you experience

K Eh.....

J How would you describe your personality in general?

K Eh, well disorganised, yes, that helps me before races quite often you know, because I'm too busy being disorganised and being last minute to worry about the race

J So it's almost like you're procrastinating?

K Eh, yeah, I'm just shunting the thought of racing out my mind and replacing it with other just silly things, or not having time to think about racing

J So that you're running about quite quickly before the race, not having time to sit down and actually think about it?

K Yeah, which is, I think it's a good thing. Almost all day I'll be talking to people like all my pals and people before the race as well, like anybody I'm going to race against I'll chat and joke and stuff with them and that helps you take your mind off the race

J OK are there any other aspects about you that you think perhaps cause you stress?

K Eh, I think disorganisation's a bit to do with me procrastinating. I don't want to, I don't want to do this race, that leads onto sort of leaving my warm-up till too late. Sometimes that can be detrimental cos I won't warm-up properly and I'll get a niggle or whatever

J And that then results in stress?

K Yes

- J So in a way then, your lack of organisation can in one sense....
- K In one sense helps, in one sense hinders, yeah
- J What about the fact that you said that, when we were talking about how important athletics was to you, you sort of said that it was 45% of your life, it was the number one at the moment. Do you think that the fact that it is so important to you can then cause you more stress?
- K Eh, yeah I think so because, because this is what I do. If I'm not good at this then I'm not good at anything, if that makes sense
- J Sure, sure
- K But I know that I can in the sort of long term do other things and whatever, but at the moment it is, it is my life at the moment
- J Can you think of anything else?
- K No
- J How do you think the stress that you experience compares with other athletes?
- K I think, well I've seen a wide spectrum of athletes stress wise. There's people that'll just, they won't utter a single word, like for hours before the race or whatever and if you try and crack a joke with them you just don't get any response, you just get a blank face and eh, there's others that you'll just sit about with at the start of the race and just, have a laugh, just as if it was your best pal or whatever, eh, I think I'm pretty laid back as an athlete, having seen all these different people, but I still stress, I still stress
- J Any other aspects of you that you think might impact on your stress?
- K Not that I can think of, no
- J OK, that's been very helpful. That's just about all I need to ask you, but before we finish, do you think there are any important factors we failed to discuss in relation to your experiences of stress?
- K No, no
- J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?
- K Eh, get an automatic typer!
- J Yeah, very, very helpful, yep. I'll enquire about that. OK well thanks very much for your time G, much appreciated and lots of luck for next season
- K Oh no problem, yes thank you

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

LEAH

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J First of all R, I'd like to thank you for taking part in this investigation and I'd also like to take this opportunity to advise you that everything you say here will be entirely confidential.

J So before we actually start discussing athletics, I'd like to get some background information on you. I wonder if you could maybe start by telling me a bit about yourself, your age, where you live and what it is you do.

R I'm 21 years old and I live in Peterborough in Eambridgeshire and my job is editorial assistant for the Running Fitness Magazine and it's a full-time job, 9.00 – 5.30, Monday to Friday.

J OK, who do you live with just now?

R Eurrently I live with my parents and I'm looking for a place of my own.

J OK, so apart from athletics and your job, what other things do you do with your time?

R They're mainly outdoor based. I do like sport a lot, um, mountain biking, um, I do some swimming. I do like socialising but I'm very lazy when it comes to organising things because I did a lot of it when I was younger and so if people organise it I'm fine, otherwise I just can't be bothered organising anything to go out.

J How would you describe your social life?

R Lacking

J Really?

R Very lacking, but that is partially through choice and now it's a case of I've got to get a balance in my life.

J And you say it's lacking. How do you feel about that?

R Sorry?

J How do you feel abut your lack of social life?

R Um, I don't know whether I notice it more because of the way this year's gone. Um, before when the athletics was going well it didn't really matter cos you knew basically it was worth it and then when your athletics goes bad you suddenly realise how important your friends are. When things go wrong you realise how much you should put in, you know, try and get the balance, um,

right so you see your friends, but you also do your training and you don't jeopardise one for the other.

J So how did that imbalance come about? Was that connected with training?

R The imbalance was with my training. Formerly I lived in Elie which is a place in the middle of nowhere. After I got back from school I'd go training and by then it was too late to go out. Well, to go anywhere decent you had to travel and I couldn't be bothered. I was just too tired and couldn't be bothered travelling and through that I lost quite a lot of friends. I just couldn't put in the effort or didn't have the time to eh, do all the social activities that they did.

J So did you feel then that perhaps you'd sacrificed a bit too much for the sport at that time?

R Um, I'd say no I didn't. I regret, I regret losing some of the friends that I did, but I don't feel I sacrificed a lot, but I'm starting to feel hang on I'm at the age now where I can't sacrifice necessarily as much as I did because I've got obviously the job and people I think nowadays, the friends at the age I am now, they're too much, you need them, you need them for other things in your life, you can't just push them away.

J Sure. OK, you mentioned that this season hasn't gone well, that's obviously going to be an important part of this interview to find out about that, we'll come back to that later. I wonder if first of all, we'll actually move onto talking about athletics. Now you're a 400 metres sprinter aren't you? Have you always done that event?

R No, um, I've done it since '96, I think. I'm just trying to workout. Since the first age that you could do it which is 17. Am I right?

J I think so yeah

R Up until then I went through the ranks doing 200's and then 300's mainly and then now I'm on 400's.

J I wonder if you could describe your training structure for me, like, do you have a training group, how many coaches do you have and perhaps if you could tell me about how often you train as well.

R Um, training wise during the winter, up until the end of April I was training with a group regularly. I travelled to Loughborough which is about an hour and a quarter journey twice three times a week to train with a group and see my coach. Um, I only have the one main coach, but I have several links off him who I use as advisors and who help me in other areas of my running. I don't really think it's a good idea having just the one coach and just relying on them.

J How would you describe the relationship you have with your coach?

- R I think it's been good, um, I've only been with him for two years, up until then I was coached by my Dad and my Dad only coached me so I mean I'm not an athlete who needs the one to one focus but I didn't know how to react if I was having a problem....do I keep going to him when he's got other athletes about him.
- J Right. And how do you get on with the rest of the training group?
- R Fine, yeah fine, it's good.
- J And you say that you used to get coached by your Dad. What made you move on?
- R My Dad felt that he'd taken me as far as he could, um actually two years prior to me actually moving on. I don't like to move onto a coach just for the sake of moving onto a coach. I like to know that that coach will offer me what I want and that we will get on - that he sees me as an athlete and not just as another runner. And I spoke to my Dad, I found my current coach, spoke to my Dad about it and he, you know, he was all for it.
- J OK, and how often do you train?
- R Depends on the time of the season. This year I have overtrained, I've done too much. I think it's been a case over the last few years where I've done that. That's not been my coach's fault. That's because, um, that's through my own, I suppose my own determination and arrogance! I wanted, you know, I've always pushed myself a bit harder and I always do push myself. To answer your question, the number of times I train, it can range between 6 and 11 times a week.
- J So sometimes you were training more than once a day?
- R Yeah, depends on the time of year
- J I wonder if you can think back to when you first got involved with the sport then and maybe tell me a bit about how it was you got involved in the sport.
- R Um, when I was at infant school, junior school, I was always active – sports days, loved them. Um, my brother who's 3 years older than me, when he was at college, um, did the school cross country. Mum and Dad asked if he wanted to join the running club. Rather than leave me out they asked if I wanted to join one too and I said yes, so I joined my local club in the cross country season and done it ever since.
- J So it was your decision then, it wasn't something you were pressured into?
- R Um, it was my decision. I wasn't pushed into it. My parents would never push me into anything

- J OK, I wonder if you could maybe talk me through your progression then from the start of your athletic career.
- R Up until about '94 I did sort of train and it was a case of run round the school field at lunch-time. Um, in that period of starting secondary school until like March '94 I did two English Schools' cross countries and an English Schools' athletics over 200 metres, all of which I ran absolutely appalling through. After the second English Schools' which was cross country which was, what '94, I decided I could do a lot better than that and thought "right I'm going to train" and I coached myself for the rest of that season. Um, and I came away with 5th in the English Schools' in the 200 metres. From that moment I've never really looked back. It's been progression onto forth in the English Schools for 300 for the two years after that and third in the Nationals. Um, forth in the 400 in '97 and 4th in the AAA's and in '98, I won the Nationals 400 metres and came forth in the AAA's, again.
- J What would you say has been your main achievement so far?
- R My main achievement I feel is my English Schools. I mean representing my country has been really good, but I think the English Schools in '98 was probably a big marker 'cos for about three years running I'd been forth.
- J How did it make you feel then to have the honour of competing for your country?
- R It was a really good honour and I mean on the first occasion when I did get selected it was a surprise, so although in '97 which was when I got my first International vest, it was a dream, it was an aim to eventually run for my country but I didn't expect it that year.
- J What sorts of emotions did you feel then?
- R Excited, I wasn't nervous but I was excited. Initially I was only selected for the relay and then when we got to Germany where the match was we were told, there's a 400 metres guest race and did I want to do it and I did, and I ran a PB, so yeah it was brilliant.
- J How satisfied would you say you are with your achievements so far?
- R I'm pleased with my achievements, but I'm noticing that obviously the sport and my event is moving on big time so my achievements are sort of sinking back into the background so then, I look at it in different ways. Quite a lot of people have never achieved what I've achieved and they can't take that away. So I feel I can achieve more and I want to achieve more. I just feel like it's just going to be a blip and hopefully, you know, there's going to be more to come and sort of bring me back to where I want to be, if I decide that, you know, that's really what I want.
- J I'd like to talk a little bit now about your goals and targets in athletics. I wonder if you could tell me a bit about the goals that you'd set for this season.

R Um, my goals for this season would be the European Under 23's. I knew I was capable of getting there but I knew also that there was probably at least 6 others that were capable of going and after last season's performance, I probably had a hard task. But I believed that I could do it and training indicated the same. Time wise I haven't achieved what I wanted or what my aim was which I needed to get to the Europeans. Um, and I did set myself target times as to how many races I had to do in a certain time, what percentage of my races had to be done in this time, so um progression, goals and aims for this season have just sort of gone out of the window.

J How do you feel about that then that things haven't gone so well?

R Um, it happens, I am disappointed but then, um, I think I'm maybe reacting differently than I would've done as recently I went through, um, some personal stuff last year when, you know, someone close to me was running and then didn't know whether he could run again anymore and it made me realise that running is not the be all and end all, so in one way I'm probably taking it better having been through that than not having gone through it at all.

J I wonder if you could maybe tell be a little bit more about what happened last year and how that made you feel and how you think that that's linked to what's happened this year.

R Um, well Last May, 2000, um we had the Eambridgeshire county Ehamps and my boyfriend won the 800 metres. Two days later we were down the track and we were training and I'd just finished a rep when someone came legging it over to me to tell me that my boyfriend had collapsed and he was on the track being resuscitated. He'd stopped breathing and basically he was completely unconscious. When I went over it just shocked me 'cos he was like convulsing, he didn't know anything, where he was, um, he was dribbling his eyes were glazed and it basically freaked me. He spent a month in hospital having tests, on several occasions his heart actually stopped and on one occasion it started on its own and another occasion it had to be started. He spent two weeks in Ehapworth Hospital where he had a defibrillator fitted and during that time it just made me realise running wasn't everything, at least I was going into races last year thinking, "well at least I'm running" and I feel I was in the end started using it as an excuse. I just couldn't hype myself up for the races, I was just being in one way lazy.

J OK, I'd like to now talk about the problems that you've encountered whilst trying to achieve your goals. I know you've touched upon this at several points so far in this interview I wonder if you could maybe discuss this with me in a bit more detail.

R What as in sort of tiredness and things or just.....

R Um, I don't know whether it's because I've overtrained, I've just had too many symptoms. I think I've had a lot of symptoms of overtraining. I mean my training was going really well. I was flying. Basically I has so much

hope and belief in myself up until about the 21st of April, um, the end of my third week in Los Angeles. My last week in America...

J Was that a warm-weather training trip you were on?

R Yes, Yeah, sorry warm-weather training. Um, my last week in America I did a 200 metres race and I always open up the season with a 200 rather than my, sort of, stronger event of the 4 and my time wasn't great but I thought, "oh well it is the season beginning. I've come off really hard training, I've been running well." And then a few days later I did a 400 and things just didn't look right. Um, when I got back from America about a week and half afterwards I went down with depression. Um I woke up one morning and I had to go to work, knew I had to go to work, I just didn't know how to do it. I knew I had to get ready for work, just didn't know how to go about it. Um....

J What do you think was causing that?

R I don't know whether eventually.... I had time to relax in.. In America I had time to relax, you know, you were doing your training but then the rest of the time was your own time. I don't know whether it's, um, partially my body sort of coming down from the stress of last year, coping with last year and suddenly realising, you know, it had just taken it's toll. I know several times I got sprung by my coach doing something extra in the gym because I was bored, so yeah, I think you know another thing's overtraining.

J Uhuh. What about the depression, what have you linked that to?

R I think..I...overtraining. I had symptoms of overtraining, I had, um, weight loss which was....I'd lost half a stone since last October and then I lost several more pounds when I was in America, basically which I shouldn't have done. I think my weight went too low.

J And how did you feel about that?

R Um, thing is I liked my weight when, you know, when it was low, but then I didn't like it affecting my running. Um, whether that was one of the factors.... I didn't menstruate for over 11 weeks. I'm not regular but it didn't come for 11 weeks and then I had a spotting for about 2 or 3 weeks later after my first one, after that long period. Um, that's about it really.

J Have you encountered any other problems during your athletic career?

R What injury wise?

R I've been very lucky. I haven't really had the injuries that a lot of athletes have had. I've had the odd niggle which you'd expect, especially when you're coming off demanding training. Um, my worst injury was probably a slight hamstring pull em 8 weeks before the English Schools in '98, but I've come through that and I've been very lucky.

- J Sure yeah. How would you describe your health in general?
- R Um, I'd say I'm really fit. I wouldn't say I'm healthy. If I was healthy then I reckon I wouldn't be running the way I am. I wouldn't be conscious of my weight all the time. I wouldn't be suffering, at the stage where I'm really really low with depression or something. If I didn't suffer that I'd say I was healthy. I don't think to be honest I am.
- J How far are you off your targets then this season in comparison to what you would've liked to run?
- R Um, I'm extremely far off, if I can use that expression. Um, I'm nowhere near what I should be running. Nowhere near what I should be running potentially, um last year, even though last year wasn't the best year that I've had. Um, time wise I'm probably, well I am 3 seconds what I have been running, 4 seconds off what I definitely can run and 5 seconds off what potentially I can do. That's for 400 metres and 200 and 100 vary accordingly.
- J OK. What sort of action have you taken to help you sort this out?
- R Um, I started seeing a sport psychologist in Jnuary and I've got an advisor who's been involved in my training since '98. Um, he's been helping me sort myself out. He's got contacts but, um, that he's also using so that if I need tests and things that they can done.
- J And how helpful has this help been?
- R It's very good to know that I've got the support because sometimes when I'm going through a low patch sometimes I'm sitting there thinking, "right nobody really cares, it doesn't really matter" but I suddenly realise that people do care, people do believe in me, and this guy believes in me and I have a lot of faith in him.
- J So we've been talking about the problems that you've experienced this year, you've put a lot of it down to the fact that you feel you've overtrained. Are there any other reasons that you feel could contribute to it?
- R I think maybe it's due to, um, my body telling me look, it's had enough. As I said earlier, I haven't had the injuries that a lot of athletes have had and I'm very very lucky, I wouldn't want them, but, it means I haven't had the forced break so basically apart from the break that I have between the summer and the winter season um...
- J How long does that tend to be?
- R It varies between, it depends how demanding my summer has been and how well it's gone. Normally if it's gone well then, you know, it can be from anything from about 3 weeks, 2, 3, 4 weeks, um but, it does depend how my summer's gone.

- J I'd like to move on now to talking about your reasons for taking part in athletics. I wonder if you can tell me a bit about that.
- R Um, what how I started or just.....?
- J Why it is that you do the sport
- R I think, I mean, to start off with I enjoyed it. I wasn't great at it. I was always beaten...
- J What was it about it you enjoyed?
- R I just enjoyed I think competing, running with people and just that, I suppose having the competitive edge. The reason I continued probably was because I became good, um, I was achieving things which probably kept me in it. I can't say whether I'd be in the sport if I hadn't achieved what I did achieve, but then I wouldn't say I'd be out the sport either, if that makes sense.
- J Yep, sure.
- R Um, when you...I feel a lot of people drop out around the age of 17/18 – basically they find there's other things in life - and I think maybe the thing that kept me going was one: I lived in a dead-end place, basically if you didn't run you wouldn't have a life anyway because there's nothing to do! Em, and secondly I was good, I achieved things nobody else probably had achieved, especially in the area that I lived. Em, I felt probably at the time I, this might contradict what I said earlier, jeopardised friendship for my running and I felt well I might as well make it worth while, I might as well make it worth while so I can turn round in a few years time and say, "OK , I lost it all. I haven't got them as friends but I have achieved this."
- J You mentioned quite a lot about achievement then, how important is it to you that you achieve in athletics?
- R It used to be very important to me. I wanted, you know, I was hungry for it. Fortunately I have lost my hunger for the winning. I want the hunger there cos I know that it's sort of..., hopefully it will come back, but I can't find it at the moment. Achieving at the moment, I'm more interested in, um, in one way, reaching my goals that I know that I can do, rather than say win a race, because I think If I aim for my goals, one I'll be happy and then everything else can take its own course.
- J My next question's aimed at finding out how important athletics is to you. Now the way that you've spoken it does sound that it is very important to you. Just to get, I suppose a more specific idea here, I like you to imagine that your life is a cake. How big a piece is the athlete part of you?
- R Um currently, um, I'd say it's probably a third. Um maybe bigger than a third. It's very hard to picture. Up until last year it was probably, if I do it

in percentage wise, probably 95% of my life. This year um, as a result of things that did happen last year, um, I think it's, I don't know, I think it's probably, you know, half, third/half. And I think it's partially because of the way my season's gone.

J Right, do you feel like you've distanced yourself from it?

R The hunger's not there so basically um, it's not making a big part of my life. However, the training is. In one way for me this year, the training is completely different event, sport whatever you want to call it – discipline to my athletics racing.

J OK, and what makes up the other parts then would you say?

R Probably, well, in importance wise, probably, um, financially trying to support myself, um, and trying to get some balance in social life back.

J Would I be right then in saying that, you said that, last year it was maybe about 95% and this year you've said maybe a third to a half. Given what you've said previously is that due to what you experienced last year with your boyfriend then, you've realised that perhaps it's not really as important as you used to think it was?

R Up until last year running was be all and end all for me, if I wasn't going to make it to running I didn't really see what else there was for me out there. Last year made me realise, "well hang on I'm lucky for running", and then I thought to myself...I wanted to make it as an athlete, I wanted to, I had Olympic dreams, I wanted to, I wanted to run championships, I wanted all of it. Then last year it was like, well, if I don't achieve that, no, you've still got to have a life out of it and could you cope with that? And, I got to the stage where, at least I'm running. I may come off the track last, I may come off with a disappointing time, but at least then I'm on the track for the next race and I can run.

COMPETITIVE STRESS:

J I'd like to move on now to the second part of this interview and discuss your experiences of stress as an athlete. Now obviously we've already covered quite a lot of this, but we'll maybe go into it in a bit more detail now. One problem though when talking about stress is that different people have got different perceptions of what stress actually is, so to make sure we're on the same wavelength I'd like to give you a definition here. So I'd like you to think of stress as those occasions where you have felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation which has had important consequences for you. OK? So, do you understand that all right?

R Yep.

- J Excellent
- J I'm interested in hearing your minor sources of stress as well as the major ones, so you know, forgetting your safety pins or anything really that springs into your mind as having been stressful. So to help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, we'll split our discussion into three different sections. These sections are the areas from which stress might arise in the sport, there are obviously other ones but...I'd like to talk about stress arising from competition, arising from training, and also arising from the demands and specific features of the sport. OK?
- J First of all we'll talk about competitive sources of stress. I'd like you to think back now to a competition which you found stressful and you can remember well. To help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, I'd like you to go through the different stages of the competition in your mind in as much detail as possible. Now you might want to think about the days leading up to the event, if there was anything stressful during that time, during the competition itself, and maybe afterwards depending on how you felt then. So to trigger your memory, if you could go through in your mind all the things you did step by step. You've got, you know, transport to the venue, registration, warming-up, getting into your blocks, hearing the gun, all that sort of stuff. Maybe if you can remember how you felt as physically and emotionally as you experienced these things. OK, so just take your time and when you're ready.....
- R This is quite a hard one seeing as, the way my season's gone so far, I'm not exactly, I haven't got my hunger so I'm not actually getting stressed for competition, um, which is probably one of my problems. Um, going back, ever since I was doing the English Schools I've been taught how to try and control my nerves and things so OK I've been nervous but I've never really got over-stressed by competing. Um...
- J Can you think of a particular event?
- R Several occasions, it won't be one particular event, but I've been taught, um...When I had my first international in Germany and I was, um, given the chance to run a sort of non-scoring 400 metres. Now I hadn't really used blocks and so I was intending to sort of just start in the normal down start. I was in lane 8 and there were 7 other German athletes inside me. I didn't know "on your marks", I didn't know what any of the commands were which I found quite amusing but quite worrying as well, seeing as it was my first GB 400 metres race and another thing that worried me was they suddenly turned round and said I had to use blocks. I didn't know my settings and I didn't know eh basically very much about using blocks at all. I found that amusing although I was quite nervous with it being my debut.
- J How did that make you feel going back? What sorts of emotions did you feel when you heard that you had to use blocks and didn't really know what to do?

- R I was surprised seeing as I was on the track ready to start and everybody else was standing there ready to start and then they suddenly said, “you’ve got to use blocks” and I was like “Oh!” Um, but, it was a little nerve racking but I ran a PB so obviously I didn’t let it affect me too much.
- R Um, another occasion would be probably English Schools ’98, um, 8 weeks before hand I had an injury, a hamstring pull and I wasn’t able to run for 4 weeks so the day of the English Schools was the first day I had the opportunity to actually compete. So my aim was to win a medal as it had been for the previous several years, um, I knew I was capable, um I was in lane 7 for my heat and I came second in my heat, the second fastest time out of the 2 heats. When it came to the final, for some unknown reason I was put in lane 8. Now that did freak me out a little bit because I was like “well how did they come to that conclusion?” I was probably wound up about it for a couple of hours and then people managed to calm me down and say hang on well, you know, “you’re just wasting energy, calm down, you can do it” and, you know, things were fine on that still.
- J How did that make you feel? What exactly was it that was stressful for you about that?
- R Lane 8?
- J Yeah
- R Because I, at the time I didn’t think I was going to be in with a good opportunity. I knew I was capable of a medal, but all my main rivals were inside me. OK, being an athlete, it shouldn’t make any difference but at that stage it was like, “hang on a minute, I’ve just run the second fastest time and I’m in lane 8!” It didn’t make sense.
- J What sorts of emotions were going through your mind when you found out that you had lane 8?
- R I was more concerned with how they’d come to that conclusion, um, seeing as normal procedure is like fastest 4 get in lanes, sort of, 2 to 6, or whatever. After a couple of hours, I think it’s just in one way the initial surprise, I was fine, everything went well and, in the end it didn’t really bother me.
- J Was there anything at stake for you then when you found out you had lane 8?
- R At stake, as in...?
- J Did you feel that there was anything that you could lose by being put in lane 8?
- R I thought may be I could, sort of, lose the race as a result of, um, running it, cos I hadn’t had the competitions up until then because of my injuries and I’d found, the heat seemed quite hard, as your first races generally are, but it felt hard and I was worried about how I was going to feel in the final – but if I feel

like that in the final I'm going to probably, you know, I'm going to struggle. Fortunately it turned out for the best as I, you know, I did run my own race and I had people chasing me which put price to them.

J So at the time it was like a fear of not achieving your target then?

R I thought maybe I could achieve, I knew I could achieve a medal, even probably from lane 8. I just thought it would make it harder for me and I thought, it just seemed that things were going against me. It was only for a couple of hours, an hour and a half that I felt like that, until I found out which way was the procedure. At the time it just felt like everything was against me.

J What other sorts of competitive pressures do you experience?

R Um, when I've been in a race, um, it's trying to run the right race, um you have several plans in your head of how you're going to run it and it's just trying to get the race right, sort of, on the day, um you don't necessarily go too fast and you can change the pace and you have got, you know, you've got it strong, you're not going to get mentally distracted, um....

J So what exactly is stressful about that for you?

R I think it's the fact that all the preparations you do for it you know you're in the form and you can run well and then suddenly you go into the race and you can lose it within 60 seconds. In 60 seconds you can go from sort of knowing that you can win it to losing, um, all within 60 seconds, basically because, um factors get to you, I don't know...

J What sorts of factors get to you?

R Well if you lose your concentration, lose your focus so you're aware of the weather, your lane draw may get to you. Thing is over the years I've actually learned, it doesn't bother me.

J Anything else?

R Um, I think what also made '98 stressful was because it was my last year and, um, I wanted to sort of go out on a high, um it was a parallel from '96 English Schools when I was in the 300 metres and coming into the home straight I was actually winning it and about 20 metres before the line, 10 metres before the line I was actually winning by over 20 metres and then in the last 5 or 6 metres I lost complete control of my body and my three main rivals overtook me. Now had I run that with my head rather than my heart I would've won it, so in one way that carried across into my '98 run because I came into the home straight slightly behind my rival and I thought to myself, "can I kick? Do I kick?" cos I knew I was in medal position, "as long as I get a medal," and I had that in my head, I didn't know what to do.

J Sure. And how did it make you feel to be beat by your rivals?

- R Um, I was gutted cos I knew I could win it, but then I'd come 4th the previous year so I was in one way coming 4th again.. [TAPE ENDS]
- J Are there any other sources of competitive stress you can tell me about?
- R Um, I think it bothers me what people think of me, um, seeing as people always like to come up to you and go, "oh you used to be good." You hear it now, "oh so and so used to be good, where are they now?" Or, "They're not as good as they were when they were younger." And I don't want to be, I don't want to be someone who used to be good, I want to be someone who is.
- J How does it make you feel when you hear people saying things like that?
- R Um, it annoys me in one sense because they don't know necessarily what the person's been through so as far as I'm concerned, that person can have viable reasons either for giving up the sport or for having several seasons or a season where it's just been really bad, Um, if an athlete comments eh, says something, "Oh the reason I've run bad is because of this," it's often seen as an excuse, not as a sort of viable reason.
- J How often would you say that you tend to worry about what other people think?
- R Um. This season, not really at all, um, I think, it goes through, it comes when I feel really low in myself, just generally when I'm, I suppose I'm on my own, when I'm going through say a depression stage when you need somebody there and you really need someone to say, "Oh you're good" or "it's fine", you need the words of encouragement. Um, it's nice to have someone there who can believe in you.
- J You mentioned then, you worry about em other people perceiving that you're not as good an athlete as you were in the past. Are there any other things you worry about that people may think about you?
- R Em, I worry sometimes that people think the reason I'm running bad is because basically I've found other people in my life and not training hard enough which is complete the opposite truth. Unfortunately, I think I train too hard. Um, I'd rather someone came up to me and said, "you train too hard" than, "you don't train enough." That in one way makes me feel better.
- J Are there any other things you worry about people thinking?
- R Not really, um, it's just basically their perception of me as an athlete. I don't mind if I lose and people comment on it, that doesn't bother me. It's their perception of me as an athlete. I want them to see that I am a good athlete or that you know I am competitive, I can be in the race. OK, I may not win all the time, but I'm not a bad, you now, it doesn't bother me necessarily in losing, but I'm going to put up a fight and they know when I'm running basically I will give it really what I've got.

- J OK, any other sources of competitive stress?
- R Not really, well, not that I can think of straight off just now. I mean you have the basic ones but, like, you know, the weather conditions and things, but...
- J In what way does the weather
- R Just the way the weather is whether it's going to affect, especially if you're aiming for a target time and the weather's not great and you're like "well I'm not going to really achieve it in this weather", but ...
- J How does that make you feel?
- R That can be annoying, especially if the next day it's really good or the day before it's really good, but, em, over the years I've actually learned, you know, "I can't control it why bother trying?"
- J How do you feel physically before a race?
- R Um, depends on the competition, the type of competition, whether it's like the AAA's or just a home match type thing. At the moment this year it's been, "just get it over with, I can't be arsed", em, but, previous years it's been focused, I can be focused, well d' you want a good competition it's generally, you know, you're focused, nobody else bothers you, you're feeling very, I don't know, just feeling very good in yourself, basically you're all there. On a bad day for me I'm unfocused, can't be bothered, um wanting to get it over with, feeling really lethargic and tired, you name it, that's being me.
- J And is that something that you would say is a source of stress for you?
- R I think it is, sometimes you can feel tired and run well or you can over do it in your warm-up or something, it's just trying to get that balance right in your warm-up and in your racing. Em sometimes, you get to the stage where you think you know yourself well and so that helps your stress and then you go through a phase when you think "Oh hang on a minute, that doesn't seem right".
- J How prepared do you feel before a competition?
- R Em training wise? Training wise, em these last couple of years I'd say, well, I'd say last year in particular, I was just before competition thinking, "Have I done the right training? Have I done, sort of, the right amount? Have I done too much? Have I not done enough? Have I done the right amount of this type of training – speed work," em, it's always crossed your mind when you're warming-up or something, "Have you done it correctly?"
- J And is that something that can cause stress for you?

- R It concerns me and I think if it doesn't necessarily act as a stressor, I think it acts as a distracter, em, it basically distracts you from what you should be doing from where the work or from where your mind should be focused.
- J And how do you feel when that happens?
- R How do I feel? I get annoyed with myself when that happens but I try and control it, I try and bring my mind back to what I'm doing, em...
- J You mentioned at the start of this section that probably one of your problems is the fact that you've lost your hunger this year. Is that something that you would say has caused stress for you?
- R It's a stressor in the fact that I know how good I have been in the past and what I am capable of. That in itself is probably quite stressful or annoying, um, um,..
- J It's alright, take your time
- R Sorry, it's just trying to think, I'm trying to, sort of, go over the questions, I forget things easily.
- J Really just trying to get an idea of the emotions that you feel when...how it makes you feel, the fact that you've lost your hunger this season.
- R This year, I suppose it has bothered me, but I realised, as I say, it's not be all and end all
- J What about when it first started to happen before you'd started to cope with it?
- R I think it had, I think it had sort of built itself in me before I was aware that it'd done it, um, I think last year had a big knock on effect as to the way I'm feeling now, so I'm not really, I can't really think when it started.
- J Are there any other sources of competitive stress you can tell me about or is that just about it?
- R It's just trying hard to remember. Um, I think you, sort of deal with, you get slight nerves and things but I just seem to be dealing with it, learned to deal with it. As long as I know what I'm doing and how I have to go about doing it then I'm fine. If I don't know those things then that, that kind of stresses me out.
- J Can you think of a time when that's happened?
- R Your first AAAs, for example, or you're not used to something different like the reporting system or you're no sure where the reporting tent is, em, when you're made to go on sort of World detours just to go to the toilet, things like that. That just stresses me out because I just think it's a waste of time, but other than that I think I'm all right.

J OK. Do you feel ready to move onto the next section now, or is there anything else you can add to that?

R Not at the moment, I don't think.

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

J OK. Let's move on now to sources of stress that you may experience during training. I'd like you again to think back in as much detail as possible to stressful training sessions you've had and try and isolate for me what you've found stressful. From my experience of being an athlete, sources of stress during training vary according to the time of year. For example, I would say that the training I do in the outdoor season is in some ways more stressful than the training I do in the indoor season. Would you agree with that? Is that something that you feel as well?

R I do agree with that, um, basically because I don't do the indoor athletics, um, my main focus is outdoors. So during the winter I've got really nothing to prove I've just got to um continue with my training and train hard and aim to achieve target times.

J You might want to discuss with me sources of stress that you experience during different phases of your training then. So, again if you take a little bit of time to think back and when you're ready tell me about the sources of stress that you experience during training.

R During training, eh, for me it's normally the first couple of reps just to get into the session knowing that you can do it um, and but it's often the travelling to training, considering I live an hour and a quarter away from my coach and I was going up there three times a week, to go up there, have a hard session and then come home, um, especially like this past season when I used trains to travel and trains have just been diabolical, so that is very stressful and it makes me very tired and I think it's just builds up onto my training.

J Does it? And in turn does that cause further stress?

R You start, it starts affecting other aspects of your life cos you start feeling tired and then you're training through tiredness when maybe you should be resting. You feel you should be training so I train and then you train harder and then you're just going in one big vicious circle, and you don't give you body enough time to recover so you get ill or the prospect of injury increases.

J OK, so what other sources of stress do you experience during training then?

R Em, I can't really say I find training stressful, I really do enjoy it. I think it's been a part of my life, I've got really nothing to prove in it. I know I train

hard and I achieve what I need to achieve in the training. You have the odd session where I'm, I run badly or I perform badly, but generally that picks up.

J OK, Em, any other sources of stress?

R Em, it's not so much during training, but before training I find a couple of hours before hand if you've got a hard session I just sit and ponder about it and wonder whether I'm actually going to achieve, achieve and do and complete the session. I've been good, I've never actually pulled out a training session, um...

J What stressful emotions do you experience?

R I just sit, I just start feeling tired and I think it's all in my mind, um, cos I know I've got this hard session coming but once I get going I'm fine about it. Training honestly doesn't stress me out.

J OK that's fine, don't worry about it. Do you have any sort of particular kind of session that you dread?

R Um, not really, I like to, when I finish a session I like to know that I've done a session, um, which isn't always a good idea. Um, I'm very bad when it comes to eh, I'm very bad when it comes to doing speed sessions because obviously you don't always feel like you've done something and

J Is that stressful for you?

R I find that hard, I find that hard to take in. I'm starting to take it in more as I get older and more experienced, but, sort of earlier on I used to find it so hard. I used to have to sort of feel pain, I used to have to push myself to the limit.

J So in a way was it a feeling of, feeling that you hadn't really pushed yourself in training?

R Sometimes with speed sessions I just don't, or shorter sessions I don't feel like I have pushed myself even though I have, but it's been so much different this year since I've been training with a group cos up until then I was training on my own.

J OK, so you've talked about how you sometimes feel stressed before a session. Do you ever feel stressed after a session?

R No I'm normally hyper! Apart from the eh, apart from the expected eh feeling of tiredness and knackered, I'm generally more awake, I'm more lively, eh, generally lively, I can think better after a session, especially if it's been, you know, a good one.

J And you said that you got on well with your coach and your training partners, I don't suppose there would be any stress coming from those areas then?

R No, my coach has been really good with me which I think is due to the fact that he knows I'm prepared to work and I didn't go straight to him as a coach cos I actually knew him a year before I em, I moved to him. I liked his training and coaching techniques and I thought he could em, if he applied them on me or if I moved to him it would be a good choice.

J Do you always agree with his coaching techniques?

R Um, I do in the sense that if I have a question he allows me to ask it, um, I don't have to hold back, um I can put my ideas forward and say what changes I want to make if I or what changes I think could be made and he'll say, "This is a good idea or we'll try that, we'll try that", so it's very good, it is a two way communication process.

J Is there anything else then that you could add to this section or...?

R Um, I just think the reason I find, training's less stressful or not stressful is one because I want to do it, I'm not made to do it and I enjoy it and um apart from the racing, the training goes well for me, and I always just think of the outcome. I may not be racing well at the moment, but I know that the outcome will be good.

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

J I'd like to move on then to the other section I mentioned on sources of stress. This em section deals with the demands and specific features of the sport so I'd like you to think about if there's anything in particular about the sport itself which causes stress for you. Try to think as broadly as possible about the specific demands and sacrifices of the sport and organisational aspects such as team management, timetabling of events, formal procedures like registration, declaration, which may cause stress for you. Can you identify any of these sources of stress?

R Um, I've learned, I don't really get, I don't really get stressed by them, um, it's more, often it's more a case of getting annoyed by certain aspects. Um, team management I think, you've got to um, I'm at the age now, I'm old enough basically to know myself. Team management are there just to support so basically I've just learned you can't do much about it.

J Anything else?

R Um, I can't, time wise, I really, I enjoy it. Although it takes up a lot of my time, and as I mentioned earlier in the interview, um, it has meant I've had to sacrifice, sort of, going out sociably with my friends, um, but it hasn't bothered me cos not many people get to represent their country.

J True, yeah, that's very true. I guess in this section, there would be, you mentioned that it's an hour and a quarter journey to training so I guess that would take up a lot of time as well.

R Travelling does take up a lot of time, I don't mind doing it, but when um, when you've had a full day at work and then you're travelling up to training and you're getting back sort of at 11 o'clock, half eleven at night and even later because like your transport's been delayed or something then I find that very stressful cos I'm just very tired the next day.

J Are there any sort of problems that you experience relating to the financial costs of the sport?

R Um, it is financially demanding, but um I have received some sort of funding. But, I just don't think, um, I haven't done the performances to expect, um, to expect some financial assistance. When you need it um I don't think necessarily it's there, but then, um, and it seems too be the same people that get it and once they've got it they get more and more.

J How do you feel about that?

R It can be annoying. I'm not talking about myself here um when I say that, because on my performances I don't deserve any financial assistance. What I would prefer is more support from um members of the National team, um, and I'm talking like team management and coaches who seem, um, and some just seem to want to know you when you're running well. I do get annoyed with that and that does stress me out.

J Are there any others relating to this section that you can think of?

R Um, as long as I know what I'm doing. If I turn up at an event and I know where I'm meant to be, what I'm doing, what the procedures is and it's basically down to me then I'm fine, um, if I know that there's support there if I need the help then I'm basically happy, I can sort myself out and I can just run as clockwork.

OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS:

J That's us covered the three sections I mentioned then. I'm just wondering if there are any other sources of stress which we experience as an athlete which we haven't yet covered?

R Um, I can't really think of anything.

J You mentioned I think at the beginning of the interview there were times when you felt that you didn't get on well with your Mum. I'm just wondering if that impact, you actually said yourself that sometimes that can cause stress in your athletics would that be, would you like to talk about that?

- R Um yeah, em, I think when I was younger it didn't really make any difference to me. As I got older both my parents brought it to my attention that having, em, an argument or something, sort of, in the build up to a race was basically a waste of energy and wasn't worth it, but I don't know whether it's true or whether, um, it's just been said to me so often that in the end you start to believe it.
- J So is what you're saying then that sometimes you have an argument with your parents and if this is happening before an event, they say to you, "this really isn't doing you any good towards your performance" and then sometimes you start to believe that and you feel that that may impact on your performance, would that be right?
- R Yes, it may not actually impact on my performance, but I start feeling it would do, um, then it causes an even bigger row cos I turn around and sort of, I'm replying, you know....
- J Are there any other sources of stress you experience as an athlete?
- R No, not really, no, not that I can think of straight off, I think we've covered it.
- J OK that's been really helpful, thanks very much.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

- R I'd like to move onto the final section now. In this section I'm interested in finding out if there's anything about you as a person which might influence the stress that you experience. I mean different people experience stress to different degrees and this is due to differences in, as I'm sure you're aware, personality, coping skills etc. I'd like here to find out if there's anything about you that you feel impacts on the stress that you experience.
- R I have a very, I suppose, obsessive behaviour, in that if I want, um, do to something I basically do it tops, um, I want to achieve something in life and seeing as I'm probably not the most academic person, and running's been good, I've always wanted to make it in my running. Um, I always feel I have to do something well, and I always aim for perfection or high standards.
- J So in what way would you say that that's actually influencing the stress that you experience?
- R Um, I think it results in my training so if I'm not achieving in my racing, even though it can be known as a result of overtraining, I then go and train harder or I go and push myself harder or I go and do that bit extra, and it's just going round in one vicious circle.
- J OK that's interesting. Are there any other aspects of you that you believe impact on the stress that you experience?

- R Not that I can, not that I know of. Um, that's probably the main one, it's just my personality where I'm determined, I just want to achieve.
- J OK you've said that you can be quite obsessive at times, what other words would you use to describe your personality?
- R Um, obsessive's probably quite a strong word, um, but I just, I think I've been very focused and single minded on my running. Um, it's been like the be all and end all up until the last couple of years, and I think when you get people who speak to you who know what you use to be like and they're coming up and you're trying to explain to them, look you just want to have a season where you're enjoying it or you want to take time out, I find that very hard and stressful.
- J So is what you're saying is maybe, would you say perhaps you're that type of person that worries about what other people think and perhaps that that may influence the stress that you experience?
- R Um, I don't know whether I completely worry about what people think. I just like them to believe in me – that's probably the, eh, main factor – I want people to, sort of, be able to come to me and say, "Look you know you can do it, don't worry about this year, you know, there's plenty more time", but you rarely ever get that said and it's up to you or basically how you think and how people close to you think.
- J How do you think the stress you experience compares with other athletes?
- R Um, I don't know, um, I'm probably one of the luckiest cos I haven't suffered the injuries and illnesses that a lot of athletes have and I do, and I mean, I repeat that all the time. I'm lucky, touch wood, but, I'm probably, I'm going through probably what a lot of athletes have been through and I probably don't listen to advice of others as much as maybe I should do, um, and I guess a lot of athletes are the same; they don't listen to somebody or they don't believe something until it's happened to them.
- J What do you tend to do to deal with the stress that you experience?
- R Um, I've learned to, over the few years I've learned to handle it and unfortunately after last year I've developed the, I haven't got the hunger and I've got the "I Can't Eare Less" type syndrome, which probably, em, was brought on this season through having a couple of bad runs and then having depression. Um, I'm currently seeing a sport psychologist and he's helped me, sort of, boost, I suppose, boost the belief in myself and when I, I mean, when I went through with depression my coach was very good with me and, you know, I was coming out with all these questions, "what do you reckon, do you reckon I can make it?" and things. And he was like, you know, he was realistic and saying, "yes you can, your training proves it" sort of thing. I knew, or I felt he wasn't fobbing me off with just an answer to make me happy.

- J Is there anything else about your personality or the way you cope that might influence your stress levels?
- R Not really, I think I've learned just to basically take life less seriously. If things happen they happen, you know, you can direct them, but I don't think you can necessarily always control them, and I've got to learn really just to let go.
- J Well I'd like to wish you a lot of luck. I think really we've come to the end of this interview. I'd like to say it's been really interesting talking to you and thanks very much for contributing towards this. Before we come to a complete finish, do you think there are any important factors we failed to discuss in relation to your experience of stress?
- R I don't think there is, um, I think, you know, at the moment that we've covered a lot.
- J Any comments or suggestions about the interview?
- R I think it's been good, I do. Yeah, it's been good.
- J OK, thanks very much then R, thanks.

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

LAURYN

DEMOGRAPHICS:

- J OK S, to start with I wonder if you could tell me a bit about yourself, maybe your age, where you live and what it is you do.
- S Em, well I'm 23. I stay in Motherwell and I do 200 and 400's
- J Do you have a job just now or...?
- S Yeah I'm a forensic scientist with Strathclyde Police
- J What sorts of things does that involve?
- S Top secret! Em, I work in the biology department and we deal with em, mostly blood stained items, weapons and we go to court. It's top secret
- J What do you most enjoy about your job?
- S Em, I think the thing I enjoy most about it is it's going to be different every day, em, although it's got it's own routine it's always different, slightly different, em, and it's a bit different from other people's jobs, a bit more exciting. It's something not a lot of people get a chance to do, em, I've always liked science. It's what I really enjoy.
- J What sorts of things do you least enjoy about it?
- S Em, reporting, reporting cases and going to court. It's a bit stressful...but yeah, it's good. I like it.
- J What sorts of hours does it demand of you then, your job?
- S Em, usually do eh, 36 hours a week but we can do flexi time so that's good
- J It's fairly standard then 9-5 is it?
- S Well any time, starting anytime between half eight and finish up till six o'clock, start whenever you want, you've got flexi-time you can go home early
- J Apart from athletics then, what other things do you do in your free time?
- S I haven't got any free time. I like going shopping, em, just going out at weekends with my friends, seeing my boyfriend who I've been going out with for nine years, em, I like going to the cinema, em, just the usual, reading and watching TV, just anything that just gives me peace - sitting on my bum doing nothing!

- J OK, we'll start talking about athletics now. So, you said you do 2's, 4's and 8's.
- S Yeah, well 2's and 4's just now. I might be going to step up to 8's
- J Have you always sort of focused on those events or..?
- S Em, when I was younger I done sprinting and well I mostly focused more on 300's, em, that's where I earned my British vest, em, gradually I've moved up to 4's, em, I've dabbled a wee bit in 8's, but just now I'm concentrating on some 2's and 4's, the 2's to help my 4's speed at the moment and then hopefully if I move up to 8's, the 4 will help me then.
- J OK, can you describe your training structure for me then? What I mean by that is how many coaches you have, how many training partners you have, just the sort of set up.
- S Em, we train most nights, nearly every night, we get one night off...usually during, we train twice each day at the weekend, em, my training group consists of about 12, 13 athletes. Usually during Winter we're all together, but in the Summer sort of track season we split off into groups, em, my group is mostly, I train mostly with sprinters but because I'm doing 4's as well, eh, there's only a couple of us do 4's, but we do like long sessions with the middle distance group and sessions with sprinters and we've got some sessions ourselves, so it's sort of varied, very different which is good and there's roughly, there's two coaches, two main coaches and one other coach.
- J And how would you describe your relationship with your coach?
- S Em, I'd say my relationship with my coach is quite good. Em, it's gradually got better the more I've knew him, yeah, quite friendly, good friends with him, good friends with his family, em, and Frank as well. He's great, he's dead nice to get on with and easy to get on with , you can tell him anything, he'll just either tell you to shut up or whatever...
- J So what age were you when you first got involved with the sport?
- S Eh, I was 12, first year at school, em...
- J How did you get involved with the sport?
- S Eh, the school made me, with lots of persuasion they made me do the Eounty Sports, em, at the school trials they put me in for the 800. I done the sprints as well, but they put me in for the 800 because there was a girl who beat me at the time, em, and I went to the Eounty Sports and the Scottish Ehampion was there – I didn't know, I didn't have a clue about it at all at the time, em, and I ended up like I was second in the race. I beat the Scottish champion. The girl that was ahead of us was older than me, she was in the wrong race sort of thing, em, and at the time Tommy was coaching Tom McKean and they were down at the track watching

- J Tommy your coach?
- S Yep, they were down at the track watching the kids. I think he had a few kids in the races himself and approached my parents and asked them if I wanted to come along to train when I was younger, saying that he thought I had some potential, so I went along and I started ever since.
- J Can you briefly then talk me through your progression from the start of your career?
- S Em, when I started of at 12, em, I mostly done sprinting. Tommy had said at the time that he thought I'd be like a 4/8 sort of runner so he started me off sprinting as a kid to get my basic speed up, em, done sprinting, 1's and 2's. I was pretty, pretty good at them, em, I was in the Scottish team every year 'till I was about 16, 'till I stepped up to 300's so 1's and 2's was the best I'd done so far. I was better at the 2. I was picked mostly for that for selection, moved up to 3 when I was about 16 and then that's when Tommy took more to do with me as well, cos when I was younger it was more Tommy and some of the other kids sort of coaches doing games and things, eh, started doing 3's. I done them for three years as an under 17 and then gradually, well I went back down and done some sprinting, em, the next year cos I think I had an injury that year. I went back down, done some sprinting, em, after that was my first year that I started 4's, eh, and then ever since it's sort of been up and down 4's and 2's. I dabbled a bit in 8's 2 years ago.
- J What would you say has been your main achievement?
- S Em, probably when I was doing 300's, I was second two years in a row in the British Championships and the British Schools' Championships and I got a medal and a European record for 300, that's my favourite. I think I got sort of second, third fastest, fourth fastest all-time for the under 17
- J How did that feel when you achieved that?
- S Excellent, absolutely excellent
- J What sorts of emotions did you experience?
- S I think it broke my heart , eh, I was absolutely over the moon, really chuffed. I felt as if everything I'd been doing was worth it, sometimes you think, "Oh it's not, nothing is worth it," but I really was so happy. I think I was on a high for quite a while. I think I just kept running on a high, not running on anything else. I was really chuffed. It was excellent. It felt superb.
- J How satisfied are you with your achievements so far?
- S Em, I'd say I was satisfied. There's a few things I'm not satisfied with but I think they'll all come together. I think nothing satisfies you till you're...I

don't think anything, probably, everywhere you get, like even if you get to Olympic level you'll still not be satisfied, you'll want to go further again.

J I'd like to talk about your goals and targets in athletics. If we talk about this season that's just about finished, I wonder if you can tell me a bit about the goals that you had set for this season.

S Em, this season I was concentrating mostly on 4's. Em, my main goal was to get my time down for 2 and get my time down for 3 and then hopefully gradually get the time down for 4. Em, I wanted to run under 56 this year and I know I'm capable of it, em, and I achieved my personal best for 2 and 4 this year so I couldn't ask for anything else but I'm still not satisfied. I want to do better, but it will come

J I wonder if you could maybe think back to a time when you didn't achieve your goals and maybe if you could describe that for me

S Em, I think when I didn't achieve my goals, em, maybe last year, absolutely pissed off. I didn't consider giving up. I wasn't for giving up at all. I really just got really pissed off, sort of thought, "Am I going anywhere. Is it happening? What's going on here?" I was in a downer but I think I had a good Winter after it to try and pick me up, apart from an injury but.....you've made me sad now!

J In terms of level of difficulty, what sort of level would you say that you tend to pitch your goals at?

S Probably, probably I would say I'm aiming my goals at something I can reach at. They might be just ever so slightly beyond myself but I think I could reach them, but my coach says I could probably go beyond them. He says that all the aims I've set myself I could achieve, so...

J So as far as you're concerned if I was to say to you, on a scale of 1-5, how difficult do you think they are, what would you...?

S How difficult I set my goals? Em, probably pretty high, pretty, 4, 5 maybe

J Do you ever doubt your ability to meet your goals?

S Em, yeah probably. I'd say sometimes I have

J Is that like when you're setting them or is that something you experience before a race or...?

S I think maybe when you set them at the start of the season, just thinking ahead, em, you're always sort of excited about it and think, "Oh I can do that, I can do that, it's easy", but I think when things start going wrong and you start getting a bit down about things then you start going

J What problems have you encountered when you've been trying to achieve your goals?

S Em, probably the main problem has been injury, em, maybe family problems or work problems, maybe studying. Studying probably was a big part of my problems, em, during the last three years when I was at Uni., my season wasn't as good as I'd hoped, but I think I had just too much on my mind I think, em...

J Can you tell me a bit about the injuries you've had?

S I've not really had serious injuries, it's all been stupid, well not stupid injuries, but things that I can get over. When I was younger it was mostly like broken arms and things. Em, I've been left with a chronic hip injury that I got last year under 15's where I ran in a race I shouldn't have ran in. I was injured but I wanted to win so I ended up winning but absolutely in agony. I got carried off in a stretcher, em, and then last year, during the Winter there sorry, I had a bad knee injury where it was sore to start with and I took a few weeks off, but I kept trying to sort of push myself back in again and it ended up getting progressively worse, em, ended up I was out training for about four and a half months although I was doing some training I wasn't doing enough...

J How did you feel during that time when you couldn't really get on the track?

S Em, at the start I was OK about it cos I thought, "Oh I can do some pool work and weights and circuits, I'll be fine with that". The longer it went on, the longer they didn't know what it was, the more pissed off I was getting about it and just, not wanting to give up again but more, that was coming into my head big time. I couldn't get anything done about it, the closer the season was getting, the harder it was, but I'm still here, I think!

J You mentioned as well there, em, family problems, could you tell me a bit more about that?

S Em, well probably any deaths in your family. When I was younger my Grandfather died, I was really close to him. That does play a big part, especially when you're working, em, he had a lot to do with my athletics as well, he was really into it. We moved house as well, em, two years ago my Mum lost the contract with her work and just the stress of that on my family, worrying that my Mum and Dad will be OK, that sort of thing

J Did you feel that that impacted on your training?

S Yeah, oh yeah. I felt their stress as well, do you know what I mean? Em, they sold the house that we were in just so that just in case they didn't want to be left with, "Oh my God, we can't pay the mortgage!" It ended up my Mum got a job quite soon after it. It was fine. But yeah, you do worry, you worry for other people, it's not just yourself, but it's nothing too stressful I've had, just wee bits here and there.

- J Any other problems that have impacted on your training?
- S I can't think of anything else, maybe comments from people that have maybe put you down, that sort of...
- J Can you think of an example?
- S Em, even maybe when you've done like a session at some point and you've not done it, like it's maybe quite close to a race and you've not done it as well you wanted to do, em, I think things like that as well, cos you start thinking, "Oh I can't make my goals, I couldn't do that so I can't do whatever"
- J OK, I'd like to talk a bit now about your reasons for doing the sport. I wonder if you could tell me a bit about that
- S Em, well as I said I started off by getting sort of scouted I supposed when I was younger. I didn't not have an interest in it but I was a gymnast at the time and the first season I trained, I started in probably May after the Eounty Sports and I raced in the July in the Scottish Schools, something like that, Scottish Ehampionships and I won the 100 metres and I'd only been training for a month, so I think that got me, "No I can do this, this is quite good", and I think when you're a kid and you win something that's great, em...
- J If you weren't an athlete, what do you think you'd be missing out on?
- S If I wasn't an athlete I'd be missing out on a great life I think because I think when you see other people that don't have things to look towards or aim towards I just don't see what they've got going for them. I don't mean that bad about people that don't have anything, but I think you'd be pretty, not a boring person, but I can't, I just, I don't see why, how someone can't have something to aim towards. I think everything you do you should have something to aim towards
- J So would you say then that your reasons for taking part in the sport are like to achieve your personal standards?
- S To achieve yeah whatever you're looking for. If you're wanting to go to the Olympics then that's why you're doing it. I wouldn't do it for nothing. I don't see the point in athletes who are doing it for nothing because it's too hard to do for nothing.
- J Can you think of any other reasons that you're doing it for?
- S Em, probably it's pride as well you know for yourself, for your family. When you see other people round about you and you think, "I wish I could do that" and I think, "I can. I have", and you want to prove people wrong and prove people right as well, show them that you're capable of things, show yourself you can do it

- J When you say, you mentioned there that you like to show other people that you can achieve things and that makes you feel good. Would you say you're the type of person that is concerned with what other people think?
- S Yeah, very much so, that's one of my problems I think, yeah
- J We'll come back to that later then. Any other reasons for taking part in the sport do you think?
- S Just the love of the sport I think, em, I like the training, I like the lifestyle...sometimes! Em, I like, I like the competitions and just the buzz it gives you as well. I think it gives you a lot of pride in yourself and you can go out, even if you don't run well you still know that you're doing something, "Oh look what I'm doing". Even if you only achieve a really small, like low level, you've still done a hell of a lot more than a lot of people sitting in the house not doing it
- J To sum up then, your reasons for taking part in the sport are to meet your own....to gain a sense of achievement, to meet your goals and aims, because you love the sport, you like the lifestyle that it brings, for pride reasons, and also because of the buzz of competition?
- S Yeah
- J OK then, I want to now get an idea of how important athletics is to you so I'd like you to imagine that your life's a cake. How big a piece is the athlete part of you then?
- S I'd say it's a really big part but I don't know how much percentage wise, em, when you've got your work life and your family life, but I think your athletics is involved in that as well even, cos you bring your athletics into your whole life, your work cos you're thinking about, "What am I eating today? What time can I finish at to get to training?" Em, I'd say it's quite a, pretty big chunk, maybe sixty something percent, something like that probably.
- J And the other parts as you said would be like your family life and your work?
- S And leisure time, not that you've got much, your leisure time's doing your warm down, as you'll find out
- J Have you ever considered how you might feel when your athletic career comes to an end?
- S I think it'll be really strange, em, maybe when the time comes it'll be pretty good, cos maybe I'll have a family by that time and need time to myself. I don't think I could ever give up completely. I don't think I could just become someone that sits about or goes to the pub every weekend. I don't like that either, no, I don't think I could be like that. I think I'll still do something. It might not be out running on the track or doing mileage. I might just be doing

weights cos I quite enjoy that side of it. I think I'd still be doing something, but I think it'll be really strange when I finish

J How do you think you'd feel if your athletic career was to come to an end right now?

S I'd be really annoyed, really annoyed cos I don't feel I've achieved what I've wanted and I know I'm not finished

J I get the sense then that athletics is very, very important to you

S Yeah

COMPETITIVE STRESS:

J OK. I'd like to move onto the second part of this interview now and discuss your experiences of stress as an athlete. The one problem here is that different people have got different ideas of what stress actually means so to make sure we're on the same wavelength I'd just like to explain how I'd like you to think of stress. OK? So, stress here refers to those occasions where you have felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation which has had important consequences for you. So I'm interested in finding out like the minor sort of sources of stress as well as the major ones. To help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, I'm going to split this up into three different sections, so we'll talk about stress coming from competition, stress coming from training and stress coming from the demands and specific features of the sport, it's just so that we can try and cover as many sources of stress as possible. OK, so obviously there might be some other areas where stress will come from, I'll give you the chance to discuss these at the end.

So we'll start with competitive sources of stress. I'd like you to take some time to think back to a competition which you found stressful and can remember well and I'd like you to think through the stages of the competition in your mind in as much detail as you can, even think about how you felt in the days leading up to it, during it and after it as well. To trigger your memory you might want to go through all the things you did step by step such as your transport to the venue, your registration, your warm-up, talking to your coach, etc., etc....em, things like during the race as well and then after the race hearing, em, other competitor's times, your own times and things. OK? So, try to remember how you felt physically and emotionally and when you're ready if you could tell me a little bit about what's caused stress for you.

S Em, I'm trying to think of some, there's been that many, a good one I mean.... em...

J Can you think of a competition first of all?

S Probably this year, em the Scottish probably, Scottish Ehampionships, em, I think leading up to it I felt pretty sound, pretty good, em, my training had been going really well coaches had said everything was going well, I was in line for a PB, I should run pretty good, em when I arrived we thought it was going to be a straight final, em, and I went to see the timetable and I thought, "It's going to be a straight final, hardly anybody's arrived for it", that made me over the moon, "Excellent, one race, go for it, great race," then I found out another one person had turned up which made it into a heat and final, so that put a wee bit of stress on me after thinking, "Oh good, it's a straight final", and it wasn't

J How did you feel at that point?

S Em, I had to sort of readjust myself and think, "Right I need to start thinking now instead of in a couple of hours", that's quite hard, cos you're already focusing on a couple of hours away, that's quite, I wouldn't say really stressful, but it was awkward, it makes you get quite panicky I suppose cos it's drawing closer than you thought, em, something in a wee while later doesn't matter too much, it's when it comes too close.....em, after that got prepared, ready to start warming up, saw my coach, em, he said, "Don't worry about it, you'll be fine. Who's in your race? Is there anything worrying you? How do you feel?" I felt great. He said, "You look a bit as if you're going to be sick", em, fine went away, I was really getting nervous by this point so I thought, "I'm going to have to calm myself down"

J What do you think was causing your nerves?

S Em, probably just the thought of the race, em, I wanted a PB so probably the worrying, "What if I don't get it?", em, "Who I was competing against.... was I going to make it into the final, don't make an arse of myself!" Em, I think sometimes when you're doing 4's as well, because it hurts so much I think you think of the pain, the pain involved and not actually what you're going to be doing. It overrides you sometimes thinking, "Oh God, I can remember how hard this is", em, but also trying to make yourself think, even although it's hard you need to still go because sometimes in a 4 as well you can get maybe 250 and you're coasting thinking you're running excellent, but you've actually slowed down without realising it and you've just lost a good second, two seconds doing that.

J You mentioned there, em, about fear of not meeting your target in terms of you said you wanted a PB, and it was almost like you were talking about a fear of failure there. Could you maybe elaborate on that for me?

S Yeah, I think because I've been training for 4's for the past couple of years, although this year I was training for 8's and it was cut back because of injury, so I had to do 4's this year. I've not been fit enough, em, I think, I know I'm capable of a lot higher than I'm actually running but it's my nerves that's overriding that, em...

J What exactly is it that you're worrying about?

- S In myself, probably worrying, I don't want to run a bad race obviously, but I think everybody worries about that anyway, worrying about the pain, worrying about...
- J How does it make you feel when you run a bad race? What sort of emotions do you experience?
- S Em, pretty sad, you feel a bit depressed and annoyed with yourself. I think it's more that I get annoyed with myself because I know that if I'd kept myself calm I would've been fine, em, and I think the fear of failure, cos you know you've done all that training all year and you get annoyed with yourself thinking, "If I'd only just stayed calm and if I only could be just like everybody else", but I suppose everybody else, they're all like me as well probably
- J You also mentioned there em, I'll just quote you, you said, em, "fear of making an arse of yourself" , em, earlier as well you brought up that notion, you mentioned something about comments from other people, how that had got to you, and you said that you are the type of person that worries about what other people think. Do you think that contributes quite a bit?
- S Yeah, oh yeah, em, I think, I think people are judging me maybe, em, I even feel as if like my parents will be thinking that as well, where I know, I absolutely know for 100% that my parents aren't judging me, but I still feel that, like I still talk myself into thinking, "Yeah they do think....", em, I think even if your team mates are there watching you or your training partners, that even puts a strain on you cos you know they know that you can do it as well and them watching you makes it difficult, your coach being there makes it difficult.
- J In what sense does your coach...? Just because you feel that you might be letting him down?
- S Because he can see you, you might let him down. He can see exactly where you're going wrong and he might pick up things that you don't want seen sort of thing, yeah. Aye, you don't want to run a bad race in front of him, obviously, you don't want him to be down cos he knows he's put a lot of training in, a lot of his time in.
- J You mentioned em, worrying about what your parents thoughts were on your performance as well, have you always been like that? Have you always been the type of person that's felt that you've had something to prove to your parents?
- S I don't feel as if I've got something to prove to them but I think that because they've been there for me for so long, I'd just love, I'd love them to be there when it happens sort of thing, when everything goes right. I don't think they judge me at all and I think if anything happened to me, like if I was in a car crash and I couldn't run again, they'd still be really proud of everything I've done cos I've done a hell of a lot more than most people, but I just think I still

feel as if, that I do want to go further and they know that I want to go further as well so I think, "Well they know that so they must be thinking...", but I think it's more my Mum and Dad want what I want, like if I'm saying to them, "At the weekend I'm going running, I really want a PB this weekend", they're out there and they feel sad if I don't get it, but it's not that they're sad because I ran rubbish, it's because they're sad for me. It's just, you think, you know that when you come away from a race situation, but when you're actually there everything's wrong, everything's what you don't want it to be so you just make yourself worse.

J Can you think of any other sources of competitive stress?

S Em, not really. I suppose if the training before hand's not went right or if you've got a wee niggle, you start to go, "Oh no, I've got a wee niggle," maybe there would be stress from that. It's not really happened to me I don't think, well once, but...

J Can you remember how that made you feel?

S I was absolutely devastated. I had had the injury for a couple of weeks before the race. It was down South somewhere in London or something, em, I was absolutely devastated when I woke up in the morning and it was still sore cos every night I was going to my bed going, "It'll be OK tomorrow," and I woke up and it was absolutely agony this morning. I iced it all day, didn't tell anyone it was sore. I just really wanted to do this race which was really stupid cos I've been left with a chronic injury from it, em, but I think probably if I hadn't done it, if I hadn't done this race, I wouldn't've been happy with myself so I probably did do the right thing.

J You mentioned em, that you do get so, so nervous. Do you think you could think back to a time when you were nervous and describe how you felt physically for me?

S Em, I think when I can control it I'm OK, but if I've went to a race and like it got so bad that I couldn't control it I actually feel physically sick before I run, em...

J Is that something that you find stressful?

S I don't know if I find being sick stressful. I think I just go, "Oh my God, you arse! Em, but it makes me feel physically sick and I feel really heavy. It makes you feel worse than you really are, like you feel, "Oh my legs are sore, oh this is sore", you just absolutely talk yourself out it I suppose, em, but when I can control it I'm absolutely fine and the same is, like I can feel physically sick but the minute they call you over, take your stuff off, get ready, on the line, I'm absolutely fine, there's nothing, like everything vanishes, so that's good, I can control it, when I'm ready to race I can control it. It's usually in the, just after the warm-up, the hanging about bit, it's the hanging about bit that really gets to me. I don't like it.

- J In what way do you think that gets to you?
- S Well I think you're sitting there in declaration, sitting, you can be sitting... It's supposed to be ten/fifteen minutes, but you can be sitting there for 20 minutes, you're sitting, you're thinking, "I'm not doing anything. I'm sitting here...." and you can see other races going on, you can see all your competitors in front of you. I just think it's really set up badly. I just don't like that sort of thing.
- J How do you feel when you see other competitors?
- S I don't actually bother about other competitors, em, that's one thing that doesn't bother me because they can either beat me or they can't. It's not, I more look at people and go, "I'm going to beat you and you and you, I'm going to aim for you and I'm going to try and beat you". I don't really look at them and go, "Oh there's big scary such and such," it doesn't.....maybe I did when I was younger, I don't know, but I don't do that now at all.
- J So you wouldn't say you had like a fear of being beat by a rival?
- S No, not at all
- J It's more about not meeting your expectations?
- S My standards, it's up to me, yeah.
- J OK, how prepared do you feel before a competition?
- S Usually 100% prepared, absolutely. I've got like a routine, a warm-up, the exact same we train at training every night. Everything's the same, I don't change it for a race or for anything, every session, although you might adjust the speed you're doing your strides at or more stretches in certain parts of your legs, whatever you do, but it's usually exactly the same blocks of time that we do. That's what my coach drums into everybody so that's just been habit, so that's quite good, it takes a lot of your nerves away, it's like routine, so you can't go wrong with it so you've no reason to be nervous if you've not warmed up properly, so that's pretty good, that helps a lot. He did go through that quite a lot to help with the stresses, he knew that was a problem.
- J Going back to this notion of worrying about what other people think, what is it that they might be thinking that concerns you do you think?
- S Em, probably thinking, "Oh she's capable of more than that", or, "She should be able to run faster than that", em, probably from like what I've ran previously and they can watch and go, "I thought you would've done faster than that", people make comments like that, although I know they're not doing it out of, to be nasty, but things like that and you go, "I know it an' all!"
- J So is it the thought of other people doubting you would you say?
- S I don't think it's the doubt that's...

- J Thinking negatively?
- S Aye probably, it's more...or even just, even thinking it at all instead of just pleased with what I done, do you know what I mean? Just sometimes you can be doing without people's comments like in a race situation, later on, aye fine, but after a race someone coming up and saying, "Oh you ran shit", that just, you know, totally wrong thing to do.
- J You've talked quite a bit about the stress that you experience during a competition, you've said that the days leading up to it are not, you usually you're all right then. Do you ever experience any stress after the competition?
- S No, not at all, usually it's....either well if it's went wrong. Usually it's went OK or really good. I don't usually have bad races, not very often, em, I wouldn't say it causes me stress, like I can come away and be a wee bit upset and go, "I wish I had done this or I wish I...", but you never done it at the time so you can't go back and change it so just be happy with what you've done, you're only as good as your last race!
- J Em, can you think of any other sorts of competitive stress that you experience?
- S No, not really, I think I've told you them all. I'm sure you've got more than me!

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

- J Absolutely! Let's move onto the sources of stress that you might experience during training. I'd like you to think back again in as much detail as possible to a stressful training session that you've had, or stressful training sessions that you've had and isolate what you've found stressful. From my experience of training I would say that sources of stress vary according to the time of year, like for example, in winter because of the kind of training you're doing, the sources of stress can be different in comparison with the Summer. Is that something that you feel as well?
- S Yeah probably cos during the Winter, well most of the athletes I train with are endurance athletes, where I'm more sprint-endurance....
- J If you want then you can like talk me through Winter sources of stress and then talk me through Summer sources of stress, or if you want to just talk in general it's up to you
- S Em, well probably in the Winter the sources of stress would probably be seeing people running ahead of you that you don't like obviously, em, because they are a lot fitter than you, em...
- J How does that make you feel?

- S Em, I think I probably think about it too much where they are fitter than me and that's just the way it is, like they are built for being fitter than me, where I could be faster and stronger than them, em, but I find sometimes when you're training in the Winter and you are training with people who are so much fitter than yourself it makes you look really bad, em, and I suppose it puts you down as well cos you think, "God if I was up there look how fast I'd be running", em, as well like maybe the coach is standing shouting you on, egging you on, you think, "Look how far behind I am, he must be thinking I'm really pants!"
- J So that's again like I suppose worrying about what your coach is thinking?
- S Yeah a wee bit, but as well about myself, thinking, "I want to be doing that"
- J So again it's maybe this sense of fear of failure in training?
- S Yeah, and I think you get so worked up about it that you actually don't do what you are capable of in training, when you're so worked up about it you actually talk yourself into running slower than you are capable of
- J What sorts of things go through your mind when you say you talk yourself out of doing your best, what sorts of things are....?
- S Eh, I don't really know, em, maybe a good example would be when I was younger maybe if it got so stressful for me I thought, " I can't do this," sort of thing, sort of, not imagine injuries and stuff, but you try and think of excuses in your head of why you couldn't do it, em, maybe think to yourself, "Oh remember the other day you couldn't do it or you weren't hungry, maybe it's that, maybe it's this, maybe it's that"
- J So it' like justifying to yourself why.....
- S Why you can't do it or if you can do it
- J What other sorts of stressful things do you experience in training?
- S Em, during the Winter, I think it's mostly just all the hard sessions when you know there's going to be pain, em...
- J What aspects of pain do you find?
- S I think when you're doing really tough, really tough into your sort of bottom of your shoes training, when it's so hard you know how much pain you're going to go through
- J Is that something that you, like are you anticipating it?
- S Probably, yeah, thinking ahead going, "Oh no, how sore is this going to be?"
- J And do you think like during it as well you....

- S No usually during it I'm fine, it's always before that I...
- J What about in the Summer then, what sorts of sources of stress in training do you experience?
- S Probably when you're doing things like flat out training and getting your times recorded
- J What's stressful about that?
- S Well you're always trying to beat what you done the last time and if you don't you want to know why, em, you might be training against other people, maybe you know you can beat them and they beat you and you think, "Oh what's going on here", I suppose that's a bit stressful, em, I suppose always you want the sense of winning anyway
- J In training even?
- S Yeah cos you need that, but it's not winning against who you're training with, it's winning for yourself, you're not going, "Oh I hate her, so I'm going to..." I'm not like that I wouldn't do that, you need it for yourself and I think if you've not got that then you've not really got the athletics at all, so that's a good way, that's a good stressful! It's the only good stressful. I think most of the.....like during the training and stuff, most of the stressful things that happen do actually help you but, I'd say, I don't think, sometimes some sessions in the Winter, some of them are that hard that they are that stressful
- J What about your training partners, how do you get on with them? Do you ever experience any stress....?
- S No, not at all , no they're all great. I'm good friends with most of them, all of them probably, em, I don't think anybody would be, I don't think they're judgmental, they might make smart comments about you or something funny, but they are all friendly, they're all doing it for a laugh, they're not being horrid at all, if you think you've run a crap race or a crap training session they'll be the first to pick you up before the coach and they'll go, "Eome on, that's fine, it doesn't matter", they're great they're really good. I think that's one good thing about them.
- J Do you always agree with your coach's training methods?
- S Eh, most of the time yeah, I'd say probably, em, there could be a couple of times I've said, "Oh what about this," but usually he has a point and goes, "Don't be stupid", like if he actually tells me what I'm saying you go, "Oh, right enough", it's usually me that's wrong.
- J So you don't ever experience any sort of stress coming from your coach?

- S No, sometimes I can think he's wrong cos I don't want to do it, but you know at the end of the session that you've done well and you've done it, so happy as you can I suppose
- J Can you think of any other sort of stressors during training?
- S I suppose things as easy as even, if you're running late from work, things like that can even stress you out
- J Like the time sort of...?
- S Yeah, you've got to be there for a certain time and you know if you're running late your training partners are maybe hanging about waiting on you, or maybe your coach is there waiting to get the session done, like coming straight from his work and you're running late and he's there to take you and you're not there, sort of thing.
- J So again this is this fear of letting other people down?
- S Yeah, yeah, but I suppose, you don't want to be late yourself cos you know you're going to have to rush about and try and get in there and you'll probably end up having to do the first set yourself and then you don't want folk hanging about and going, "Where's she, she's late again"
- J You mentioned sometimes in competition the idea of getting a little niggle and that can be stressful. Is that something that you experience in training or...?
- S Em, yeah, maybe, yeah maybe that is, em, I think I got that injury during the Winter, the first couple times it happened [TAPE ENDS]. Everything was going well during the Winter and I knew everything was on target sort of thing for a good season, eh, all my training sessions were bang on, all the times I was running were excellent. I was really stress free, it was great, everything was absolutely fantastic, but I think sometimes when you're on such a high point and you're training so hard that something has to go, there must be something has to go, pity for me it was an injury, em, but I think the first couple of times it was sore and I was thinking, "Oh God, please don't be....." I'll just keep training through it, again you don't want Tommy to do, "Oh God, no there's nothing the matter with you", or else "Oh right, stop", cos you don't want to stop, you don't really want to tell them because you think they'll either think, "Oh don't be stupid", or, "It's nothing", or whatever, you don't want to stop for yourself either, em, that's about it probably, you just get pissed off about it, you do get upset.....
- J OK, I'll just go through what we've covered and see if you can think of anything else, so sources of stress in training, em, you've talked about in the Winter, sometimes seeing people running ahead of you that are actually doing different events from you, but still that can be quite stressful for you, worrying again about what your coach is thinking, em, the time aspects, sometimes if you're running late, the niggles that you sometimes experience in training..... Can you think of anything else?

S I think just, well the least one would be the niggles, but probably things like you be worrying for in the future as in, "I hope everything's went right this year", if you're training really good then that's excellent cos you've not got really any worries, but some couple of wee things have went wrong and you sometimes keep them at the back of your head, but then I've had really good things, I try and bring them forward and think about them instead of the bad things...

J I think you mentioned earlier, em, when you've got a competition coming up and you're doing training sessions that aren't quite as good as you'd hoped, you mentioned that that can be stressful. Can you elaborate a bit on that for me?

S Em, I think probably when you're doing sessions geared towards an actual race, em, say you're going to race a 400 and you're doing a flat out 3, or like just off flat out, say the pace you're going to go through in a 400, em, you run it in the time, or just a wee bit faster than the time and you're absolutely knackered and you think, "How am I going to get round 400, like doing that and another 100", things like that, em, or say you've to go through in a certain time, thinking about going through in a certain time over 200 and you try and do it a few times and you just mess them up or they're all over the place and you think, "What if I go to a race and I don't get it right, you've just messed up the race" sort of thing, but I wouldn't say they're the most, it's only happened a couple of times, it's not been a total stressful thing for me. I think things like that I try and put at the back of my head, again try and put positive thoughts in front of it.

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

J We'll move onto the final section on the sources of stress now, so I'd like you to consider if there's anything in particular about the actual sport which causes stress for you, so if you can think as broadly as possible about the specific demands and sacrifices associated with the sport and also like organisational aspects such as team management, timetabling of events, registration, declaration procedures, that sort of thing which may cause stress for you. Can you identify any of those sources of stress?

S Em, probably some of the demands of the sport stops you having as much social life as some of my friends, em...

J How do you feel about that?

S I don't mind not having the social life, like the going out, clubbing and all that sort of thing. I don't mind that cos you can have that to a certain degree, you don't need to stop it totally, but I find it hard to keep in touch with people, like friends from school, from Uni. I find that most of my friends are who I train with where they're mostly boys, but soon to be girls as well, em, that's quite, that's probably one of the things that annoys you a wee bit, cos you do, like

you speak to somebody, maybe six months ago and then they phone you and they're, "Oh I thought you were dead", sort of thing, and you're like that, you've no time for messing about and trying to keep in touch with everybody that you'd like to, but I suppose your good friends will still stay in touch with you if they want to stay in touch with you, but they do, so....

J But is it something that you, I mean how do you feel about that, that you're not really able to.....

S I don't think it, it bothers me but it doesn't bother me, it's maybe away at the back of my head sort of thing going, "God....." It's a shame that you can't do it, but you've got to either want one thing or the other and I think that sort of thing you've got time for in later life, you've got your family and you've got your friends around you, so it doesn't really matter, em, I think maybe some of the organisational aspects would be things like team selections, some of the team managers, you can be running amazingly one year where they absolutely love you, pay you every attention to you, phone you all the time, ask you what you're eating, what colour your pants are, absolutely everything that they can do for you. The next year they can walk by you and don't even know who you are, they're absolutely ridiculous

J And how do you feel about that?

S That really annoys me, absolutely really annoys me. It doesn't stop my athletics, it doesn't stress me out in my athletics, but when I'm at an event, I don't look at a team and go, "God, I remember...", it's more when I'm in the house that I think about it, or if I get a letter through for something and you pay something I'm thinking, "[angry gesture] why should I?", cos I don't feel they do anything for me, em, I'm trying to think of anything else that would....

J What about the team selection procedures?

S I suppose sometimes you find out about who's been selected for things and you see people getting selected for things that aren't really, not shouldn't be getting selected, but at that point they're not capable of what they were, like they could maybe be selected because they ran something two years ago, whereas there's other people coming through and they should give other people a chance as well, or even take a B Team, or take maybe, like I've seen a few International events where they've said, like, "We can only take six athletes", where they should give more people a chance and say, "Right if you pay your own way you can come as well," I think things like that should be done because I don't, I think they only specialise in people that are absolutely right there at the top and how are we.....? There's nobody helping those on their way through, or maybe I'm not on my way through, maybe I've been there and I'm never going to go back there but I don't intend that to happen and if it does that's fair enough, but I don't see them helping at all. You'd think if they knew athletes were as good and they look at them and sort of think, "Oh well, you're finished", they shouldn't, they should be looking to wonder, "I wonder what's the matter, I wonder if her training's not going right or I wonder if something's not going right with him, has that boy hurt himself? I wonder if

we can give him any help", but I just don't see them doing that at all, so I don't like that.

Em, probably as I said before, the declaration before races as well, I can't see how they could organise it any other way, but I just think they're not totally organised when it comes to declarations, you see when you go to bigger competitions, it's absolutely bang on perfect you're not hanging about, you're not left sitting, like not knowing what's happening - has your event got cancelled? Is it going to be a straight final three hours later? You know exactly if it's going to be run as a straight final, it'll be run at heat time, it'll be dead on, usually everything's bang on, but I suppose that's to do with the TV being there as well, it's got to be run perfectly. Em, but I think in smaller key events, em, it's one thing I think they should look at, cos it does stress you out a bit sitting there hanging about for ages thinking, "Oh, when am I going to be running?" cos you've got yourself geared up in the warm-up to be running pretty soon and you can be left hanging about and that's quite stressful.

Em, and timetabling of events as well, em, I don't think it's stressful, it does, it can really affect your performance because like myself, I'm doing events like the 200 and 400 and I've seen before that I've just finished a 200 and 20 minutes later there's heats of the 400, or I've got the final of the 200 half an hour after my 400, em, just things like that where you think, "Do they not have a clue", sometimes. It doesn't stress me out, I suppose it might do, I've not really sat down and went, "Oh I noticed I was really stressed out about that", like turning up at the event to think, "Oh I'm going to do the 2 and the 4", and you arrive there and think, "How the hell am I supposed to do that?", there's no possible way you can do it so they've sort of wasted your plan, not that you should plan for something that you don't know's going to happen, but they've wasted it in a way that you think, "That could've been totally organised and I could've done everything that I wanted to do", so you could be going thinking, "I want to do a 2 first so that I can do....like, get a good run out before my 4", or it doesn't really matter what order you do them in, but, em, when they've planned them like half an hour between them there's no way you can do them or you're just going to do one really good race and the rest's away to pot, so what's the point? It's a bit annoying.

Em, I'm trying to think if there's any other demands of the sport that.... I suppose it must be, I'm not married so I don't really know, but I've seen it with other people, it must be really demanding on your family life, well it's pretty demanding, I still stay with my parents and it's demanding, cos I can see sometimes maybe my Mum going, "You've no done anything for me for the past week. Can you go and do this?", and you've just got absolutely no time on your hands, or during the Winter training you're absolutely knackered and you're trying to have a sleep on a Saturday afternoon and the whole family's in jumping about the house and that's quite, that's quite a demanding aspect.....em, I think that's it

OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS:

J We've covered quite a lot as well there, that's good. I'm just wondering if there's anything completely out with these sections that might be stressful for you, any other areas?

S Em, I don't really think so

J Anything environmental or weather conditions?

S No, I suppose you do think about the weather when you're out racing but I don't think you would use it to your advantage or disadvantage, like worry, using it as, "Well I never performed good cos it was...", like you don't use it, you might say it to somebody, "Oh my time was rubbish cos it was...", but that's not really, I wouldn't use it as an excuse because everybody's run the same race in the same conditions so, no, it doesn't really...If it's windy it's windy, there's nothing you can do about it, although I suppose if you're really desperate for a good run and it's your last race or something and it's absolutely chucking it down and windy, that would really piss you off, but I don't think it would stress you out

J Has that happened to you?

S Em, it probably has if I've thought about it, aye, probably, can't really think but aye probably it has happened if I thought about it, even maybe not a large race, but a race that you've geared yourself up, maybe like, it's probably, I think it's maybe been in the Scottish or something it's happened and I've really geared myself up to it and then I've got there and it's been absolutely crap day and you're just thinking, "Oh great, I was really geared up for this", then your next race you're not geared up for.

J Anything else then or...?

S No, I don't think so

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

J OK that's been helpful thank you. Let's move on to the final section now. I'm interested here in finding out if there's anything about you as a person which might influence the stress that you experience, so as I'm sure you're aware different people experience stress to different degrees and that's due to like personality differences or coping skill differences. What aspects of you do you think influence the stress you experience?

S Em, I'd probably say that I'm the kind of person that worries, well is worrying constantly about what other people think, em, I suppose I'm out there to impress. I'm that type of person.

J How do you think that that influences your stress?

- S Em, probably because I'm always, not always for myself, but always trying to do things to impress other people, well not to impress them, it's not to get, like "Oh, Wow, you're just superb", I'm not wanting that, I like sort of praise, I like that, I need that in my life, like I need praise, em...
- J Why do you think that is?
- S I don't know, probably I doubt myself and I think more people praising me and giving me praise saying how good you were, how good you run, that sort of thing brings you up, makes you a more positive person...
- J Would you say then that you're the type of person that's quite low in confidence as well?
- S Probably, I'd say I'm low in confidence in some things and absolutely high confidence in others, em....
- J Do you think that influences your stress in the sport?
- S Yeah probably, em, yeah because when I'm doing sessions I know I'm good at I feel on top of the World, I know I'm doing brilliant, and then when it comes to harder sessions I'm thinking, "I can't do that", or not that I can't do it, more wishing that I could do it better because I'm wanting to do better for myself, instead of just focusing on there and that time thinking, "Right, if I do a certain time this week, next week I can do...", where I'm always wanting to go ahead, ahead, ahead, constantly, where it can't happen in an ideal World, or it would happen in an ideal World
- J What other aspects of yourself do you think influence your stress?
- S Em.....
- J How would you describe your personality then? See if that helps you
- S Em, quite a bubbly outgoing person, I think, em, I like to have a lot of people round about me, like lots of friends, em, I suppose sometimes, I don't like saying it, but I suppose sometimes I like being like the centre of attention, but not in a big-headed way, but I like to know people are there to talk to me sort of thing or comment on something that you've done and say, "Oh that's great". I think even the job I'm in just now's the same. I think I strived for that job since I was really young and it was a really difficult position to get. I think in the interviews there was something like over 8000 people applied for the job and there was only two jobs and I think it must've come through in the interview, my personality must've been, well people have told me I've got a really strong personality and I come over pretty confident and positive where inside I'm not and I should use that, I should think, "Well, I am, I can do it. I can do it when I want to do it," but aye, even in my job, it's the kind of job that I know that not everyone can do, so I want to do it. I always seem to want to do something that not many people like can do. I always want to achieve

something pretty high, that's noticeable, people notice and go, "Oh That's really good"

J Do you think any of these things influence your stress?

S Aye probably, self achievement, em, seeing what people think of you. If you're constantly wanting other people to notice things you're doing for yourself, to be proud of yourself then that'll come through. If you don't do well then you've annoyed yourself and you think you've annoyed others where you've not or you're thinking, "God, that's.....", something that's not went....

J You mentioned, em, when we talked about the cake and you said that, em athletics made up sixty-odd percent of your life. Do you think the fact that it's so important to you influences your stress?

S Eh maybe yeah, I suppose it could ,yeah cos it's so high like you can be sitting down at the dinner table and go, "I shouldn't be eating that", even things as simple as that, em, you can be going out, nights out, and think, like everybody else is enjoying themselves, getting drunk, and I'm thinking, "Oh no, I don't want to do that", but that's my choice, I don't need to do that so it's not absolutely stressful, but I suppose it could be, if you were feeling sorry for yourself maybe I suppose

J So in a way do you, is it like the fact that it's so important to you, you feel that you have to give these things up, em...

S I don't give them up. I have them sort of proportioned, so...

J They're lower down on your priority...

S Yeah, yeah, if I was invited to something, but I was supposed to be doing a hard training session or a training session I would do that before I would go on a night out, like finish training and then go to it, I wouldn't

J So in what way do you feel that the fact that it's so important to you influences your stress?

S Em maybe it's, maybe I think about it too much. I think you can think about something too much and it actually gets on top of you, instead of trying to....

J How do you think the stress you experience compares with other athletes?

S Em, I'd say probably that you think yourself that you're the only one that's nervous and stressed out, but I think most athletes probably are. I think that all athletes are absolutely stressed out their nut, very nervous before a race, but just some people can control it, some people can control it really well, some moderate and some a little, but some just can't, so...

J How would you say you generally tend to cope?

- S If I've been doing like a string of races where I've been racing constantly every couple of weeks, I think I'm coping with it pretty easily, pretty good, I'd be thinking of the races I've done thinking, "I can do it, I've done it, I can run this, I can do that, my training means this, I can do it", but I suppose if something's gone wrong, if something's happened or some bad race or maybe if you've had a big break from racing, you've had a good few weeks you've been training and you get back into racing and you think, "God, don't think about then, that was weeks ago, what if I can't do it now?", but it's only weeks but in training World that's ages
- J You mentioned there something about your diet, is that something that you ever find stressful?
- S I don't know if I'd count it as something stressful but I do think about it, em I suppose you've got to watch your weight and I suppose what you eat. What you eat influences your training obviously, em, I don't want to put on weight, I don't want to lose too much weight. I do think about it but I don't think it's that stressful
- J Just before we finish, do you think there are any other aspects of you as a person that impact on your stress?
- S Probably that I like to talk so much that I try and, like if I'm talking to someone about my athletics, I can say like "I can do this, I can do that", probably talk to someone, at the end of the conversation they're probably thinking, "Oh she must be really good", do you know what I mean, like I'm not bumming myself up, but I can talk a good game but I don't always do what I talk about.
- J Is that a source of stress for you?
- S Probably, especially if I've said something or done something, I'll be like, "Oh no, why did I do that?" or....
- J Is this like with other athletes?
- S I don't even, no probably not, probably friends or family or, just like in general, or even with your boyfriend, saying something like, "Oh if I run a second quicker, I could get selected for such and such, and you're like that, "I've just put so much pressure on myself by saying that to him I didn't need to say that to him I could've just kept my mouth shut, but I can't keep my mouth shut, but I could've just totally kept my mouth shut, not said a thing and then that was one less thing to think about, but then if I said that to him I would go out to the race the next day and go, "F***, what did I do that for?"
- J Right, I understand what you mean now. So basically what you're saying is you find it difficult to be quiet about really what your ambitions are and you really feel you should....
- S Yeah, I should really keep it to myself

- J Eos it puts pressure on yourself
- S And that's one thing that comes across, that's what most people do say, like if I'm talking to anyone about it they have said that, even at interviews for jobs, it's come across that I've really jumped straight in there, "This is me!", and they're like that...., but usually it works to my advantage in the job I'm in, but that's just me.
- J OK then, can you think of anything else?
- S No, I don't think so, I'll probably go home and think of hundreds of things
- J I think we've got a lot here though, that's been really helpful thanks. OK then, before we finish though do you think there are any important factors we filed to discuss in relation to your stress?
- S No I don't think so
- J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?
- S No I think it went really well, you asked a lot of good questions. It makes you really think as well, it does help. It even helps, get some of your stress, like I'm racing in a couple of days, cos I can, the things I've said to you, I'm like, "What the hell do I think that for or why do I do that?", and it's just totally took it out my head cos I'm thinking, I feel quite good about it , cos I'm looking forward to it, but it's talking about it, like I was even talking to someone at work about it today that done psychology and it really, just talking to somebody does take a lot of it out you, cos you can get all the sort of, "...and I think this and I think this and I think this," and then you go, "Oh, that's better," so thanks
- J No, thank you, thanks very much and loads of luck for next year
- S Thank you

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

JAMIE

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J Right G, thanks for agreeing to be part of this study. I'll just start by explaining my reasons for conducting this research. Basically my experience of being an athlete is that aspects of it are very stressful and I'm interested in finding out how other athletes perceive stress in the sport. So with your experience of competing at an elite level, I hope you'll be able to offer a valuable contribution to this study.

G I'll do my best.

J Right, before we start discussing athletics, I'd like to get a bit of background information from you, so to begin with do you think you could tell me a bit about yourself and what it is you do, your age, etc?

G Eh, I'm twenty five years old, eh, I work for Scotrail Railways, eh, where my job entails travelling around a lot of, quite a vast area. It covers from the sort of South West of Scotland right up to the sort of South Glasgow, Ayrshire area, em, I live in Girvan.....

J What is it sorry, what sort of things does your job involve?

G Em, basically a, well, a lot of it is involved with basically looking after Railway stations and associated health and safety, eh, looking after booking offices, dispatching trains, everything associated with sort of running a railway, apart from driving the trains.

J What sort of things do you enjoy about that then?

G It, I quite like the varied lifestyle, eh, it's, eh, no two days are the same, it's always different, dealing with the public, it is pretty good but on the other hand that can be quite stressful as well.

J In what way is that then?

G I'm sure you'll know how well the railways run in this country. Basically we're on the front line and get the brunt of all that, so, you know, we've got to organise when things go wrong, organise the impossible really, you know, from very limited resources as well.

J What sort of hours are you working?

G Really a thirty seven hour week but sometimes more than that, eh, depending on short staffing levels - usually work a four day week with each day, with, it's each day a nine hour x amount of minute day, eh, but sometimes I have, I will work extra days off or even work, eh, Sundays or whatever, from time to time.

- J OK, before I barged in you were, I think about to tell me about where you live, so could you continue with that?
- G Yeah, Girvan, in Ayrshire, do you know it?
- J Actually, yes. Who is it you live with there?
- G I live with my parents there. That's a sort of recent development. I used to live in Dumfries but then basically because of my job and also to pursue athletics as well, I've, eh, decided to go for the sort of, the easier lifestyle to say, and move in with my parents actually, you know?
- J How do you feel about that, in what way is it easier?
- G Eh, sort of easier in terms of, eh, it's a time problem because of the hours I work. It's early starts and late finishes, sometimes it's stressful and I was finding when I was back home with other things in my life I was, didn't have time to basically to wash dishes, get shirts ironed and washed, eh, feed myself even, eh, it was, life was like a hundred miles an hour all the time and at least with being home I'm getting fed properly, I'm having.... My Dad's very supportive towards my athletics as well. He coaches, well he doesn't coach me as such but he does come along and help out with time keeping and various things.
- J What sort of, are there any aspects of living with your parents that you don't like?
- G I've got a pretty good relationship with them so there isn't a lot, a bit kind of smothering sometimes and restrictive but for other reasons I can't really go into on this tape!
- J Right, what other sorts of things do you do in your free time then apart from athletics?
- G Eh, a whole host of different things really, eh, I'm into music in quite a big way, eh, into socialising with friends, spending a lot of time with my girlfriend, eh, really, a lot of this has been quashed because of the amount of hours I'm sort of working as well and then fitting in training around that, so really free time is a rare thing these days.
- J Do you find difficulties with trying to work in training with your work then, with the hours that you're working?
- G Yeah it is. It's hard to sort of structure things. It's very hard to, eh, plan ahead because basically at the drop of a hat I could then have something planned and then it could change within twenty four hours and I could end up somewhere completely different and it could ruin all my plans for training you know? So I've got to take a very flexible approach to training.

- J OK, let's move on to talking about athletics now. I believe you are a 100 and 200 metres sprinter
- G Yeah
- J What sort of age were you when you first got involved in athletics?
- G Eh, about the age of fourteen, fourteen fifteen Jne
- J OK, could you tell me a bit about how you got involved in the sport?
- G It was encouragement through my brother, basically just started in a long jump competition and then on a 200 metres initially and then it's just sort of went from there. It's Scottish Schools, Sports Day at school, then sort of escalated.
- J Was your brother an athlete as well?
- G He was yeah
- J Is that how he introduced you then?
- G Yeah, it was yeah
- J OK, I wonder if you could talk me now through your progression from the start of your athletic career to where you are just now.
- G Eh, the start of my athletics career was probably running for schools and was probably very successful at school level as well and I ran, eh, British Schools, Scottish Schools and European Schools and then since then I've had the, eh, opportunity to run for Scotland under 20's and Scotland under 23 team.
- J OK. How satisfied are you with your achievements so far?
- G Eh, a bit disillusioned with some things as injury, and also probably some things in myself is probably not dedicating myself or having the time I'd like to athletics to say the least.
- J Right, what would you say has been your main achievement so far?
- G Eh, various things, sort of, eh, looking towards....I like taking a lot of things from fast times. I believe I've run fairly fast, eh, also probably achievements is probably actually having run in the European Schools' Championships in France.
- J How did that make you feel to run in a competition like that then?
- G A bit over awed actually at the time, it was completely different, good opportunity to talk to people and meet people from other countries but certainly at that sort of, sort of....I was aged 17 when that happened and gave us a, sort of good insight to, eh, how fast other people actually were at the

same age. It opened my eyes to say the least but myself I was really delighted. I took a lot of confidence from that and coming back from that I was running faster than ever before when I actually came back to this country.

J You mentioned there about having injury problems and how that's set you back a bit, could you maybe tell me a little bit more about your injuries?

G I've had, eh, quite a whole host of injuries throughout my running career I'm afraid. Injuries from a lot of foot problems caused by sort of fallen arches. I've had, eh, very little hamstring problems believe it or not, it's been back problems and, eh, knee problems and from time to time shoulder problems actually.

J I see what you mean by having a whole host of problems. How would you say that these injuries have effected your progression then?

G Big hindrance, big, big hindrance. Every time I sort of feel I'm trying to get fit, I get to a certain level and then I'll, I'll suffer a severe injury and it will take a lot of attention and take a lot of time out and then its very, very difficult to get back in and regain the motivation that I had before the actual injury.

J And how do you feel about that?

G Really disappointed, and it's OK looking back thinking, "OK, once I get injured, once I sort of recovered from the injury I should've just got back in," but then while I was injured I then found other things out with athletics and it was a sort of distraction as such, so I found myself getting distracted from athletics while I've been injured and then taking periods of time to sort of regain my motivation, get back into sort of good training in order to improve.

J Take it these injuries took up quite a long, a lot of time out then?

G Yeah, yeah, some of them 3 to 6 months even.

J Right, apart from your injuries then how would you say your health is in general?

G Eh fair, well I've never really had any major problems at all that I know of.

J I'd like to talk now about the goals that you've had this season, can you tell me a bit about what they were?

G The goals I've had for this season Jne were, eh....because of injury I actually spent a lot of last Winter after last season a lot of that actually injured and it was really only in towards the end of Jnuary that I started training and then I got more injuries again this year, so really this year my main aim was actually to just get back running and get back reasonably fit again and I believe I'm sort of heading part of the way there as well.

- J Can you maybe think back to the last time when you had a successful season? Could you maybe think back to the goals that you had then?
- G Probably the season that springs to mind, probably now that because of injury and various things and, eh, problems, probably going back to like a few years ago actually. It was a season when, eh, I was running various races for, British League races, and my goals for that year were basically to run the qualifying time for the Eommonwealth Games, eh, possibly to make the Eommonwealth Games team and then basically to run as fast as I possibly could really that year.
- J Did you achieve those goals?
- G Well sort of, eh, I achieved the Eommonwealth Games qualifying time, but unfortunately through injury I basically couldn't run the Scottish Ehamppionships that year and missed selection for the Eommonwealth Games, but I certainly set quite a few personal bests that year and came out with some pretty fast times that are still respectable even yet.
- J How does that make you feel when you think back to achieving those goals, although you didn't actually make your final ultimate goal that season, you had as you say you had a lot of personal bests, you did actually reach the qualifier. How did that make you feel?
- G It was all good but the problem was, the main thing was actually being injured and with being injured I really got probably a lot of disappointment from that and that over shadowed any of the positive stuff that happened that year, you know?
- J How exactly did being injured make you feel then?
- G Just, "Why have I put so much time and effort into this and to sustain every injury under the sun in the space of a month," really.
- J I'd like you to think, em, going back to this notion of goals I'd like you to think back to when you set your goals. I wonder if you could tell me in terms of level of difficulty what sort of level you tend to pitch your goals at.
- G Eh, fairly hard but realistic, without being silly 'cause obviously I'm never going to be some amazing, amazing athlete so there's no point in pushing myself to set goals or racing people like Darren Eampbell and you know Linford Ehristie, people like that you know. So I sort of set them at a target that is probably good Scottish national level and towards making in the top 10, top 15 within England.
- J And in terms of level of difficulty?
- G Ah yeah, pretty difficult yeah, sort of stuff that I'd actually have to be fit and training well to actually make.

- J But you feel that they're realistic?
- G Yeah, I feel as if I could achieve that, yeah
- J Do you ever doubt your ability to meet your goals?
- G Just through injury, that's the biggest problem, eh, I don't doubt my ability and talent to be able to run this fast but I do actually worry more about, well circumstances, for some reason I seem more prone to injuries than a lot of other people.
- J I wonder if you could tell me what your reasons are for taking part in athletics now
- G Eh, all, well really always since I've been 14/15, since I started athletics get great enjoyment, great social aspect out of it as well, eh, going to athletics meetings, especially at Schools, you made friends at these Schools' Internationals that even now I still keep in touch with and still speak to, eh, it's the enjoyment of the whole thing. Its sort of, I don't know what to say, it's a sort of circle that you're in where you get to meet loads of new people, get to go travel about and you also get the advantage of staying fit, staying healthy.
- J Any other reasons?
- G Eompeting is good fun. I enjoy competing
- J What is it about competing that you enjoy?
- G It's the before the race, it's the part before the race, I enjoy the build up to the race. I enjoy the warm up. I enjoy the idea of, eh, basically 7 or 8, well 6 or 8 guys standing on a line all on a level playing field racing against each other you know? That to me is very challenging. I enjoy that. I get a lot of excitement. I get a good buzz out of that actually.
- J Any other reasons?
- G Eh, really from my personal perspective that's really the only reasons why I do it. Plus I actually want to. I don't want to look back in years time and feel as if I've.....I haven't. Fair enough if I never actually make, make a name for myself in athletics because of injury, at least it won't be because I haven't tried.
- J So to sum up then, you would say your reasons for taking part in the sport are enjoyment reasons through the social aspect, em, because you get health benefits from it and because you enjoy the buzz of the competition?
- G Yeah, Yeah, and actually probably on top of that as well it's a sort of sense of, probably sense of, sort of, superiority of myself for being an athlete. I perceive myself 'cause I'm an athlete, I feel that I'm somehow better than your average Joe Bloggs on the street in terms of general physical ability to be able to go

and do things and that's what I like as well, 'cause I like the fact that I can go out, have a long run, don't really get too knackered whereas other people I know even professional footballers, some of the sessions that I do, they struggle or wouldn't even be able to do the sessions I do, but I feel that I've got a good standard of fitness that I can always sort of fall back on and I reckon that will keep me healthy in later life as well hopefully.

J Would you say in that respect then it's almost, em, helping you to maintain maybe some self worth?

G Eertainly probably making up part of me as a person actually, yeah

J That leads us on to the next bit then, em, really here I'd like to get an idea of just how important athletics is to you. I'd like you to imagine that your life is a cake. If that was the case, how big a piece is the athlete part of you?

G Probably just now about 50%, maybe a bit more, eh, it means a lot just now, it really does mean a lot Jne, eh, I don't want to get injured again. I've got to try and prevent against that but next I can foresee, as long as I can stay healthy this year and be sensible throughout the Winter, I believe I'm putting.....I'm trying to strike a fine balance between working, between social life and between athletics which I think really if I'm not putting all my eggs in one basket I think I could probably stay uninjured next year because I've got other things to focus on and probably run better off of that with, 'cause I'll have trained consistently.

J What do you mean by putting all your eggs in one basket?

G Well in the past I've, eh, probably jumped in too deep too soon, its, eh, like just like well, "Great I want to be an athlete," and just like trained seven days a week or something like that, like a complete nutter when my body is not used to it and this is partly why I've got injured in the past, just doing mental sessions.

J Did you not have a coach during this time?

G No

J OK, so you said about 50% makes up the athlete part of you, what would you say makes up the other part?

G Well, being G, the person that I am. It takes in a lot, a lot of my different personality. I've dabbled in a few things that I've also got a lot of enjoyment out of. For example, one of the things perhaps sounds a bit bizarre, eh, but I get a lot of enjoyment from, eh, music as I was saying and one of the things I see a lot, I do find as a good stress reliever is actually DJ-ing.

J Right so, say maybe 50% of your life is as an athlete and sounds like quite a large proportion of it is you see yourself as a DJ, would that be right?

G Yeah, that makes up, that's a, that's a good interest I've got, other parts is obviously my work, what I do at work, other parts also like being a, being with my girlfriend, other things like being friends to my friends.

J OK, I get the sense then that you invest quite a bit, fair bit into your athletics then?

G Try to

COMPETITIVE STRESS:

J Sure. OK, I'd like to move on now to the second part of the interview and talk about your experiences of stress as an athlete. Because everyone has different perceptions of what stress is, I'd like to make sure we're both on the same wavelength here, so if you don't mind I'll just give you a wee definition. When we discuss sources of stress I am referring to encounters where you've felt taxed in meeting the demands and pressures of a situation which has had important consequences for you. OK, do you have any questions about that definition?

G No, seems straight forward enough

J OK, what I'd like you to do now then is to try and think about the sport as a whole, taking into account your entire athletic experience. To help you to identify as many sources of stress as possible, I'm going to split this discussion into three sections and this is the three sections from which stress might occur, I mean obviously there are lots of different areas from which stress can occur in the sport but this is maybe just to help prompt you. First is competitive sources of stress, second is sources of stress you experience during training and the third is sources of stress coming from the demands and features of the sport, but I'll explain that when we move onto that section. OK, let's start with competitive sources of stress then. What I'd like you to do is to take some time to think back carefully to a competition which you found stressful and you can remember well. I'd like you to think in as much detail about that event as possible, even think about the build up, the days leading up to the event.

G Could this include a competition where I was planning to do and through injury problems was unable to, but still travelled to the meeting in the glimmer of hope that I may have been able to actually compete that day?

J Yeah, if you can identify sources of stress that were occurring in the build up to that, definitely yes.

G Probably that's the biggest source of stress that I can safely say that I've had from a racing experience.

- J Right maybe you'd to draw up on two different experiences then, maybe you could talk about that experience for me and also another one where you have been able to compete, would that be possible?
- G Yeah. Yeah, usually where I'm able to compete is I actually find the actual racing part not as stressful. It's the not racing part that I find particularly stressful.
- J OK, let's deal with that time then when you were unable to compete but it was an important event for you. When was that event?
- G It was the Scottish Championships several years ago
- J How many years ago?
- G 1998
- J And you can still remember that well?
- G Oh yeah, yes
- J In what way was that event important to you?
- G It was selection for the Commonwealth games that day
- J OK. I'd like you to try and tell me, try and explain for me what exactly it was about that situation that made it stressful for you?
- G Eh, well basically saying that injury, it was a problem I had in my calf muscle and my knee and also in my Achilles tendon at that time that I thought I may have been able to run, a slight slim chance that I was running particularly fast that season and obviously I was trying to make the Commonwealth Games team. Conditions were absolutely perfect, good following wind and runners that were not capable of running fast times, because of the conditions, were running phenomenally fast times that really none of them have ever achieved since or previous to that as well, and basically that day I was left sitting on the side lines watching people running very fast that I should have easily, all that year I had been beating and I should have been basically there to prove that I was better than a lot of other people and to justify selection to go to the Commonwealth Games that year and the feeling of basically sitting and watching that slip away from you and knowing there's absolutely nothing else you can do because of basically another injury problem.
- J And what was that feeling like?
- G Gutted, absolutely gutted
- J So what actually happened at the event. Did you go through a warm up or?

- G Tried to, tried to jog, tried to stretch off, just too tight.....getting a lot, a lot of knee pain and it was just a joke. It was getting to a point where trying to stride was so, so painful and just had to hit the nail on the head it was a probably....I could not run flat out and it was just, I just had to abandon the whole decision, didn't even go and run the heats because it was so bad and I would always like to say if I do, if I do miss out on something I would like to say that if I go out, I will go out trying, but in this case I couldn't even try. The pain was just too much and then to sit and basically watch everybody else run really fast times when.....It was something I didn't take too well that year actually which probably affected me for later years as well
- J In what way does it affect you in later years?
- G Put a lot of work in at the start of that year and I had run really fast at New Year time or basically the indoor season I was running quick then and I was sure I could've run a lot faster that year. As it was, I ended up running as fast but I could have run faster but as I've said injury problems, that was the main problem
- J What about in the build up to the event then? Can you remember how that felt maybe and identify some sources of stress at that point?
- G Well obviously I knew I was injured before the event and it was the apprehension of actually going to the event thinking, "I'm in a dream, surely this cannot happen, you cannot put this amount of work into something, and this amount of wanting something for niggling muscle pain to actually knock you out of it and, eh, days and days before hand I absolutely rested trying to get people again to massage my legs, to try and loosen off the problem, going to a physiotherapist to basically try and identify what the problem was and try and give me some sort of idea how I could get it, basically if it could get better in that sort of space of time." There's nothing else I could've done to actually try and get myself ready for that at all.
- J Were they able to identify what the problem was?
- G There was a few speculations on it but basically, the knee problem was no one could identify at all, there was.....
- J Did that cause stress for you?
- G Oh, completely because basically no one had an absolute clue what it was
- J So there wasn't just the disappointment surrounding not being able to run and carrying the injury, there's also the sense of uncertainty in actually knowing what it was?
- G What the injury was yeah, as it was anybody who actually then, after the Scottish Ehamppionships I also went to see had different ideas of what the knee problem was, but no one could actually identify it and it took 6 to 7 months to

disappear and it had to go away on its own, no treatment helped, no ultrasound, no massage not anything helped it at all.

J And how were you feeling during this time?

G I then distanced myself from athletics because it was too painful, too hurtful and.....

J In what way was it too hurtful?

G Eh, too hurtful, then well obviously I couldn't train because of the knee pain, but if I was to wait I was going to lead a very, very boring life, still living life as an athlete but not being able to train, so then I had to actually look towards different parts of my life and at that moment in time I looked towards like my social life then and then took advantage of that.

J OK. Can you think of any other stressful parts of that competition, or the build up to it or after it that you could maybe talk about for me please?

G Eh, probably after the competition one of my fellow competitors that I beat basically all that year - talking to him after it and basically he was third in the race, the person who was second was not going to run the 100 metres at the Eommonwealth Games and the first person that was going ended up not running that year because again through injury to themselves. So this person who was in third place was Scotland's only representative at the Eommonwealth Games and eh, his performance there was dire to say the least, which was more sort of a true reflection because I was running faster than him all year and I actually watched his heat on the television and could not help that, "that should have been me running there."

J And how exactly did that make you feel?

G Watched it then switched it off, then went out with my mates....pretty upset, discussed the idea with a few of them, a lot of them sympathised but it's a thing that not a lot of people know, they don't know, they haven't been the one that's been getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning and doing 2 sessions on a Saturday and knocking in loads of time in cold nights, wet nights when it's been freezing and, you know, putting in all the hard work, sacrificing all your nights out, never going out, never having late nights anything like that at all. They've not experienced that.

J Are there any other aspects that you can think of then. What about, was there any pain surrounding the injury?

G Oh yeah, it was painful that's why I didn't run.

J Presumably you didn't run though the chances, why exactly did you pull out?

G It was the pain, oh couldn't run yeah.

- J OK, I wonder If you could maybe think to a competition where you have been able to compete then and maybe tell me a little bit more about maybe the sources of stress that occur during the competition for you, if there are any
- G Perhaps the worst, the worst one that I can actually think of was eh, a long, many, many years ago was the Scottish Schools' championships and eh, basically Scottish championship there was four of us in contention to basically win the Scottish Schools' title. Two of us had been given selection for the British Schools' Ehampionships, myself and one of my friends actually and eh, I finished third in he finished forth in it and we were beat two other people. Basically after the semi-finals that my friend, me and my friend knew that for some reason, some days it's just not there and the idea that we had been selected to run for Scottish Schools and then to go to the Scottish Schools' Ehampionships and then get beat it seemed like, God, this is really, really bad, it seemed like a nightmare come true.
- J What sort of emotions did you experience when that happened then?
- G Eh, a bit of disbelief, a bit of....that we were letting down, basically letting down the selectors.
- J So would you identify being beat as a source of stress in itself?
- G That day yeah, yeah, absolutely
- J You mentioned letting down selectors. Are there any other people that you may potentially feel that you might let down that could be a source of stress for you?
- G On that occasion?
- J On that occasion or in general
- G In general well you've got to, you don't want to let down the people that actually believe in you, the people that actually have belief in you and believe that you can run fast and believe that you can beat them. If you don't, then these people can be like your parents or your girlfriend or anything at all and if you don't achieve what they think you can then you'll obviously feel as if I've let them down, you know?
- J That's a source of stress for you too?
- G Yeah, could be yeah but it's not anything I give consideration to before an event, it's really after the event if I've not performed to what I think I can.
- J So you mentioned there that you worry about letting other people down. Would you say you're the type of person that worries about what other people think, or is it more letting them down?

- G I don't, I don't really care so much what other people think, it's really more....people that are close to me I just don't want to let them down. Disappointment, you know?
- J Are there any other sources of competitive stress you can think of?
- G Eh, off the top of my head, no
- J It's all right you can take your time
- G No
- J No, you mentioned something earlier about the conditions, you mentioned something about the conditions were perfect and that was in a race where you were unable to compete. Is that something that's important for you, the conditions, so I'm wondering if perhaps em, bad conditions would be a source of stress for you?
- G Yeah, if you're really looking for times but really in a 100metres if the winds blowing into your face, it's blowing into the face of everyone else, so it's not any real advantage or disadvantage the weather conditions, it's just if you're looking for fast times, if you get the conditions great but you're looking for fast times and for some reason in that case everyone was getting the conditions to run fast times and I basically was there but couldn't run, so I missed out on that opportunity.
- J Anything else you can think of?
- G Eompetitive sources of stress. No I don't think I can, no.

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

- J OK, let's move onto the next section then, sources of stress that you might experience during training. I haven't actually sussed out exactly yet, I haven't asked you what's, what your training set up is. Do you have a training group or do you train on your own?
- G Just now?
- J Uhuh
- G Just now I do a lot of sessions on my own because of my work
- J How regularly do you see your coach?
- G Maybe one, once in a week to maybe once in a fortnight, not as often as I would like to.

- J Is that a source of stress for you would you say?
- G Well obviously, it's not so much a source of stress, its just a desire that I would ideally like to have more communication and more, more contact with him but it's not so much a source of stress 'cause as long as I've still got the sessions there I can still get on with doing it.
- J OK, so most of the time your training on your own but you do have a coach over looking what your doing. Do you have a training group at all or training partners?
- G Yeah, training group yeah.
- J But a lot of the time is it
- G A lot of the time away from ...
- J Right, how regularly would say you're with them?
- G Sometimes it could be twice a week, sometimes it could be twice a month.
- J OK, what I'd like you to do then is em, think back to stressful training sessions you've had, em, again I'd like you to go through a particular session in as much detail as possible and identify what caused stress for you. From my experience of training I would definitely say that if someone was to ask me what sources of stress in training were I would have to say in Winter time they completely different from in Summer time. Is that the same for you?
- G Yeah, mostly cause of weather conditions, you know
- J So you might want to talk about different sessions coming from different type, phases of your training. Its up to you what ever you find more helpful. First of all could you, if you want to try and identify a training session.
- G A specific training session?
- J If you can, yeah.
- G In Winter time it's just sessions where because of the weather conditions are so cold and miserable, it's horrible and it's hard getting out of a nice warm bed to go and basically run through mud and cold, ice and rain and wind. Summer time it's again enjoyable when it's not raining and windy. If you get the weather it takes away a lot of the sort of stress of having to do as much warm-up. It's a time thing as well you know, if it's a bit warmer you don't have to do just as many strides, just as much stretching you know if it's a bit warmer.
- J In what way does the time come into it?
- G Basically to then travel to where I'm going to train and then basically do the session, do the warm-up then warm-down and then get all the way back from

there usually back in time to then actually go to work. It can be, leave as little as like half an hour to jump in the shower, get lunch, travel to work and then it's all time.

J You've talked quite a lot about your work then, talking about sometimes you have to work a lot of late hours and that it can be a very stressful job and obviously it doesn't sound that it's all that flexible. Is this something that you would say is quite a big source of stress for you?

G It's getting more like that yeah, it's becoming more kind of apparent that the lifestyle that it demands is not the sort of lifestyle that sort of, that athletics is compatible with, you know? Definitely not conducive to good athletic performances and good athletic training.

J So you've identified the weather conditions then in a Winter session as being worse because of the need to work, spend more time at those sessions. Is there anything else you can think of?

G Sometimes boredom, same sort of sessions, doing the sessions week in week out you know, eh, training venues, if you're always training on the track all Winter time gets sort of repetitive and tedious, eh, doing the same weight sessions, doing the same circuit sessions. If you don't break it up, if you don't vary it, it's boredom comes in and then I find if I get bored I don't want to do it as much so then I can lose motivation and then it stresses me out because I don't think I'm training as well or hard enough, you know?

J Any other sources of stress from training then?

G Eh, again sometimes not being able to train in a group, doing long hard sessions on your own is a lot worse than doing them with other people, sharing that same pain with them, you know?

J Do you get on well with your training partners?

G Yeah

J Are there any ... ever any problems coming from that end of things then?

G Never, not at all no.

J What's your relationship with your coach like?

G Eh, friendly fine, professional

J Can you identify any more sources of stress?

G With training...I've covered weather conditions, boredom and time, there's nothing really else that I would say, apart from again injury.

J Is that the fear of injury, or?

- G Am I training too much or what, am I not training hard enough, if I train too hard I get injured, you know?
- J So is that something you think about away from the track also during sessions as well?
- G Sometimes as well if you go, again feeling twinges and niggles in the warm-up
- J What goes through your mind when that happens?
- G It's like, "Oh no not again." Because I've experienced so much of it I know what's round the corner so you tend to hold back and maybe even in some circumstances just say, "no," today it's not worth it, just get your stuff and go home.
- J OK, you mentioned injury there, are there any other sort of physical aspects of training that you say could relate to stress?
- G Yeah, when it comes to training itself eh, what I find is probably the pain aspect is, during the session is quite, it goes through your mind, "Why the hell am I doing this to myself?" but then after it you get a sense of enjoyment, feeling that you achieved something, you know?
- J Can you think of any other sources of stress during training then?
- G No, afraid, I think I've covered everything that I experience there.
- J So to some up then you've mentioned, the weather conditions in Winter can be a source of stress, also there seems to be a lot of stress surrounding your time because of your work and trying to juggle things about and also stress coming from that and that you maybe don't get to see your coach and your training group as much as you would like to. You mentioned boredom with training sessions and injury again and training sources.... Anything else?
- G I think that's really covered everything there.

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

- J OK, let's move onto the next section then, sources of stress relating to the demands and specific features of the sport. I'll just explain this in a bit more detail here, em, really it's just anything in particular about the actual sport which causes stress for you, so really here you'll have to think as broadly as possible about the specific demands and requirements of the sport, maybe also organisational aspects such as team management, time tabling of events, formal procedures such as registration and declaration which may cause stress for you. Are you familiar with what I'm getting at here?

- G Uhuh, yeah, eh, fortunately, I think with most aspects of that I seem to have, if it comes to events where I've got to enter, sort of pre-enter before the day, my parents take over that aspect for me and sort all that out. Declaration, on the day, I really don't have a great problem with that, I give myself plenty of time before competition, so really the only, the worst thing probably is actually getting, if it's a major championship is getting to the championship probably the day before, finding accommodation, the night before the championship and then trying to get settled down before you actually run your race. If it's such an important race ideally I would like to sleep in my own bed the night before the race but I don't want to travel for 3 or 4 hours before the race you know and be cooped up in a car, so it's trying to hit a compromise for as little time away from home as possible in order to sort of race well.
- J OK, anything else?
- G Eh, finding physios, finding decent physios and obviously the costs of all these physiotherapy treatments as well. It mounts up after a period of time. I think most athletes with reoccurring problems like this would agree that physiotherapy does not come cheap and eh, if you've had as many injuries as what I have and you've seen as many physios and whatever, then obviously the costs do mount.
- J Are there any other financial costs of the sport that cause stress?
- G Not particularly with athletics at all, it's a sport where you just need a pair of running shoes and it doesn't demand a lot of equipment at all, you know?
- J You've talked a lot about the time demands of the sport as well, obviously that's a big one but I don't think we need to go over that again. You mentioned as well about the sacrificing of your social life, would that be another demand of the sport that you could maybe identify as being stressful?
- G Not particularly stressful, it's eh, the sacrifices I make, I want to do them because of what I want to achieve so I don't really see that I'm loosing out on anything by sacrificing nights out, I just see it as if I'm actually sacrificing a night out, I'm gaining on my athletic performance so I don't particularly see that as a stress.
- J Anything else? What about any of the organisational aspects, team management anything like that.
- G 'Eause I'm a member of Border Harriers. They're pretty good in terms of good organisational team management, very good actually so it's never really a problem. They get in touch with us plenty of time before league meetings, organise transport, organise accommodation, basically carry you there and carry you back, so everything's taken care of.
- J Have you found the Scottish team management side as helpful?

- G Mmmm, debatable, some yeah, some very encouraging, some not so good, eh, different view points on this.
- J Are there any aspects of stress you can.....?
- G Some, sometimes with Scottish Athletics teams I feel as if there's a lot of pettiness and sort of definitely a lot of nepotism within Scottish Athletics. It's like who you know rather than how good you are.
- J Could you elaborate a bit on that for me please?
- G Well really eh, again looking back several years, undoubtedly I was a faster athlete but then lost out on selection because I wasn't in the right circle of knowing who's important, so then I take it from that my face didn't fit or I didn't know the right people at that time to actually then warrant selection, I find that quite disturbing.
- J Any other sources of stress then?
- G Not that I can think of, no.

OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS:

- J Do you think there are any sources of stress you experience as an athlete which we haven't covered then, out with the sections we've covered?
- G I think we've actually covered everything there that could possibly think of or possibly anything that I've ever experienced, maybe a few things, maybe circumstances throughout life, changing jobs, moving houses, things like that that unsettle me in periods of time that sort of knock your training on the head until you get all this out the way, em, bits and pieces like that but certainly nothing that I would say that affects me long term

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

- J OK, well that's been helpful thanks. We'll just move onto the final section now of the interview. This section, in this section what I'd like to look at is aspects about you that might influence the stress that you experience, I'll just explain this in a bit more detail now. As I'm sure you're aware, different people do experience stress to different extents and obviously this is due to differences in a number of factors such as personality, different people have got different coping skills, differences in things that are important to us. What aspects of you do you think influence the stress that you experience?
- G Probably, I would say my way of dealing with stress is probably actually quite rational and logical

- J What do you mean by that?
- G Well I put everything into perspective, what it is, what the problem is, what it means to me, what the consequences are, you know?
- J Can you give me an example of that?
- G Well, it depends what it is. Again I've been faced with injuries and then obviously the injury aspect, the severity of the injury and looking, "Well, if I wallow in this, the next three months I'm going to go off my head and be so frustrated," so then I've got to sort of identify then what the whole thing means to me. Obviously I'm still bearing in my mind that I do want to recover from it and start running again, but I've then also got to start other parts of my life in motion as well to sort of compensate
- J So would you say that an advantage then is the way you cope in relation to other people?
- G Eh, it depends what athletics means to other people. To some people it means everything, to some people not as much, some people.....everybody's different as far as I see, the way they deal with things. What some people would see as a big deal, I may actually just brush off. I do find that I've got a good ability to take some threatening circumstances and just maybe perhaps brush them off
- J How would you describe your personality?
- G Eh, friendly, talkative, sociable, pretty relaxed, fairly laid back, eh, very diplomatic, a bit indecisive from time to time, eh, I like to think of myself as fairly reliable and generally sort of a very fair person as well
- J How would you say that those personality characteristics impact on your stress then?
- G Probably just means that I can deal with stressful situations, probably a lot easier than people who are more sort of uptight, more highly strung type personality, you know?
- J Are there any aspects about you which you feel aren't helpful?
- G Not that I've examined yet, no
- J Are there any other aspects about you that you think could possibly impact on stress?
- G Not that I can think of no, sorry Jne
- J No that's fine, that's been helpful. OK, well that's just about everything then. I'd like to thank you very much for taking part in this. Before we finish

though, do you think there's anything that we failed to discuss in relation to your experiences of stress?

G I think I can safely say that I've covered everything that I could ever think of

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

G It was very good, very good

J OK, thanks very much then

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

BECKY

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J OK G, before we start discussing athletics it would be useful for me to get some background information from you, so to begin with could you tell me a bit about yourself, maybe your age, where you live and what it is you do?

G Right, I'm 24 and I live in Edinburgh with my husband, em, I'm a qualified doctor but at the moment I'm not working 'cos I'm going back into full-time athletics, so I'm having a bit of a rest for the moment

J When was it you moved back into full-time athletics?

G About a month ago now, em, so it's been pretty hard work

J And how do you find that?

G It's been a nice change, em, I spent a year working really hard as a doctor and it's been good to have the time off to be able to concentrate on something else for a change, 'though it's starting to get a bit boring during the days and stuff when I'm not doing my athletics. It's difficult to find things to occupy your mind

J Apart from your athletics then, what other sorts of things do you do in your free time?

G I've been doing a lot of cross stitch, doing a lot of....I'm going to start playing the piano again which I used to do, em, lots of house work, doing the garden, lots of boring house wifey type duties, cooking dinner every night, shopping.

J How would you describe your social life?

G Em, right now non existent, it's been a tough few weeks, eh normally it's not too bad, em, I'm sure it'll pick up in the next couple of weeks. It's just been quite a hard time for me and my husband, em, there was a death in the family so obviously socially things don't work out as they should do but it should get a little bit better, so...

J What about in general terms, how would you describe your social life?

G Em it's probably not as busy as most people my age, but then I'm not the type of person who enjoys doing what most people my age do. I'm not the type of person that likes going out every weekend clubbing, so I'm more the type of person who is quite happy to sit in front of the TV with a good bottle of wine, em, so if I go out once every fortnight, I mean that's good for me. It's not great but it's what I like doing, so...

- J OK, we'll talk a bit about athletics now. So you're a 100 and 200 metres sprinter? Have you always done that event?
- G Em, yes I have. Basically since I started athletics seriously I've always done the short sprints, em, and I haven't really done anything else. I've tried hurdles once or twice but unfortunately with injuries and biomechanics have held me back from that point of view so I've never been able to do anything more serious than just sort of hurdles drills and things over that, but sprinting is my main thing.
- J I'd like you to describe your training structure for me just now. What I mean by that is, do you have a training group? How many coaches do you have? How often do you train?
- G Em, from a training point of view things are changing at the moment just because of the fact that I'm moving from basically not doing much to full-time training, em, I've got a plan for the next year which I think involves six sessions a week, em, and that will tend to be six different days that I'll be training. I've got a coach, em just one coach, who has set up the entire training programme with me, em, and we've just sort of gone through what the aim is, what I want to do next year and set up a training schedule. There is a group, but I'm not sure how much time I'm going to manage to spend with them They're training in Glasgow, and living in Edinburgh, that's not easy for either of us, em, at the moment it's not too bad, but...
- J How do you feel about that?
- G Em, I've never really trained in a, well, I trained in a group originally, but since about the past five/six years I've been training by myself so I'm not actually that bothered about it. I'm quite used to going out and doing sessions by myself. Admittedly before it was always with my coach, whereas now I'm going to be more and more doing sessions without my coach which is slightly different but I'm starting to get used to it now. Holding the stop watch by yourself while you're trying to do a run has been difficult to get used to, but I'm starting to get the hang of that now as well. I'm not thinking about it quite as much but it should work out OK.
- J How would you describe the relationship you have with your coach?
- G Em, I think I've got quite a good relationship, probably better than most people have with their coach, but that's really just because of the nature of our relationship in itself. My coach is my Dad so we've got a good basic foundation to work on, em, and also he feels that he's quite happy to discuss everything with me, to chat about what we're doing, what I feel I need to do, he's, over the past few years he's realised that I know what my body's telling me and sometimes I go up to him and say, "Look I know this is what we had planned for a session, but I really feel I need to do something else," and he's quite willing to take that into consideration, but that's taken probably six or seven years of working together to get to the point where I can actually, we can work together with training sessions...

- J Was that something you felt you were unable to do before?
- G I think I was unable just because of lack of experience and also as a sort of late teenager, you don't really know your body well enough to be able to tell somebody else how you're feeling, so it's just getting older, getting more used to your body, getting to know what kind of training sessions you're doing and how you feel after certain training sessions and what kind of build up of training sessions, what that'll give you, em, so I sometimes say to my Dad, "I think I need to do something a bit faster cos I'm feeling really heavy," so he'll put in a short sprints session or I'll say, "Look, I'm actually feeling as if I'm quite fast but I just don't have any stamina," so we'll work out some kind of endurance session for me to do and so it's really....he takes a lot out of what I feel I need to do, em, and certainly although there's training sessions worked out till, well sort of Jnuary, for the next five or six months now, em, I'm not sure whether we'll actually stick to that 100%, it'll really depend on how I'm running and how I'm coping with the sessions that I've got
- J How did you get involved in the sport?
- G I got involved through my Mum and Dad really, em, they were both athletes so I mean they weren't, they didn't push me into it. They were quite keen that as I grew up I did it I think, so I did lots of sports. I did swimming, badminton, netball, hockey, I did athletics as well and they really left it up to me to make the decision when and if I wanted to do athletics, em, and obviously sine I've made that decision they've been 100% supportive of it. They were hoping I would make that decision anyway, em, but they just didn't want to force me into it
- J So basically it's something that you've done purely on your own accord, it's been something that you've wanted to do and not something that you've felt you've had to do?
- G Yeah, definitely something that I've wanted to do, em, at School I did everything and I didn't actually turn round to my parents and say, "I'd like to take this a bit more seriously," until I was about 15 or 16, so I mean they knew at that point that it was what I wanted to do rather than something that they had pushed me into. That certainly helps I think from the point of view of the training
- J I'd like you then to talk me through your progression from the start of your athletic career
- G OK em, I took the kind of big leap into training when I was 15, em, I joined a group of people about the same age as me, didn't train with my Dad at that point, my first coach was somebody else, em, and in my first season I got to run for the Scottish Schools' team in the sprint relay, which was quite a big achievement. Next season hoping for good things I got a stress fracture so I couldn't compete that year, em, the following year I think was my first year at University and with all the upheaval of going to university and moving out of

home, my athletics basically took a complete sort of backwards step and I didn't really know training that year at all

J How did you feel about that?

G Em, I don't think I felt anything about that at the time. I was really sad that I wasn't able to keep it up but I think from a motivation point of view, things weren't going right anywhere, em, University wasn't going well, I didn't, I wasn't doing well having moved out of house, em, in my personal life there were things that weren't right and at the end of the day athletics wasn't something that I felt I had time for, actual physical time or emotional time, so I just didn't do it

J OK that's interesting, we'll come back to that later. Sorry, before I interrupted you were telling me about your progression

G That's OK, em, second year of University I moved back home, started to get a bit more structure, em, did some really good training and that following season, em, in the indoors I sort of ran PB's in the 60 metres. I was still a Junior at the time, em, broke the Scottish 60 metres record for Juniors. In the Summer I qualified to go to the World Juniors, em, to run the 100 metres and I was picked to run in the relay as well, em, the year after that, unfortunately a bad year again, went warm-weather training, came back, got really ill, got pneumonia followed by chronic fatigue syndrome cos I didn't know I had pneumonia, em, the doctors couldn't tell me that I had it, so that season was completely written off, em, but at the end of that season I took the decision that I wanted to go full-time training, em, I took a year out of University and did the full-time training with the aim of getting to the Eommonwealth Games in '98, which I did, em, and again I suppose since then I really had to concentrate back on the University work and the following year I still made the GB Under 23 team, but obviously not running as well as I could have been if I'd still been training full-time. The following year I had my Finals to sit and I started work and I've been working for the past year so that's the sort of leading up to now I've been working for the past 12 months and now I'm back into full-time training

J It seems then that you have achieved a lot so far. How satisfied are you with your achievements so far?

G Em, it'd be difficult to say that I'm not satisfied. I think that anybody looking at sort of my athletics EV would say that I've done pretty well, but I think also looking at it there's a lot of years there where I did nothing and I suppose that's a bit disappointing because there's always been a problem with injury or health or something else that's been at the back of my mind that's meant that I haven't performed as well as I would've possibly have liked to and even the year I went to the Eommonwealth Games, I was injured and leading up to the Eommonwealth Games I was injured and I knew I could've run faster but I couldn't because of my injury and I suppose it was disappointing and that's one of the reasons why I'm now kind of saying this is my last opportunity to go and do it and I think it's something.....athletics to me is very personal. It's

about being able to achieve and being able to be as best as you can be, so I think knowing that I haven't done that yet it was very difficult for me to continue with my medical career without sort of giving it one more go and saying, "Look, what can I actually do?" providing I stay free of injury we'll see what happens

J I'd like to talk a bit now about your goals and targets in athletics. Taking this season or a season that you can reflect on from the past, I wonder if you could tell me a bit about the goals that you had

G Em, I think this season is just the same as any other season that I would do so I may as well just do this. I mean it's, we go through the same process, we work towards an end point so we decide right at the very beginning before we start Winter training, "What do I actually want to do next year?" and for me that was pretty simple, I'd like to get to next year's Eommonwealth Games, so the goal I had to set from the very beginning was to find out what the standard was for me to get picked for the team and work back from that and in some ways it's very different to what I've done in the past, because normally when I set a goal it's been something that, em, has been a progression thing from what I've done the year before. I haven't done anything this year so I've got nothing to look back on and in some ways the goals that I've set myself are much higher than any of the PB's that I've ever run before, so it's quite a daunting task and it's very...they're normally very realistic my goals and you normally have to set something realistic, but I think this being kind of my last opportunity to do this, I've had to set goals that are possibly a bit higher than I normally would've done and work back from that

J How do you feel about that, that they're slightly higher than they've been?

G Em, I think when I started training I started doing a small amount of training a couple of months ago when my work load at work got less and when I'd worked out my training schedules then for the times that I wanted to be running 12 months in advance, it was very difficult and I thought this was going to be absolute hell to do and psychologically it was difficult to go out there and do sessions that I wasn't actually reaching the target times that I wanted to do. I had planned in my plan that this is what I had to be running these sessions in to be able to run such and such a time in 12 months time, but I think a lot of that was just general fitness and certainly over the past couple of months as my fitness has improved and I've started doing sessions and I've been given times to do and I'm actually managing to do the times now, I'm even running faster than I'm meant to be but still feeling relatively easy doing those times. I'm not straining myself and still managing well so it's been difficult to think of the times but I think one of the important things is that I have to stay confident about it. I have to stay thinking to myself that I can do it and keep believing that it is possible and that's the most important thing for the next sort of 6, 7 months is just believing in myself and doing the hard work

J I wonder if you could maybe reflect on a time when you've felt that you've achieved your goals or perhaps had a really good performance and maybe talk me through the emotions that you experienced during that time

G Em, I think from an achieving a goal point of view, there's two different types of goal because there's the goals that you set yourself from a time point of view, em, you want to run a certain time, there's also the goals that you set that you want to be picked for certain competitions and certainly through my experience it's different emotions if you actually manage to run a time, em, it's difficult because the way that I run and the way that I train, I always have a fair idea of whether I'm capable to do it or not and so going into a competition and running the time is, I suppose, just relief that you've actually achieved what you knew that you could and it's now down in paper that you've done it, em, so I'm not sure that there's any other emotions involved in that for me personally. There's certainly personal satisfaction if you've achieved that time and beaten some major rivals in the process then certainly a lot of sort of joy and happiness that you've eventually managed to do something that you've spent all Winter training to do, em, the other thing.....in some ways that's all in your own control, you can in some ways control how you run by doing the training and everything else, so it is just personal satisfaction more than anything.

The other side of it is actually getting picked for teams, that's completely out with your control and you can run times, you can do everything you can and yet still not get picked for teams and there's nothing you can do about that, em, one particular occasion was when I went to the World Juniors. I hadn't run the standard, but they'd asked me to run, to get into the team and yet I found out a day after the Championships that I had actually been selected to go and I just couldn't believe it, you know, it's.....they'd set a standard of something like 11.80 and I'd run, or was it 11.75 and I'd run 11.83 and I thought, "Well, if anything I'll go for the relay, but are they really going to send that amount of money just taking one person over to Australia for a relay run?" I didn't think so, so in some ways I didn't think I was going to get picked and it's difficult to explain how you feel really, em, just sheer joy, just absolute amazement that you've done it and that other people have recognised that you're capable of doing that as well. That's, in that situation, that's really important to get sort of recognition when you're getting picked for teams that other people appreciate how well you're running and what you're doing and that there is talent there that they feel is important to actually nurture in a way, so yeah, that's probably...I can't think of any other emotions that I would feel

J What about a time when you didn't achieve your goals or you had a disappointing performance? Could you tell me how that felt?

G Em, I suppose the only thing that I can remember is when I had, when I was told I had a stress fracture. I'd come off from a very good season the year previously, I think it was just my second season I was running, em, I'd been running really well. I'd been running PB's every single week but I'd had a problem with my foot and I couldn't do anything about it and I'd got to the Scottish Seniors and I was still 17 and I couldn't warm-up. I couldn't even do strides and I went to the physio and they told me, "No, you've got a stress fracture in your foot, eight weeks out, nothing else," and it's devastating because you've spent 6, 7 maybe even 8 months of the year training towards

this one thing to be suddenly told that you can't do it, and I mean I could've done it but I probably wouldn't have been able to run more than two steps before collapsing because my foot was really painful at that point and although you feel as if someone else has stopped you from doing it, you know that they haven't. I mean deep down you know that they haven't but you don't think it's a personal thing, you think somebody else has got it in for you, that, you know, things are going wrong and, "Why does it have to be me?" and all these kinds of thoughts and then the realisation of, you know, eight weeks of not being able to train in the middle of Summer was.....it's difficult. You spend most of your life, well at that age I spent a lot of my life thinking about my athletics and it was a huge part of my life, to be then told that it's going to be nothing for eight weeks, you can't do it, you can't have that part of your life. It's very difficult. You suddenly find yourself in the evenings watching TV and you don't know what to do with yourself because you're used to going out training for one and a half to two hours every night and you're suddenly stuck there twiddling your thumbs and it gets really frustrating when you can't do it basically

J You said that the kind of goals that you set are generally realistic, you have a good idea of whether or not you're going to be able to achieve them. On a scale of 1 – 5, how difficult would you say that those goals are?

G Em, I think you have to set them as difficult as you can, so if 5 was the most difficult then your goals have to be at the level 5. There's no point aiming for something less than that because you're going to achieve it, but you also have to remember that you can't aim them too much at the 5 level because you end up not being able to achieve them, or you only achieve them once in a season. It's much better I suppose, it's much better to get somewhere between level 4 and 5 where, you know, it's achievable and you'll be able to do it a couple of times but there is going to be one point in the season where you can run faster than that, where your goal will be surpassed, and you have to aim a goal at that but you've got an aim and you will achieve that aim, but there has to be a sort of level above that that at one point during that season you could surpass it, and I suppose that's the whole point of setting a goal, that you know you can achieve it, but once you get close to achieving it that you actually feel as if well, you can do better than this and that always has to be part of making a goal and setting a goal

J My next question's aimed at finding out what problems you've encountered whilst trying to achieve your goals, and I realise we have actually covered quite a lot of this, you've talked to me about your injury you mentioned the injuries you've experienced, you mentioned biomechanical problems, problems you had at University and also problems you had with your personal life. I wonder if you could maybe elaborate on those for me a bit

G Em, injuries if we start with that, injuries and biomechanics from my point of view go together and that's pretty easy, everybody's going to get it and because of the biomechanical problems that I have, problems with my back, I know that if unless I do proper stretching and proper exercise and good posture and all the rest of it, I'm always going to get injuries and that's

unfortunate and in some ways I've learnt to live with that. I can't do anything about that. It's the way I was made and I can do many things to try and make it happen less often but I'm never going to get rid of them and I suppose now I just take it in my stride that, you know, I've got an injury, let's see what I can do and what happens from now on....you can't plan on getting an injury, so whenever you do get one it's always unexpected and it's always a point where you think, "Well, why does it have to happen now?" and they tend to happen at the points where you're putting your body under the most stress, so it's either right in the middle of Winter where you're really getting hard work done or it's right in the middle of Summer where you're asking more of your body than it's used to doing so you're trying to run the fast times and you're trying to go out there and perform, em, so it's always going to happen at an inconvenient moment more than anything and of course that's always going to have an effect on you psychologically, and coming back from an injury is always difficult because you don't want to do too much and yet you know that if you don't push yourself you're not going to get any better and it's very important that you don't start trying to protect an old injury that you're now over because that can affect your running style, it can affect your speed, it can affect everything so it's.....from an injury point of view as I said, I'm just used to it and for me it's just a way of athletics life now that I am going to get injured and when I do, see the physio and try and get it sorted out as quickly as possible, em, if I move onto the next one, University, em, I did medicine which was an extremely stressful course. It's very difficult and in some ways I did it the hard way. I went straight from fifth year at school to University where aged seventeen and a half and nobody ever does that as far as I know, or at least very few people do that. They always do a sixth year. They always do some extra sixth year studies or A Levels and I didn't and I found the first year of University extremely difficult. I didn't have the basic knowledge that everybody else did. I did A Level biology in two weeks at the beginning of first year where I hadn't even done Higher biology, just really simple things in a way that made it much more difficult for me to do the work, and also just the fact that in school I was always top of the year. I was always the best in the class and I suddenly go to University where I'm actually nowhere near the top and in fact I was struggling, I was really struggling. I was failing exams where I had never failed an exam before in my life and just coping with that kind of pressure, knowing that you have to pass these exams knowing how much work you have to do....

J What impact did that have on your athletics?

G I just didn't do any, em, I spent sort of spare moments doing work that I could but it wasn't even that, it was just a case of the whole University lifestyle that I just wasn't prepared for which distracted me not only from my athletics, but from my University work as well

J In what way were you not prepared for it?

G Em, I went to a school where you weren't really prepared for life out with school, em, you were very much kind of secluded and kept apart from other people and particularly from my point of view in the last year or two of

school, where most of my life out with school was my athletics, so socially I wasn't prepared for doing the social life that is involved with University, the going out to clubs, the going out to parties, to pubs, drinking, all that kind of thing. I'd never done that before. It wasn't something that I was used to doing. I wasn't used to somebody chapping on my door on a Wednesday evening and saying, "Look, we're all going out to the pub, do you want to join us?" you know, it's something that I had to learn to fit into my life and it tended to be that I went out to the pub than going to my training and so I did all my work and I did all my studying but then at the end of the day I had a choice between athletics and going out and enjoying myself with my friends and I chose to go out and enjoy myself, em, and I suppose, I mean I don't regret doing that because I think that you have to do that, and yet from an athletics point of view I do regret it because, you know, I missed a year of training. I did basically nothing, em, I mean I did join the athletics club, but as anybody knows, a University athletics club doesn't always do athletics and from my point of view we did two sessions of circuits a week and after circuits we all went to the pub and so, you know, yeah you do the exercise but it's all a bit tongue and cheek and it's not very serious and that just, and it makes you sort of a more rounded person, you're not just completely stuck on athletics but.....

J Do you feel that before that you perhaps weren't a very well-rounded person?

G Yeah, I think I was, I think I was just kind of learning in athletics. There wasn't very much 'Social G' in G, there was just 'Athletics G' and 'Studying G' and there was nobody else there

J Was that something that was stressful for you at the time?

G Em, I think it was, very much because of my parents. My parents had always known me as 'Studying G' and 'Athletics G' and it came as a bit of a shock to them that there was a sort of 'Social G' as well and they found it very difficult to let go so it caused a lot of hassles within the family, em, and they just didn't think it was appropriate for me to be doing what I was doing at my age. They thought I was too young to be going out and things like that, whereas in actual fact, I was probably quite late to be doing that kind of stuff. They just didn't realise it and I think a lot of that, I'm the younger daughter of two, I'm sort of their little baby and they didn't want to see me growing up and it made me rebel a lot, so everything they wanted me to do I didn't want to do. They wanted me to keep on with my athletics so I purposefully didn't do my athletics kind of thing and it was something that most 14, 15 year olds go through and I went through it probably 3, 4 years after then, em, I just didn't feel that I'd been given the opportunity earlier and I wanted to make the most of it while I was out the house and I didn't have them staring over my shoulder. It made things difficult when I didn't come home every weekend because my sister had done that and I just wasn't up for coming home every weekend. I wanted to go out with my friends, em, it made things difficult during holidays when I was at home when I wanted to go out and they were like, "Oh you've got to be back by 11 o'clock," and I was like, "You must be joking!" It's just stupid things like that that caused a lot of aggro and a lot of

problems within the family just because I wanted to do things that they weren't prepared to let me do, just because they felt I was too young

J And are these the problems that you mentioned relating to your personal life?

G Basically yes, em, a lot of issues surrounding that, a lot of issues surrounding boyfriends and things like that so from that point of view, that took over most of my life that year, just trying to sort out family problems, trying to sort out relationship issues, things that I'd never done before, that suddenly I realised a really important part of life, em, it wasn't all athletics and studying, there as something else you could do in the background, there was something else that would make you into a proper person, or a proper adult and they weren't prepared to see that and I could see that and I wanted to get as much of it as possible cos I felt as if I'd missed out and they didn't see it that way so there was a lot of aggro between me and my parents, a lot of, sort of, problems just because of that and a lot of problems with them starting to relate to me as an adult, rather than just a child

J So there was a lot of stress at that time of your life then obviously?

G Yeah, and then as I went through University, obviously things got better, em, I actually purposefully made the move back home because I realised that I wanted to do my athletics and that was the only way to do it. I could still go out and enjoy myself in Edinburgh, I had plenty of friends that I could stay over night with them. I managed to sort out a lot of things with my parents from that point of view. I did my athletics, I did my studying, I still went out with people and everything was a lot steadier, em, things just got better from that point

J I wonder if you could briefly tell me about your reasons for taking part in athletics now

G Now my reasons are very, very personal, em, as I think I've said before, I feel that so far in athletics although I've achieved a lot, I haven't achieved everything that I could achieve and because of my medical career I do have some commitments to medicine and to do all the training and things from that point of view and I'm not very old. I know I'm not old, em, but from an athletics point of view I'm getting to that age where if I don't do something now, I'm never going to do it, so I just want to go out and prove to myself that I can do what I think I can do, em, I think I can run better than I did in the last Eommonwealth Games year, particularly over 200 metres I don't think I've ever reached my full potential over 200 metres and that in some ways is very important to me, to know that I've reached my full potential, to know that I've given it my best shot, so that's the reason why I'm taking a year to do that, because I want to prove to myself that I can really, em....

J So I get the sense then that your reason for taking part in athletics really is just purely to reach your potential

G Well I think it's very important to me, em, but I mean it's all to do with goal setting, it's all to do with having aims in life and knowing what you want out of life, and from my point of view, having made the decision only ten years ago to go into athletics, you have to make a decision at that point that you're either going to play about with it and do it for fun or you're going to take it seriously, and I've taken it seriously all the time and I know that I can do better than I have done, so it is about fulfilling my potential. I feel that I haven't done that yet. I feel that there's still something there that I haven't tapped into and slightly twiddling about with my training this Winter and hopefully things will work out next year and then, yeah, it's just believing that I can do better than I have done and I know that next year, you know, it's going to be a make or break year really

J Are there any other reasons?

G Em, I'm not sure that there are. I know that I used to take, the reason that I got into it first of all was that I had success and as soon as you're successful you get attention and that was really important to me at first. It's not as important as I've got older but certainly as in anything, as soon as you get successful at something, you get attention and no matter how you look at it, everybody wants attention

J Do you think that that's been particularly important to you?

G I think it has been in the past, yeah

J Why do you think that?

G Because I didn't feel....I think as I was growing up as a teenager, late teens especially, I didn't feel I was getting the attention that I wanted from parents and friends etc., so getting the attention from a different area was very important to me. It was very important to be accepted and I suppose that's a major part of my first year at University, I really wanted to be accepted and as part of my athletics, I've always felt that within Scotland to be accepted, you have to be the best that....well better than everybody in the whole of Great Britain, otherwise you don't get accepted, and that's certainly my experience and certainly why I've had so much sort of drive and been so determined to do what I wanted to do at first, em, it has become much more personal because I've achieved things and people have accepted me in some ways, em, and certainly helped along that way, but now I don't feel as if I need to be accepted anymore. I think from a personal point of view and from a family point of view, I think I've got all the acceptance and all the attention that I need, em, I've got a very loving husband who gives me 100% support, I've got a family who give me 100% support, both my in-laws and my own family and I don't need to prove anything anymore, apart from to myself. I don't need to prove to anybody else, or at least I don't feel I need to prove to anybody else, certainly in the past I've felt that I've had to prove to everybody else that I was good enough, em, now I just don't care anymore what people think. It's not that important to me

J I'd like to get an idea now of how important athletics is to you so I'd like you to imagine that your life's a cake. If that was the case, how big a piece is the athlete part of you?

G Em, right now it's probably not as big as people would expect, em, even though I'm doing full-time athletics I'd probably say that me as a person I have three roles: I'm a doctor, I'm an athlete and I'm a wife/housewife and they probably hold a third of that piece of cake each. It's not much more than that. I wouldn't say I'm one more than the other. I'm still working as a doctor just now every so often so I still have to keep that role, em, and I'm constantly a wife. I mean that's something that you can't take away particularly when I'm not working. That's going to be one of my main roles out with athletics is to be the kind of perfect little housewife as it were, it'll be interesting, em, and certainly from my athletics point of view, I can't let that take over my life. I've done that before, you know, and it means excluding everything else and I don't want to exclude everything else. I can't exclude other things just now, there's too many other things in my life to be able to do that and I think to be able to say that athletics takes up more than a third of my life I'd have to say that I'm doing it or thinking about it for more than a third of each day and I'm certainly not doing that, em, most of my day is probably spent doing house work and sitting in front of a TV doing other things, keeping my mind occupied rather than athletics so....

J Would I be right in saying then that in the past it sounds like it probably made up a lot more, athletics made up a lot more of who you are, but perhaps you've become aware of the fact that maybe your life wasn't as well balanced as you would've liked it to have been at that point, and now maybe you're making more of an effort to make sure that athletics doesn't take over. Would that be right?

G I think in the past I took it much more seriously than I do just now. I mean I still take my athletics seriously and I still am very determined to do what I want to do, but I think I've also realised as I've got older that it's not the be all and end all to life, there are other things that you have to keep going, that you have to keep involved in your life and you can't just shut bits of your life out because you do get unbalanced, you know, you have to keep everything at a balance, you have to keep going out and doing the social thing, you have to keep doing the work thing and just now I have to keep doing all my athletics and my training

J Have you ever considered how you might feel when your athletic career comes to an end?

G Em, I think I'll feel quite relieved that it's all over. I think there's been a lot of pressure put on, well, certainly from myself, that this year is it and that, you know, at the end of this year that's it and I think that once that year is over, the relief of not having that pressure anymore and knowing I can just get on with the rest of my life really is going to be a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. I feel as if I'm putting the rest of my life on hold at the moment and even though I've said it isn't an important part of my life, a major part of my life is

my medicine and I'm putting that on hold for an entire year, so yeah, I've basically had to put my life on hold for a whole year, so it's going to be a relief when it comes to an end, whether I've done it or not, em, whether I've done what I've set out to achieve or not, it's irrelevant, em, it's going to finish and I'll be happy that it's over

COMPETITIVE STRESS:

J I'd like to move on now to the second part of this interview and discuss your experiences of stress as an athlete. One problem here is that different people do have different perceptions of what stress actually means. To make sure we're both on the same wavelength I'd like to explain how I'd like you to think of stress. Stress refers to those occasions where you have felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation which has had important consequences for you. To help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, we'll split the discussion into three different areas from which stress may arise: competitive sources of stress, sources of stress in training and sources of stress coming from the specific demands and features of the sport. Obviously stress may arise from other areas of the sport as well, so I'll give you an opportunity to discuss these at the end of the section

So let's start with competitive sources of stress. I'd like you to take some time to think back carefully to a competition which you found stressful and can remember well. I'd like you to go through the stages of the competition in your mind in as much detail as possible, even think about the days before the event, if there was any stress you experienced then, during the event and after the event as well. Can you select a competition to discuss with me?

G Em, I can probably think of a couple of competitions that were particularly stressful for, I don't know if they were for the same reasons, I don't think they were the same reasons, em, the first one was the AAA's Under 20 Championships indoors that I did quite a few years ago now, and it was the 60 metres and I'd been running quite well all season and I went into this competition thinking that I could actually get a medal. I didn't know what colour, but I could get a medal, em, and leading up to it I'd been running the same time every single week in competition, 7.63 every single week and I was getting quite bored of it really. It was getting quite annoying every time I ran I didn't have to look at the clock, I knew it was going to say 7.63, em, so when I ran in the heats and I ran, I can't even remember what I was, it wasn't 7.63 anyway, it was slightly faster than that. I was just absolutely over the moon. It was just brilliant and I knew I'd run it quite easily. I hadn't trained that much, so going into the Final, em, I knew it wasn't even just a medal, I knew I had a chance of a gold medal, em, and I just didn't know what I was going to do. The other thing that I knew was that if I won the gold medal there was a Scottish Record to be had as well, cos I was quite close to the Scottish Under 20 record, so that was quite a major stress, but the two things leading up to it was the record and the medal, em, and I don't talk to my coach much when I'm warming up. I don't like talking about the competition, but I suppose

sprinting's very different because I suppose I don't have to think of a game plan. When you're running 60 metres there is only one game plan, the gun goes and you run as fast as you can to the line and you can't do anything else. It's not like a 400 or an 800 where you have to kind of think, "Well, I'll either run fast from the beginning or I'll do even splits," or whatever, you just basically go out there and run, so that's not an issue. The thing that I do do with my coach during the warm-up is really try and keep my mind of, em, the actual competition, so I place a lot of emphasis on the way that I'm warming up, so when I'm doing strides I'll keep talking about, "Well what do I look like? Am I lifting my knees high enough? Am I doing this? Do I look relaxed?" so, just trying to keep my mind off the competition for as long as possible leading up to it, em.....

J What exactly was it that you found stressful at that event?

G Em, I think just the internal pressure, knowing that something's achievable and was I actually going to do it? I knew that I wanted to do it. It was something that I really, really wanted to do, but just the pressure of going out there and performing and proving that I could do it and, you know, actually showing everybody else that I could do it. I mean this was at a pretty major competition and there was selection for GB Junior teams and things, but there were so many people out there that were watching. It was probably one of the biggest competitions I'd done at that point

J So, you said, you described it as internal pressure so it was only you that was putting the pressure on you would you say?

G Em, I think it probably was

J What was going through your mind?

G Em, just, "What if it all goes wrong?" At that point my start was not great and it was pretty hit and miss and as everybody knows in the 60 metres, if you get the start wrong then that's it and I suppose that was the main thing that I was trying to keep out of my mind, was my start, "Don't think about what you're doing, just go out there and run," and just, I suppose the thoughts of what would happen if I didn't do it, I mean from a personal point of view it would have been devastating not to have done it when I knew I could have done, but I suppose the other things were, "Well what am I going to do if I do do it?" you know, "What's going to happen? What kind of opportunities are going to open up to me?"

J That's interesting. Is that something that you would find stressful as well, the thought of maybe change?

G Em, I'm not sure whether it was the thought of change. It was the thought of new opportunities. It was the thought of new situations rather than change because it wouldn't have really changed that much from what I was doing. It wouldn't have changed my life drastically, em, it would have just opened up a new pathway for me to go down

- J In what way was that stressful?
- G Em, when I was younger, probably not so much now, I was very, very shy. I didn't like being in groups of people. I didn't like going out into new groups of people where I didn't know anybody and that was certainly a thought [TAPE ENDS] To get picked for a team that I know absolutely nobody and I have to go abroad with these people and how am I going to cope in that situation? It wasn't even an athletics thing that was causing me stress, it was the social aspect that would come with the achievement in athletics. I knew that if I ran well once I got on the track, I was a completely different person to how I was off the track and that no matter where I was and what I was running, I could perform, but at the end of the day it was more the extra sort of social obligations of what came with running well on the track that I found the pressure of, just the fact that I'd have to meet all these new people, that I'd have to speak to all these new coaches and do all these things that just scared me shitless really, so it's more a fear of what was going to happen if I did achieve, em.....
- J You mentioned as well, em, when there's an audience there and you actually said at one point, you mentioned showing other people as well that you could break the record, you could achieve what you wanted to achieve there, so I get the sense then that, I know you've said now that you don't really care what other people think, but I get the sense that at that point perhaps that was important to you
- G I think it was important for.....it's difficult to say why but I think the major reason was that, em, when I was running I always felt that within sort of Scottish athletics I wasn't accepted as an athlete. It's always a point where you feel that other people are always getting chosen above you or that things are happening that you just haven't been included in, and I felt that in some ways because I didn't have the right coach or I didn't live in the right area or run for the right club, regardless of what the reason was, I wasn't being accepted within, sort of, SAF and within the Scottish Team, and I suppose I wanted to go out and prove to them that, you know, I am worth looking at and I think it was more them than the audience. Other people that I don't know, you know, I don't care, but I knew there was a couple of people there from the SAF or that had contacts with the SAF that would be able to then sort of drop hints and things and I think it was really to prove to them that they had been wrong
- J So what sorts of stressful thoughts did you experience in relation to that?
- G I think in relation to that there's a fear of not succeeding and proving them right and you have to have the confidence to go out and do it, because otherwise you fail, and not only do you have your own sort of pressures of failing, but you have, you probably don't have it, but in my mind I always felt that there were people in the SAF that would say, "Well, we knew she didn't have it in her," and they probably weren't saying that and it was all completely in my own head and I was completely paranoid about it, but that was certainly

how I felt, that I had to prove to them that I could do it, to prove to them that I could be accepted as a member of their team, whereas in actual fact I've since learned that that is irrelevant, you know, it doesn't matter whether you can prove to them or not because it's all about me, but also at the end of the day whether you can run or not, you're either going to be in the team or not and it's their personal choice and if your face doesn't fit, then you don't get in regardless of how well you can run, so that's one reason why I don't care anymore, cos I know at the end of the day I can do the best that I can do and it's out of my hands, there's nothing I can do about it, but at the time I thought that it was all me, that I controlled what I could do that if I ran well I would get picked and if I didn't run well I wouldn't get picked, so that was the main reason, the main kind of pressures was just proving to everybody else that I could do it. It wasn't even proving to myself because I felt that I could do things but just the pressure of other people who I felt were important within the athletics world and in showing them

J Any other sources of competitive stress?

G Em, I think after that year when I actually started getting better and there were other rivals I suppose, I'd never thought of other people because I didn't have to. When I was younger I'd always run against, sort of, people my own age and certainly I very rarely had any competition, but as I got older into the Senior category there started to be more and more people that you had to run against and from a Great Britain point of view that didn't bother me at all, em, there was a really good bunch of girls and we were sort of rivals, we were all running against each other, we all kind of chatted to each other. We knew that we were up against it and we had to sort of, there was competition for places in the team, but it was all really quite friendly off the track. The problem was in Scotland unfortunately that there was one major rival who had been running for Scotland for five or six years and who was basically seen to be the kind of 'bell of the ball' as it were, who always got chosen above me and I felt a pressure that not only did I have to get the standard to get to the Commonwealth Games for instance, that I had to beat this person to prove that I was good enough to go and that if I didn't beat her that I wouldn't go, em, and that was difficult, just knowing that, just the pressure of other people, suddenly realising that it's the Final of the Scottish Seniors and you've got to race this person and it's, and that's it, you either win it or you lose it and winning it meant the Commonwealth Games, losing it meant staying at home and that was a big pressure, having other people there, and certainly having support from my coach just saying to me, "Well at the end of the day, if you're going to win it, you're going to get the time and you're going to go and you're probably going to beat her," and just believing that I was going to beat her as well, em, and yet it's really, again it's a very personal pressure because nobody was out there telling me that I had to beat her. It was just a feeling that I had inside that I felt that I had to, em, and at the end of the season I had to actually beat her and that I don't know the girl. I really don't know her at all, well I didn't at that point and every time she'd ever talked to me, in all honesty I'd felt she was quite a bitch towards me and really quite hoity-toity and all the rest of it

- J Was that something that you found quite stressful as well?
- G I found, I think I found it quite stressful because she was part of the group in the SAF that I wanted to be part of, and I felt that if I could become friends with her then somehow I would become part of the group, and yet I realised very soon on that that wasn't going to happen, so from a kind of friendship point of view I felt that, "If I can't get in with her then there is no other way that I will get into this team," em so, yeah, it was something that I felt was quite important to be able to communicate with other potential members of the team and I just felt that I couldn't do that with her because of her attitude towards me, or because of the attitude that I perceived she had towards me more than anything. Eertainly after the race her attitude completely changed and I wouldn't say we're great friends, but we can tolerate each other and we can talk to each other and we can have conversations which is a lot better than it was before hand, em....
- J Any other sources of competitive stress?
- G Em, I'm not sure about competitive stress. I'm not sure whether it classes as competitive stress, certainly one of the stress that I had going into competitions, em, for about 18 months to 2 years leading up to the Eommonwealth Games, I had been told that on no account were the Scottish Team going to take any sprinters to the Eommonwealth Games, and this was 2 years in advance of the Eommonwealth Games, and I suppose that provided an extra pressure on me because the standards that were set I felt were pretty unrealistic, em, and I wasn't sure whether I was going to manage them. And over and above that I felt I had an extra hurdle to climb because even if I did reach them, you know, they'd already told me they weren't taking anybody, so what was I going to do? There wasn't much I could do and that certainly provided a lot of stress in what I was doing, em, an extra pressure on my back, you know, an extra sort of push there that I had to perform and I had to perform outstandingly. It wasn't just making the standard, I actually had to go out there and do something special and that's difficult to do
- J So far then you've talked about....I'll just summarise what you've said. You've talked about the internal pressure that you've experienced at one competition in particular, em, proving yourself to team selectors, the pressure that you experienced in relation to beating one of your rivals and as well, the conflict that you perceived between you and that rival and you mentioned as well, the standards that were set for the Eommonwealth Games, you found that quite stressful. Is there anything else?
- G I can't think of much else
- J How do you feel physically before a race?
- G It depends on the race. Eertainly, not just on what competition I'm doing, but what event I'm doing as well, em, normally in League competitions I tend to have a goal set as to what I want to do within a race so the end result isn't that important to me, em, before a Ehampionship competition I think everybody

gets nerves to a certain extent and I don't think I'm that...I don't react to my nerves, I don't tend to get that nervous. I don't feel the nerves that much, em....

J Is there any stress then that you experience in relation to that aspect of things?

G To the nerves? I don't, I think because of my routine of warming-up I don't tend to think about the competition to the very last minute. I don't have that many nerves going into it. The biggest problem with doing it that way is that you then walk onto the start line and you suddenly realise you've got to race and so all the nerves come out at that point

J So is that something that you find stressful?

G I think it's difficult because in most of the races that I do, the start is the most important thing and if you've suddenly just released all these nerves and you're sitting in the blocks then you're either going to do a false start which my coach would laugh at, that I suggested that I might do a false start, or you're just going to be left in the blocks and you're not going to be able to react well

J So what sorts of thoughts go through your mind?

G I'm not sure really, it's most of the times that I've had the opportunity to think about sort of nerves and things and how my nerves are affecting me, I probably have completely blanked out the race because it's been that kind of situation that I just don't remember anything about it, em, it's certainly things like, "Oh my God, I've got to run," I mean that's a major thing and, "Oh my God it's now and I've got to start," and I tend to think about my start a lot and get really nervous about that. It's not been a particularly good or consistent part of my race em, up until the last couple of years so that was a big issue for me and that was where my main nerves came out, and very often coming out into the Final and seeing people around you that you know are better than you and you suddenly feel the pressure thinking, "Oh my God, I can't do this," you know, "There's so many good people here and what am I going to do?" It's not, I don't like looking to see what the race line up is before I go out into a race, so it's I suppose it's a bad thing because I then go out into the arena and you've got ten minutes to set up your blocks and ten minutes from my point of view to get my head round all these things like, "Are my blocks set up right? Oh my God there's so and so and Oh my God, there's so and so and I'm right in the middle and I've got these two brilliant people on either side," and I suppose just everything gets on top of you and you just, it's just I suppose a pressure of trying to get those nerves out your head to be able to stay focused on what you're doing

J It seems to me then that you've drawn upon three separate sources of stress there, em, you've described, it's almost liked leaving it until last minute until you find out the other athletes that are in your heat, so then as soon as you see them you find that quite stressful, em, the worry associated with setting up

your blocks and have you got them set up correctly, and also your lane draw, how that can be quite stressful

G Eertainly I would say out of those three things, em, blocks are the most important, em, I've got a coping strategy for that. I always try and have my coach or somebody that I trust in the stand and I will do one start and once I've set my blocks up and even if it's a pathetic start, they'll kind of nod and say, "Yeah, that's OK," and that calms my nerves from that point of view. I always talk about which athletes are going to be running in a certain competition before the competition so that I've got a fair idea of what the competition's going to be like, what the standard is, so that it's not as big a shock that, you know, it's always scary when you're in a semi-final and you realise that you're in the better semi-final because all the names are in your race and then I suppose you start thinking, "Well what if I don't qualify? What if I don't get in the top four?" and all these kind of thoughts, so....and the last one, lane draw, if your biggest rival is sitting right next to you in the blocks, you're going to look at her and that's the worst thing you can do, you can't look at other athletes, you can't start thinking about other people in your race because you end up not running your own race, you end up thinking too much about what everybody else is doing and so from a lane draw point of view, you want to be in the thick of the action, you want to be in the middle of all the good people, but if you've got one particular rival, you don't want to be next to them, em, I suppose the best example would be the World Ehamionships that've just passed when you had Marion Jones and Pintusevich-Blok. I looked at that start of that race and as soon as Marion Jones got settled in he blocks, I said she's lost the race because she always, it's a kind of process that you go through. You always have a certain thing that you do going into a race that just settles your nerves. It's a routine that takes your mind off whatever you're doing and I suppose from her point of view, she always goes into her blocks and looks right down the track and rests her eyes down between her arms. In that race she looked over her right shoulder at the competitor next to her and it happened to be that she won and I knew straight away, she's not thinking of herself, she's scared that she's going to lose, and that's what you have to get over the fact that if you've got people around you that you may lose, that's I suppose pressure at the start of the race believing that you can win and believing that you're not going to lose

J Let's go back to talking about you though. Are there any other sources of stress that you experience in competition?

G I think I've had a lot of stress that's been event orientated. As a sprinter you do, well I do three different events. I do the 60 metres, 100 and the 200 and I've always been good at the 60 and I've always been pretty decent at the 100 metres. The 200 metres has always been a weak point for me, em, it's.....at first I thought it was all in the training. I thought a lot of it was, you know, "I'm not doing the right training. I need to build up the years of training behind me to actually get the stamina and strength to run it," but when I started building it up and the times still weren't coming, I had to think about, "Well what else is stopping me from doing this?" and a lot of it was just psychological, I couldn't run the race, em, I didn't know how to run it. I

realised that it was going to hurt at the end and it was always going to hurt at the end.....

J When you say a lot of it was psychological, what sorts of thoughts were you experiencing prior to the race?

G Well the fact that I knew that in the last 50 metres there was going to be pain, em, and so and that was.....if I went flat out from the beginning it was going to hurt and so I would purposefully run the bend slower and then run the straight a bit faster so that it wouldn't hurt quite as much, em, and then there was just the fact that I thought that 200 metres is an awful long way. I know that that sounds like a silly thing. I could run a perfect 150. If there was a race for 150 metres I could run it, but just getting my head round that extra 50 metres at the end I couldn't do it and just coaches couldn't understand where the block was in my head and I knew it was in my head. I could run 17.0 for a 150, you know, less than 6 seconds for each 50 metres which should theoretically give me a time of about 23.5, 24 seconds. I couldn't break 25 seconds off that. I just physically could not do it and they didn't understand and it wasn't that I wasn't capable of doing it, em, I could've probably quite easily run faster, but psychologically my head was saying, "Right, you've run 150, you're tired now and you're going to start easing up," even if I wasn't, you know, I could finish the race barely out of breath but my body was telling my legs, "You're tired, you're not going to run any faster," and I would slow down, and there was very little that I could do about it. I knew I could do it, well, I tried to believe that I could do it, but there was just this block that just kept telling me, "It's a hell of a long way, you are going to get tired running it," and it was just, I suppose the turning point was realising that it was going to have to hurt. If I wanted to run 200 metres it was going to have to hurt at the end and then regardless of how fast I ran the first 50 metres it was always going to hurt at the end and that was something I had to put up with

J Is there anything else then or do you feel ready to move onto the next section?

G We could probably move on

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

J This section is sources of stress in training. Again I'd like you to think back in as much detail as possible to stressful training sessions that you've had and think about what it is about them that you've found stressful. From my experience of being an athlete, I personally feel that sources of stress in Winter are very different from Summer depending on the kind of training that I'm doing. Is that something that you would agree with?

G Eertainly, there's a lot of sessions that I do over Winter that I wouldn't do in Summer

- J Right, in that case then, it might be helpful if you want to tell me about sources of stress in Winter and then sources of stress in Summer, if that helps
- G Definitely, if you carry on from the kind of 200 metres scenario, the way to, that we've found to improve that, is by making me do lots of running, now, unfortunately that's something that I'm not talented with. I can't do it and so during the Winter when I'm having to put in the miles and things I find that really stressful because I know that it's a weak point and I suppose its plugging away at that weak point until it's no longer a weak point
- J So what sorts of emotions do you experience prior to for example doing one of these sessions that you don't like?
- G If I take as an example a session that I did a couple of months ago which was 2 minute runs, now 2 minute runs I cannot stand, I cannot do and compared to a lot of people, I wasn't running that far in them, but leading up to the session it was a case of I just kept thinking, "I can't do this, I can't do this," and that's just something that was in my head, you know, and there isn't much else, I knew that the associated pain with doing the session, the fact that I was going to have to actually run for 2 minutes is just, my brain can't cope with that information, it doesn't process it. It doesn't understand why. I think my brain is conditioned to be a sprinter and, you know, 2 minutes and 12 seconds for 100 metres doesn't quite equate, so although I know that I have to do it to get better, my brain and my body doesn't understand why I'm punishing it that way, so it just doesn't work and I constantly go into the session just thinking, "I can't do this session," em, on the other side of that, if I actually manage to complete it, it's a huge achievement for me like, you know, I feel great, it's a wonderful feeling to have when you can complete a session that you didn't think you could but it's certainly sessions like that that I can't, you know, I can't cope with over Winter, em, things like, I've got certain times that I need to run for 300's and 200's over Winter and, em, I get times and I think, "Well, that's actually quite difficult." It's not difficult for a lot of people but for me I feel it's quite difficult times to achieve and just the stress of having to go out there and do six 300's and actually hit a certain time every single time knowing that I'm going to be getting really tired, knowing it's something that I hate doing and I suppose at the end of the day believing that it's something that I can't do just makes it very difficult to complete the sessions and to work through them
- J OK, you've talked about the sessions that I suppose you dread in training, how they're stressful. Are there any other aspects of training that you find stressful?
- G Em, I'm not sure that there are. I love training, I wouldn't be doing this If I didn't, em, and most of the other sessions I can do reasonably well and I suppose as soon as you can do something reasonably well, you don't feel stressed about it, em, the only other thing would be a kind of technical session which for me would be block work but sort of external pressures, I don't feel that there are any. I suppose there's certainly the pressure of the coach, the expectation of him that he's made out this programme and he wants you to

follow it and you have to perform to what he thinks you can do, em, and you know, you do to some extent have an input into what that training session is and what times we've set, but at the end of the day he really has the last word and if he thinks you've set your standards too low he'll tell you to run faster, and that's certainly stressful if you're really dying and your legs are heavy and you've got 50 metres to run of a 300 and he's shouting at you because you're too slow

J Is that a sense then of perhaps letting your coach down?

G I think it probably is but again for those sessions it's letting your self down as well because you want to put everything into a session, you want to be able to have finished it and have that sense of achievement, and if you're struggling and if you're not managing to get the times, you're not managing to get the distances whatever, that it's really, you feel as if you've let yourself down as well as your coach because you haven't been able to do what he asked you to do

J So these feelings of letting yourself down, letting your coach down, are these thoughts that you experience prior to the repetition or whatever, is it prior to the training session or is it during or after or...?

G Em, it's probably all the way through it. Before it all you want to do is to be able to finish the session, em, and to do your best to do it as well as you've been asked to do it, and then during it when you start getting tired you start thinking, "Well am I actually going to be able to do this?" or "Am I going to have to bail out at some point and not do well?"

J So in a sense is it stress relating to perhaps self-doubt would you say?

G Em, in certain session yes, certainly, em, I mean in some of the sessions there will be stress relating to not believing that I can do it and to self-doubt, but in other sessions it will be that I believe that I can do the session but for some reason it's going wrong and you don't know why and it's just the stress of thinking, "What on earth is going on? Why can't I do this? I know that I should be able to do this?"

J So when there's a sense of ambiguity then surrounding your performance?

G Yeah, when you don't know what's going on, certainly, you always want to feel as if you're 100% in control of what's happening and when that's taken out of your control, you can't do anything. You can't mend what you don't know and if you don't know why a session's not working then you can't mend it, you can't do anything to change it, em, and it takes a lot of work to do that, to work out exactly what's going wrong and how to fix it em, and I suppose it's difficult if you've got that session to do again, if you haven't done it once to then go out and try and do it a second time, em, even if you've been given different times, even if you've been given different rests, to pick yourself upto try and repeat a session that you've already failed at or that you've perceive that you've failed at, it's a difficult thing to do as with everything. I suppose

you can take it in life, if you can't do something and you keep trying to do it, you know, it's difficult to keep picking yourself up once you've been knocked down and that's quite difficult through Winter cos there's a lot of those sessions that, OK my coach might not think I've failed at, but certainly personally I think I've failed at and then to go out the following week and try that session again, where I know I failed at it the last time I did it, you either approach it with a sense of, you know, "I failed it last time, I'm going to fail it again," or you approach it with, "Well I failed it last time, I'm determined I'm going to do it this time," and that's the way you start off, but very often through the session it becomes quite obvious that you're just going to fail again, and if you do that too many times it can start putting a detrimental effect on the rest of your training as well cos if you're not achieving in one part of it, then you're going to start doubting what you can do in other parts of the session as well so it just leads on from one thing to another

J What about in the Summer, you've talked about the sessions that you dread in the Winter, what sort of stress do you experience in the Summer?

G I think Summer's completely different for me because we do lots of stuff that I love doing, just nice short work, very fast work, things that I feel I can actually do. I think the most stressful thing for me is doing block sessions, em, it's not something that's been a particularly good thing for me is my start, 'though it has improved, em, but then as it was improving I wasn't getting any consistency, so I could do ten starts in training and maybe four or five of them would be good if I was.....

J What exactly was it that was stressful?

G I think it was just the fact that when you do a start, you don't think about what you're doing so you really need the input from somebody else, so you do a start and you try and work out what's gone wrong if you haven't done a good start and you get told, "Well you didn't do this, you didn't do the next thing," but it's very difficult to actually think about that when you're in the blocks and all you are really thinking about is waiting for the gun or a clap of the hands or for somebody to say, "go," or.....where you need to think about the fact that you need to put your first foot down faster, you need to stand up a bit slower, you need to do this, that or the next thing. It's not something that you're used to doing is thinking in blocks, em, and that just makes it quite stressful. The other thing is if you're in a training group, you tend to do starts together and you pretty much know who's the best starter among you and if you suddenly find that you're not getting away from everybody the way that you thought you would be, then even if your starts are fine and it's everybody else that's improved, you start trying to pick faults where there aren't any. You start trying to think, "Well what have I done wrong? What's not going right today?" and you start thinking of excuses and you don't actually think somebody else might be getting better and you're, you know, just staying steady

- J What sorts of thoughts go through your head then when, say one of your training partners does perform better than you in one repetition or in one training session, what.....
- G Em, I think it's difficult, particularly in the Summer if they do a better session than me then you start thinking, "Well what's happening in my training? Why has he or she suddenly done a better session than me? How did it get to that stage? Have I not been training hard enough? Have I fallen behind?" em, and you do take it very personally even though very often it's got nothing to do with you, you suddenly start thinking, "Well, what have I been doing wrong? Have I not been giving 100%? Have I not been running the times that I was meant to and I just haven't been told about it? Was there something wrong with my technique that day that wasn't right?" And you start kind of thinking up injuries and things and start making excuses, "Oh I didn't run well cos my leg was sore," or, "I didn't run well cos I was shopping all day and I was on my feet," and I mean really there's no excuses for it and at the end of the day sometimes you run well and sometimes you don't and that's certainly my attitude now, but I know in the past if I didn't do a good training session, it could affect the rest of the evening for me, you know, you'd go home and you'd kind of feel a bit depressed cos you think, "Well, what's happened?" and especially if it's leading up to a big competition and you've just done a really bad session and you think, "Well what on earth's going on? I've got to run this weekend. I've got to be 100% this weekend and I've just done a crap session?" I suppose sometimes you don't realise the pressure that you're putting on yourself to perform in training, rather than the pressure that you're putting on yourself to perform in competitions, it's the same thing. I mean I don't think I've ever given completely 100% in training, even during Summer. I suppose the nearest I would get to that would be in a block session or in a sort of pure speed work session where I would give 100%, but then if you get to a point where somebody's actually doing better than usual which means that you have to give more than 100% and they're still doing better than you when they're not usually, that can be quite, psychologically you start thinking, "Well what's going to happen this weekend?" and you don't think about what's going to happen in training, you think about how it's going to relate to a competition that you want to do rather than anything else and, "Is it going to affect me?" and it normally does in some way, so it's quite difficult that way
- J Let's just go over what you've talked about then. You've talked about, em, the stress relating to the longer sessions that you don't feel you're as good at, em, stress relating to the expectations of your coach and yourself, you sometimes feel like, it's almost like a fear of letting yourself down and letting your coach down and sometimes that can lead to self-doubt, em, the stress you experience when a training partner may do better than you and how that can impact on your perceptions of how you'll then perform in a competition that may be imminent, em, and also how that relates to the pressure that you put on yourself in training. Can you think of anything else at all?
- G Em, I'm not sure that there is much else that I can think of from a training point of view

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

J OK, I'd like to move onto the final section now and I'd like you to consider if there's anything in particular about the sport which causes stress for you, so try to think as broadly as possible about the specific demands and the sacrifices associated with the sport and also organisational aspects such as team management, timetabling of events which may cause stress for you

G OK, I think the most important thing about athletics which causes stress is the whole individuality of the sport, em, most other sports you're within a team and you've got your team people to look up to and to go to for help. Athletics is a very individual thing, you're out there on your own and if you fail you're on your own and you have to deal with it. If you succeed then, you know, you tend to get, you make new friends very quickly if you succeed and people are with you, but certainly if you fail, you're out there on your own.....

J Can you think of a time when that's happened?

G Em, when I've become injured and haven't performed as well as I should be and people just completely ignore you. People within the governing body just don't pay attention to you and just don't even ask what's happening

J And how do you think about that?

G I think it's very difficult because it's not really your fault that you haven't been able to perform. I know you're injured and that's kind of your fault that you got injured, but in some ways that's the time when you need the most support from everybody around you. That's the time when you want people to take notice and say, "Well what's wrong? What can we do for you? Is there anything that we can help you with?" and certainly there've been times when I've become injured and I just haven't had that kind of support and people have just forgotten about me, until obviously I came out the next time and run well again and then suddenly I'm everybody's friend again and that's very difficult because you wouldn't get that in a team, certainly in a team event you'd always have your team members for support, they'd always be looking out for you because they can't compete without you, whereas in athletics, there's always somebody else there to take your place so they don't care, even the team management, they don't care whether you're running or not because if you can't run somebody else will take your place, it's as simple as that. It's very cut-throat really at the end of the day, you're either in it or you're out and there's no in between, em, I suppose the pressure comes from the whole funding thing now, that you have to perform to get funding so that's the pressure of actually....so when you're not performing, people forget about you because you're not sort of an interesting person to them anymore because they can't involve you in the whole support programme and that's very difficult to do, certainly there was a year when I was getting lots of funding from the Lottery when everything was great. I was doing really well, I was running

well and for some unknown reason they took it away from me, they took my Lottery funding away from me

J How did you feel about that?

G I just didn't understand I think was the problem. I'd just won a bronze medal at the Intercounties, I'd run over a tenth faster than I'd ever done. I'd got pretty close to all the standards that they wanted me to get close to and they took my money away from me. I was like, "What on earth is going on?" I had plans to do competitions that I can now no longer afford and that was it, and athletics is expensive, you spend a lot of money travelling to competitions. One weekend in England can cost £250, £300, and that's just for you, not to mention any coach that you want to bring along with you

J So to what extent has that prevented you from competing would you say?

G I think there's been certain competitions abroad that I would've liked to have done but I haven't been able to do just from a cost point of view, and I don't think I've been prevented from anything I actually wanted to do. If I'd wanted to do a competition, the money was found, either if I didn't have Lottery funding my parents found the money and paid for it, em, or my boyfriend would give me money or whatever, or we'd wrap it round a trip to visit a relative and therefore my mother-in-law paid for it. I mean little schemes that I would come up with to get the money from somewhere where I couldn't afford, but it's a major issue. When I first filled out a form for Lottery funding I worked out I'd spent over £10,000 a year on my athletics. It's a hell of a lot of money for somebody who's not earning, you know, it's a huge undertaking and if you're suddenly dropped from a kind of Lottery funded programme like that, you don't know what to do anymore, you're suddenly lost because at that point it was £6000 a year that I was getting and I was suddenly £6000 short and you can't miraculously make that, you can't suddenly come up with that, so that was quite sort of stressful from that point of view, just knowing whether you're going to be able to afford what you want to do for your plans without the support you feel you need and the support that you feel you deserve, em, so yeah

J Anything else?

G I think the only other thing that's annoying and frustrating more than anything is the timetables of competitions. You always get a time to run, but it very rarely runs to time. It's either running early or it's running late and you don't find out till the last minute at which point your warm-up is half an hour instead of an hour and a quarter or it's two hours, you know, it's lengthened because you weren't told that the race had been postponed

J And how do you feel when that happens?

G Just really frustrated because you go to a competition and you're always 100% prepared and you're always wanting to do everything 100% right, and when something like that happens that you haven't been sort of warned about, you

haven't been told at the time the timetable was running differently, it can be very difficult then to go out there and perform, but then it's very easy then if you haven't performed well to use that as an excuse, whereas it's not really an excuse, I can do an east sort of training warm-up within sort of half an hour and I would be fine to run, but you just like to take your time and do it in an hour in competition, so I mean it's not really an excuse but it's just very difficult and really frustrating when that happens, em, but there's nothing you can do about it

I think also the timing of events as well, there's been certain years when I've wanted to do two events but haven't been able to because of the timetable, em, it just hasn't been possible for a sprinter to do both the 100 and the 200 at the Scottish Seniors and I think that's ridiculous to have a timetable like that, and it's because the 200 metres heats are half an hour before the 100 metres Final, that's just pathetic timetabling, there's something gone seriously wrong there, em, and that's really annoying when you're not allowed to do something that you want to do just because of timetabling errors

J Anything else in this section?

G I think from the past just from outside the sport more than anything you have to be a very dedicated athlete and I've touched on it before from talking about University and things, the just sheer peer pressure of being a normal teenager and being a normal person rather than an athlete but I've spoken all about that, that's been a major part of my life so I don't really think there's much point in saying much more just now

J What about, I'm just wondering if you've ever experienced any stress in relation to the fact that you can actually run for Poland and for Scotland can't you?

G Yeah

J Has that ever caused any stress for you?

G It's caused some very stressful decision making, em, particularly in times when I felt I wasn't getting the support that I wanted from the Scottish Athletics Federation, em, when I knew that Poland were making me an offer that I really would be stupid to refuse and just the stress of making that decision to turn down that offer and to stick with Scotland and still to this day I don't know why I'm not running for Poland rather than Scotland. It's some stupid.....I don't know what

J In what way was the decision so stressful?

G Because at the time I was making a decision, it was a decision, do I run for Poland and get all the support that I want financial, medical, everything, training support, em, and then also miss out on doing the Eommonwealth Games, which was the decision I had to make because if I had decided to move to Poland, I wouldn't get to do the Eommonwealth Games and at that

time that's what my entire year was leading up to, so it was stressful to then decide, "Well this is my aim and I have to stick by my aim and I have to stick with Scotland whether I like it or not because this is what I want to do personally," and at the end of the day it doesn't matter who you run for but certainly making that decision and deciding to turn down such a good offer to run for somebody who at the time I felt had no respect for me at all, em, just put a lot of strain on what I was doing and on my training and just generally the competition level as well

J Are there any other sources of stress that you experience as an athlete which we haven't yet covered?

G Don't think so, nothing that's particularly important. I tend not to get too stressed

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

J OK then. Let's move onto the final section then. In this section I'm interested in finding out if there's anything about you as a person which might influence the stress you experience, and as I'm sure you're aware, generally different people experience stress to different degrees due to individual differences in factors such as personality, coping skills etc. What aspects of you do you think influence the stress that you experience?

G I think the most important part of me is just determination, just the fact that I want to do what I'm doing and I want to be best at what I'm doing, maybe not best as in number one in Great Britain or whatever, but the best that I can be in what I'm doing and I want to do it as well as I can and I'm quite determined to do it. I could've quite easily carried on working this year and done my athletics part time, but I wanted to give it 100%, I wanted to do the best that I could and I felt that I couldn't unless I went full-time and it's just sort of sheer determination that puts me through that, that says, "You can do it"

J And in what way do you feel that that influences the stress that you experience?

G I think it helps me deal with it in a way because it makes the sport and it makes my running much more personal to me and it stops me thinking about what other people think, certainly because a lot of what I'm doing I'm doing for myself, certainly now, probably not in the past, but now I'm at a stage where if I don't do well, it's something that I'm going to have to deal with myself and it's not something that other people can influence, em, and I'm not going to feel pressure from other people to perform because I don't care really what other people think. I'm not at that stage where...I'm passed the stage where I think, "Well if I don't do this, what's such and such going to think about it?" I'm going out there and if I don't run well or if I do something wrong, I'm going to have to analyse that myself and work out myself what I've done wrong, but I don't care what other people think about it. I sit down

with my coach and sort that out myself. In a way I think I'm searching for a perfect race. I don't think I've done that yet and that's the main reason for me taking this year to go back into athletics. I want to do the perfect race and I haven't done that and I want to give myself the best chance to do that and it just helps me to cope with everybody around me knowing that this is very personal and this is something that I have to do

J It sounds like you're a bit of a perfectionist. Would you agree with that?

G I probably am. I like to sit down and just think about everything that I've done in a race. Once I've raced, given myself a chance to sort out whether I've done well or I've done badly, I will sit down with my coach and analyse every single bit of the race, what I did right, what I did wrong, what I could've done better even though it was right, em, and try and improve on it the next time and I'll try and try again. It's like in a block work session. I will analyse every single start until I get it right, until I work out exactly what works for me and I have to get it 100% perfect otherwise I'm not happy with it, and that's certainly something that's come out through myself that it's, you know, I have to be perfect at what I'm doing for myself otherwise I won't be happy with it. It doesn't matter if other people are happy with it or not, I have to be happy myself

J OK you've said that you're a very, very determined person and you've described yourself as a bit of a perfectionist, and you've said that these traits in a way help your stress. Would you say that the fact that, you know, a perfectionist is someone that sets very high personal standard for themselves, would you say that in a way, that could also increase your stress?

G I think it probably increases the personal stress that I have, personal pressures and stresses that I've put on myself, em, and it makes it much more difficult if I fail because I know that I'm letting myself down rather than other people and it does make that fall harder to take because...I mean if you're trying to impress somebody else then they can always help you if you don't succeed. If you're trying to impress yourself then there's nobody to turn to at the end of the day if it goes wrong and all the support in the World isn't going to help you, sort of, the feelings that you have inside of letting yourself down and of not succeeding and that's going to be much more difficult to deal with. Eertainly, I think as I've got older this has become more and more important to me, just the sort of personal aspect of the sport, so it's not something that I've been able to deal with in the past and it's quite a daunting prospect because a lot of the stresses that I'm going to encounter I've had before and one of the ways I deal with that is with coping mechanisms, everybody does, and I've got my own and therefore I don't tend to feel that much pressure or stress

J Do you feel that the coping strategies that you've developed then are another aspect of you that influence your stress, in this case assists your stress?

G I think it helps me overcome my stress. It helps me realise before I go into a situation what the stresses are going to be so that I'm prepared for them and so

that I know what I'm going to do so that they don't affect me in a way em, I don't.....there's certain things very specific to athletics that, just through experience you've learned how to deal with and you've learned....I mean you're never going to completely eradicate stress from the sport, you're never going to completely eradicate the fact that when you get onto the starting line, you're going to feel nervous and you're going to feel pressure to perform and the rest of it, but I think I've learned to cope with it, I've learned how to do certain things to decrease the amount of stress that I've had just by changing the way I'm thinking about the competitions, the way I think about the training

J Can you give me an example of one of your coping strategies?

G I think changing the way I think about races. For instance, particularly with the 200 metres, em, in the past I've felt really sort of like I couldn't do them and that it was a problem with me physically. I think just now to getting to the stage where I believe that I can do it and just going into the race with a different attitude, em, even going into a race with a different game plan and instead of thinking, "Oh God, I've got a 200 metres to run," thinking, "OK, well I've got a 150 to run rather than 200," and that psychologically sets me up differently because I know I can run 150 metres and that's not a problem, so I automatically go into the race feeling much more confident that I can do it and at the end of the day it makes things easier, setting yourself individual goals and individual targets for doing different things, em, running a 60 metres and saying, "OK, the time is irrelevant but what the coach wants to see is that the first 20 metres are really fast and the start's good. It's irrelevant how I finish the race," same with the 100, em, doing a 200 metres, coming off the bend, irrelevant whether I start well, irrelevant whether I finish well, but the middle 100 metres has to be fast, just taking the actual thoughts of the race as a whole out and dividing it up into different areas that I can think about, rather than thinking about the race as a whole. It certainly decreases the amount of stress that you have and decreases the amount of pressure that you put on yourself to perform in that situation

J OK, are there any other aspects of you as a person that you feel impact on the stress that you experience?

G Em, I think the way that I deal with pressure when I'm actually under pressure and the way that I deal with stress. I know a lot of people who when they get stressed and they feel that they're under pressure, get really worked up about it and just constantly think about it and just get into a flap more than anything. I don't do that. It's a personality thing. I will get worked up. I will get stressed, but I don't tend, I think it's probably just that I don't tend to show it as much. I can be much calmer inside. I can talk myself out of it, em, much more easily than what other people can and when there's that much energy buzzing round inside of you, instead of kind of going away in a corner and sort of crying or whatever just because of the pressure, I kind of go hyper. I start laughing, I start making a joke out of the situation and it relaxes me, it relaxes everybody around me and it just makes me feel sort of much less stressed and I find that in my working life as well as in my athletics career, that just kind of laughing things away and just trying to calm situations down can make you

feel a lot less stressed, can take some of that kind of electric energy out of you that you're feeling

J Would you say then that the stress you experience is less than that of other athletes?

G I would like to think it probably is, em, probably less than other athletes of my age in my situation, probably people who are sort of major athletes don't feel the stress as much as I do or have different stresses, em, certainly the way that I am, I am much older than most 24 year olds, em, you know, there are very few 24 year olds who have the same attitude to life that I do and I think that makes a difference. Also knowing that my athletics isn't the be all and end all of life. There are other things apart from that, so if things go wrong, yeah I'll get upset, I'll get stressed, I'll get this, that and the next thing, but I know that there's something other than athletics and in some ways things that aren't my athletics in life are more important to me than my athletics now, and a lot of people don't have that. A lot of people still find athletics as the most important thing in their life. I'm more likely to have my athletics affected by things that are happening out with that. If I'm having problems in relationships, if I'm having problems at work my athletics will suffer, whereas if I'm having problems with my athletics, the rest of my life doesn't suffer, em, so I think it's just prioritising more than anything and understanding it's a matter of ten years in the sport and, you know, there are other things to do in life other than run round a track, you know, so it just makes it easier to cope with

J Is there anything else then?

G I don't think so

J OK then, I think that's just about all I need to ask you. Before we finish though, do you think there are any important factors we failed to discuss in relation to your stress?

G Em, I can't think of any, you've been quite thorough

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

G I don't think so, em, I think preparation is important, having this sheet before hand, knowing exactly what I was going to be asked made it easier to help me think about it, em, made me think about the sport a lot more as well, about how I feel about the sport which is a good thing. You should always do that when you're doing anything, is work out what you want yourself and this certainly made me think about what I was doing and that's quite important. I think that helps me more than anything and certainly other people who've done this will probably find benefit from talking about their stresses, em, and that's an important thing about it. It's quite, you know, sort of open ground that you just kind of say anything you want to let steam off, you know

J Good, that was good to hear. Well thanks very much for you time and lots of luck for next season

G Thank you

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

TOM

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J OK before we start discussing athletics, it would be useful for me to get some background information on you, so to begin with could you tell me a bit about yourself, like your age, where you live and what it is you do just now?

N I'm 21 years old. I live in Wishaw at home with my parents and I consider myself as a full-time athlete. I have a part-time job with Packard Bell, but I don't really consider that my job

J OK and what sort of hours are you working during the week?

N I'm just now full-time but next week I will be doing sixteen hours a week, just 2 days

J OK and why have you chosen to go part-time?

N In my work?

J Yep

N So that I can train twice a day

J OK. And you said that you see yourself as being a full-time athlete. What sort of things do you enjoy about that lifestyle?

N Em, maybe the ability to control every situation, just really being different and athletics is the only thing that I really want to do. It's the only thing that I'm really passionate about in life, so getting to do what I want to do and what I like to do

J OK you said there that em, you mentioned being able to control every situation. What do you mean by that?

N Being able to control my diet, my time-management, where I train and if athletics is the only thing I do then I don't have a job to interfere with training basically

J OK. So apart from athletics, what other things do you do in your free time?

N I don't really have free time anymore, em, I still like going out with friends. I like reading, em, socialising, but not socialising in a normal way, maybe going out for a couple of hours and just catching up with friends, if I have time

J OK. Let's talk about athletics now. So I believe you're a middle distance runner and is it 800 metres that's your main event?

- N Yeah, 800 is the main but I still focus on 400 as well
- J OK. I'd like you to describe your training structure for me and what I mean by that is, how many people you train with, how many coaches you have and how often you train
- N Em, at the moment I'm training 9 times a week, em, which will eventually become twice a day, em, there's just a small group of us, maybe about 10 or 11, em, I have one main coach and there's two other coaches who don't really create a training plan for me, but tend to have more of a supervisory role in just checking that everything I'm doing is being done safely and correctly
- J And how would you describe the relationship that you have with your main coach?
- N Em, I think it's probably typical of every coach-athlete, we have our moments. There's obviously a closeness there that you may not have with anyone else in your life, but there's still part of you that has to remain ruthless and you can have your bad moments
- J Right, so would you say that you have a good working relationship with your coach, or?
- N Definitely a good working relationship. If it wasn't a good working relationship then I don't think we would be together
- J Right, but it's perhaps not so much a friend relationship, or?
- N Yeah sometimes it can be friendly. When we're not on the, when we're not actually at training, if we're in a different situation then it's more judged as a friends situation, but if we're at training then I prefer it to be more business really
- J OK. And what age were you when you first got involved in the sport?
- N Probably about 11 but obviously it was on and off for the first few years. I obviously wasn't dedicated at the age of 11, although I really enjoyed it
- J And how was it that you got involved in the sport?
- N At school actually, the local athletics club was having like a promotional period and organising 'Eome and Try' days for every school and a leaflet was posted to our school and I decided just to give it a try
- J And from there did you join a club, or....?
- N Yeah, the Motherwell Athletics Elub that had the 'Eome and Try' day, I just started training with them regularly and then eventually became a member

J I wonder if you could briefly talk me through your progression from the start of your athletic career, like maybe just outline your main achievements

N Em, from the age of...from 11 up until 14, I didn't really compete. The only competitions I had were Elub competitions, em, at 14 I had my first Scottish Ehampionships, em, ran 800 and I was 3rd and then sort of fuffed about a bit and lost dedication, then came back again and sort of played about with events and did some 400 hurdles, em, won the West Districts, was 3rd at the Scottish Schools', then went to 400 flat, em, as an Under 20, got a silver medal at the Scottish Ehampionships, em, second year Under 20 wasn't so good at 400, didn't get a medal in the Scottish, em, final year of Under 20's, moved up to 800's and won the Scottish and became a Senior, first year in the Seniors I was 2nd at the 800 metres Scottish, reached the Final of the AAA's Seniors/Olympic trials, eh, second year as a Senior which was this year, em, reached the Final of the World trials and was ranked number 1 in Scotland and 2nd in Britain for the Under 23 age group

J And you obviously earned a British vest through that?

N Yeah, yeah, I was selected for the Great Britain versus France match

J And how satisfied would you say that you are with your achievements so far?

N Em, I don't think I'm really satisfied with it at all. I always see that there's room for improvement. I can't imagine myself being the type of person who is happy with what I achieve. Maybe when I retire I'll look back and think that I've achieved something, but right now there's, I'm onto thinking about other things and bigger things to achieve

J OK, that brings us on to talking about goals in athletics then. Taking this season that's, well last season, I wonder if you could maybe tell me a bit about the goals that you'd set for that season

N Em, one of my goals actually was to be ranked number 1 in Scotland and to obtain a British vest and I got both. I would've liked a medal at the British Under 23's, but I had a disastrous heat which was my own fault and I didn't get into the Final, so two out of three isn't bad

J In terms of level of difficulty, what sort of level would you say that you tend to pitch your goals at?

N Em, I don't really see anything as being undifficult because I think most things are obtainable so I tend to set goals that I know I can achieve and I don't really view them as being difficult

J So on a scale of 1 – 5, how difficult would you say that your goals are?

N Maybe a 2, because nothing can....it's only me that makes it difficult, so it's not really difficult

- J That's interesting. I'd like you to think back to a time when you had a performance that you were particularly pleased with and if you could describe the emotions that you felt at that time
- N I can't really think of a specific time when pleasure at a race has lasted long because I tend just to focus on the things that could've been improved, so maybe when I won my first Scottish Championships as an Under 20, em, I achieved a time that I'd wanted to which was 1.52, I'd wanted that time but I spent most of the hour after it being sick so I didn't really have time to enjoy it and I focused on the fact that someone was really close to me and I could've been easily beaten, so proud of that moment, but....
- J But you tended to focus more on the negative aspects of your performance?
- N Not the negative, I didn't see it as negative then, more of the things that could be improved while still being positive
- J Right, OK. What about if you've ever had a performance that you've been particularly displeased with, if you could describe the emotions that you felt in relation to that
- N Em, the Under 23 AAA's this year I was really disappointed not to get into the Final when I had huge chance of....I could've easily got a medal and there was a huge chance that I could've won, but because of poor tactics I didn't get into the Final and I ran extremely sloppily and I was extremely disappointed in myself and really angry in myself
- J Do you ever doubt your ability to meet your goals?
- N Em, now and again but it only lasts for about 30 seconds. It's usually when I'm really exhausted or really emotionally tired and I sometimes think, "This is going to be tough," but not a lot
- J What problems have you encountered whilst trying to achieve in athletics?
- N Em, sometimes trying to motivate myself, but not very often, em.....
- J Can you give me an example of that?
- N When it's extremely cold and it's extremely wet and you feel physically exhausted, emotionally tired, but just a few minutes of talking to yourself can sort that out, em, other problems, finding people who understand how much it means to you and finding friends who might not be athletes who understand that you can't spend a lot of time with them or that other things take priorities. That's probably the biggest thing, trying to find people who understand that they usually have to take second place
- J OK, any other problems?

- N No, that's probably it
- J I think we've probably covered a little bit of this already. You mentioned at the start a bit about your reasons for taking part in the sport, what it was you liked about being an athlete. Could you maybe just go over that again for me, really just my question is, what are your reasons for taking part in athletics?
- N Em, to be different and there may be part of me that's really sick but I enjoy really training extremely hard and being physically exhausted, but more about the sense of achievement and knowing that there's very few people in the World who are willing to do what I'm doing and willing to put in the work, and in a way, feeling better than the people that don't do it
- J So in a sense there would you say that there's a bit of an ego thing going on there?
- N Oh definitely! All athletes have egos, it's part of being an athlete and part of being successful
- J Indeed I would agree with that. I'd like to get an idea now of how important athletics is to you. So I'd like you to imagine that your life's a cake. How big a piece would the athlete part of you be would you say?
- N About 99%
- J So obviously it's very, very important to you then?
- N Yeah, yeah, extremely important
- J How important would you say it is that other people perceive you as an athlete?
- N Probably about 99% as well. There's nothing more annoying than when I tell people that I'm an athlete and they immediately assume that I jog twice a week. That really pisses me off
- J Have you ever considered how you might feel when your athletics career comes to an end, if it was to come to an end without you not having much control over it?
- N I've thought about it now and again and I don't really want to think about the feelings that I'd have because I'd be extremely upset and because it's the only thing that I really have in my life that it would be extremely weird to go from having a huge dream to having nothing really, but I tend not to think about that because right now I am an athlete and I have to focus on that. I can't focus on not being an athlete. I've got too much to do
- J OK, let's move swiftly on then
- N To something happier!

STRESS IN EOMPETITION:

J Well actually now we're going to discuss sources of stress! So obviously I want to discuss your experiences of stress as an athlete, em, and one problem here is that different people have different ideas of what stress actually means, so to make sure we're on the same wavelength I'd like you to sort of think of stress as referring to those occasions where you have felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation which has had important consequences for you, em, so basically here it's not just like major stressful events that I'm looking at, just basically anything at all that would come under that definition of having ever been stressful for you. So we'll split this discussion up into the different areas from which stress might arise: stress in competition, stress in training and stress relating to the demands and the features of the sport

So we'll start with competitive sources of stress and what I'd like you to do here is to take some time to think back to an event which you can remember well and which was particularly stressful for you and if you can just, even the days leading up to the event, if you can try and think through what sort of emotions you were feeling during the event, go through the different things you did, you know, your registration procedures, warming-up, all the sort of stressful emotions that were going through your head at that point, if any. Have a think about that and when you're ready, if you could tell me about them. First of all if you could select a competition to discuss with me if you've got one

N Yeah, Olympic Trials 2000

J I can remember it well. And what was stressful about that for you?

N Em, the fact that it was such an important meeting. It was the first time I'd ever been to a Senior AAA's Ehamptionship and it just so happened that it doubled as an Olympic Trial year and the fact that the whole set up was different, the whole physicality of the meeting and.....

J In what way was that stressful for you, the physicality of the meeting?

N Just the fact that the whole call-up regime was different. There was a huge crowd. There were TV cameras there. There were people that I'd watched on television who had been Olympic Ehamptions and I was walking amongst them and that was weird from the fact that it had been so different and not what I had been used to before. I wasn't used to such an excellent organisation

J So, let's go back then to that scenario. You've got yourself at the Olympic Trials, there's a huge crowd there. There are famous people there. There are TV cameras there. There's a very elite sort of atmosphere. What sorts of emotions were you experiencing at that point?

N Part of me maybe was terrified of it, but there was probably a bigger part that absolutely loved it. It really fed my huge ego. I thought, “This is what it’s all about. This is part of what I want athletics for – competing at this level,” and really just going out and showing that I can cut it with the best of them and I was only 20 years old at the time and that made it more special knowing that I was just coming out of Junior rankings and in amongst it, so that was it. The biggest part was the part that it fed my ego and I liked the attention of the crowd. At the same time maybe, it sounds weird but, part of you disliked it, but part of you loved the intensity of it and the importance of it, if that makes sense

J Which part of that specifically was stressful for you would you say?

N Which part of the meeting was stressful?

J Part of what you’ve just described, what exactly was it about that, that was stressful for you?

N Em, I think probably having too high expectations of myself and thinking that although it was my first time at such a huge competition that I should do...put in an amazing performance and I should do amazingly well and really putting pressure on myself to put in a really good performance, plus the fact competing against guys who had been to the Olympics and had been professional athletes for years and had been cutting it with the really big boys if you like

J OK, I get the sense here that there’s two sort of independent sources of stress here then. There’s the first one, just the fact that the meeting was so big it was almost like you were putting an awful lot of pressure on yourself so that was one source of stress and then I also got the sense it was almost like you felt you were a little bit out of your depth. Would that be right?

N I felt a bit like that for about 30 seconds and then as soon as your athletic ego kicks in you’ve got to be arrogant again and start to realise that, “No they’re not any better than me,” as long as you keep telling yourself that you’re human, they’re human and they can be beaten like everyone else, so that fear of being out of my depth maybe lasted for about 30 seconds, a minute, and then I thought, “No you have work to do. Just get over it, stop feeling sorry for yourself!”

J What other things were stressful about that event?

N I think they were probably the most important. The fact that there was so much emphasis placed on meetings like that from being really young, that they were really important meetings and people who were there, their livelihood depended on putting in good performances so I knew that most of the people who were there wanted it just as badly as I did

J So why exactly do you think that that particular event was so important to you?

- N Because it was the Olympic Trials. It was televised so people who hadn't seen me race before were going to see me and....but because it was the biggest competition that I had competed at, that when you step up a level things are new and when routine has been changed then that's what becomes stressful, when you're no longer in a routine and something new has been exposed to you, you don't know how to control or react or act in that situation
- J OK so what would you say was at stake for you if you hadn't met your expectations at that event?
- N My own disappointment, em, the fact that I would've been really annoyed that I had put so much dedication into a whole year's work and not done what I was capable of doing. That's what I would've felt, losing my.....I would've felt that I would've failed
- J So would you say then that there's almost like there was a fear of failure in relation to that event as well?
- N Em, I wouldn't really like to say fear of failure but just, you know, not achieving what I can achieve. That's a more positive way of saying it
- J And can you think back to a specific moment when you were actually thinking like that to give me an example of it?
- N Em, I think the heats were actually more stressful than the Final, just thinking, "I've travelled all the way here and if I don't get passed these heats then it's been pointless." In some ways when you get to the Final it's less stressful, but the heats are like, they can be pretty wild and people can lose their nerve a bit because it's so important to qualify because any performance during the heats and semi-final doesn't much count so everyone gets pretty erratic and just pulls out every punch in order to get through to the next round
- J You mentioned the call-up procedure as well, what was stressful about that?
- N Em, the fact that you had to call-up, you had a separate warm-up area which I wasn't used to, which sometimes has reporters and photographers and kids waiting outside and the fact that you had a call-up tent where you were sitting beside all of your competitors in a tent for like 15 minutes to be given your lane draw and there was security and there were officials who were constantly contacting other officials on walky-talkies to make sure you were running on schedule and everything was running smoothly, em, then you'd be escorted from the tent out onto the track, past the crowd, past the cameras.....
- J And what was going through your mind at that point?
- N Em, part of me was really nervous but part of me thought that I was really special! It sounds so corny. I was like, "Yes, I have arrived!" but most of me was just thinking like, "Just control the situation, breath deeply, you're good

enough to get here so they're human, anything can happen in the race and just do what you plan to do"

J OK so a lot of it I guess was this idea of change again, like....

N Yeah. I wasn't used to the whole sophistication, if you want to put it like that, of the event – not that I'm complaining actually

J Em, and you mentioned there about, that you were very, very nervous. Is that like sort of physical nerves would you say?

N Yeah

J Is that something that you ever interpret as being stressful when you experience that?

N I have physical nerves for about 20 minutes from when I first walked into the stadium on the day of the Final when the crowd was the biggest it had been, em, and I thought to myself, "I'm at the Final of the Olympic Trials and I'm 20 years old. Who the hell do I think I am?!" And then, I felt sort of a bit sick and I thought, "No, just control it and appreciate the situation," and then again I was back to being arrogant and it was like, "I am good enough to be here," so the physical nerves maybe lasted about 20 minutes which is less than most athletes

J What other sorts of competitive pressures do you experience in general then?

N I find it quite hard to control my temper actually when someone's trying to do better than me and especially if I know that they're not any better than me, if they try and take the piss out of me, that's how I interpret it, if they have the audacity to challenge me

J Can you give me an example of that?

N Em, the Scottish Championships this year 2001, I was disqualified for pushing someone off the track because they got in the way and he was a slower athlete than me and I resented the fact that he thought he could lead me round the track and win the heat and he got in my way and could've prevented me from qualifying, so I just prevented myself from qualifying and shoved him off the track and got disqualified

J OK, so your temper is something in general that can be stressful for you at times?

N Yeah sometimes, most of time I can control it but it tends to be my arrogance that feeds my temper more than my temper feeding my....it's usually when I think that someone's trying to challenge me and I just think, "No, it's not happening." It's more actually at training that my temper gets to me when people are fooling around and being more lackadaisical because in competition most people are there because they want to be and sometimes if I

think that someone at training doesn't really want to be there, that really, really annoys me. That's what gets to me more than competition. Training is when my temper can sometimes get the better of me, but only for a short while

J To what extent do you feel prepared before a competition would you say?

N Sorry?

J In terms of your rest, nutrition, physical, mental preparation, how prepared would you say that you tend to feel before you compete?

N I think as prepared as I can be, the best I can be. I don't think I would step onto the track in a competition if I knew that something was lacking in the preparation. Sometimes there are obviously situations that no matter how much you want to control it you can't, for example, a race being delayed or a timetable running late. As much as you'd like to control that situation, you just can't and you have to deal with it and relax and get on with it. That's probably the only part of competition that I'd like to think that I can't control and that I can....it gets me stressful, so all the other preparation I'd like to think is the best it can be, but in saying that there is always room for slight improvements

J And how do you tend to feel when there are important people watching you race?

N I tend to try and ignore them cos I'm not really in athletics for anyone else, you're not really there to seek their approval. There is part of me that likes the fact that important people may be watching, but there's part of me that's not really concerned with them. I really don't care if they're there or not

J Right. So if I was going to ask you to what extent are you concerned with how other people perceive you or what other people think about you. I guess in a way you've already answered that

N Yeah, in a way I don't really care what they think of me. I'm there to do my job. I mean if they praise me for what they think is success then that's nice and if they criticise my performance then that's fine. I don't ever take any of them on board because if I have any criticism to offer them, I'll offer it to myself. I don't really need anyone else to offer it. I'm probably more critical of myself than anyone else could be

J How do you tend to feel if a rival beats you?

N Really angry, really annoyed and really disappointed in myself. There's part of me that wants to take my anger out on them, but if they've beaten me then it tends to be because it's been my fault

J To what extent would you describe that as being stressful?

- N Em, I don't really know if it's stressful. It'd probably be more disappointment. It does get stressful immediately after the event when I'm really, really annoyed and that's obviously a form of stress and that can be quite intense for a long time and then as much as you can you just have to get over it and move onto other things because it's gone and nothing can be done to change it, so there's not really any point in dwelling on it a really long time, but you do have to dwell on it and learn from the mistakes that you made. That's the only way you improve as an athlete
- J OK, so we've talked a bit about the stress associated with the event itself. We've talked a bit there about stress relating to after the event if you get beat. Is there ever any stress before the event that you ever experience, like the days leading up to the actual day of the event?
- N The days leading up to it can be stressful, but usually I do things to occupy me that stop me from thinking about it
- J What can cause stress in the days leading up would you say?
- N Just thinking about the competition in general basically and thinking about the routine you're going to go through and just maybe part of me thinking about having to do well for myself, that may be stressful thinking, "I can't let myself down here. I have to do really, really well," that more than anything, but I tend to do things not associated with athletics in order to keep my mind away from the, the event because if you get too involved in the days leading up then you just become too nervous and lose the plot basically
- J Anything else relating to competition that you find stressful at all?
- N Not really, we've probably mentioned everything that I want to mention. I don't really think I find them as stressful as most athletes. There's some athletes who are in real nervous states before competition and I tend to be able to keep my cool

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

- J Let's move on to the sources of stress that you may experience during training now. I'd like you to think back again in as much detail as possible to stressful training sessions you've had and isolate what you've found stressful and from my experience of training I would say that stress varies according to the time of year because of the kind of training that you're doing, so if that relates to you as well you might want to split the year up and tell me about sources of stress relating to different times of the year, if not if you want to just talk in general it's up to you. OK?
- N Winter definitely tends to be the most stressful because that's when I'm training more than I am in the Summer so more hours have to be committed and the weather as well just really pisses me off sometimes because there's

nothing you can do about it.....you can't stop it raining, you cant stop it from being windy or cold or icy and that's one of the things that really annoy me, the fact that I can't get to do what I want to do and have to do, just because there's something as stupid as the weather and the fact that it can't be changed and you have to sometimes just give into it and change what you want to do. So that sometimes can get really stressful, but in general what gets me stressful in training as I said before is the fact that sometimes people within the group aren't as focused as I want them to be and I need them to be, because I need people around me who are focused because they're ultimately going to help me, although I'm going to have to put all the work in myself, it can make it slightly more easy when there's people helping me and encouraging me and knowing that really they're doing what I want them to do to make my job slightly easier, easier by about 1% because it's all down to me at the end of the day. That's probably one of the most....like when people maybe sometimes carry on or if they turn up late that really gets me going, but I can only focus on that stress for a short period of time and just get on with it. So it tends to be other people's behaviour that stresses me out, not really my own

J OK and you mentioned that fact that you have to put more hours in in the Winter. In what way is that stressful for you?

N Em, the fact that you have to make even more sacrifices than you do in the Summer. Maybe in the Summer you can get to see other people and do other things for about four hours in the week rather than the ones that you're getting to see other people for like half an hour and do other things, and it just makes it more stressful on friendships, the fact that you're having to commit less time to them and having to do more explaining about how important it is to you, but part of it's good as well because it means that you.....there's part of me that likes the, the more stress and the more work because it does make you feel more dedicated and more special.....

J OK what about in the Summer?

N Em, that's when I really love training in the Summer, maybe the thing that's most stressful about Summer is the fact that we're on track so a lot of the training days can turn into...some of the training sessions can be like competition because some of the sessions do involve flat out work, a lot of speed work, em, that's probably the most annoying but I really, really love Summer training, I just think it's great. The weather tends to be better and....

J And what was the competitive part of it that was slightly stressful for you?

N Em, the fact that I have to know that when I'm on the track and competing against people that I've trained with, that I have to beat them by a huge margin, and if I don't beat them by a huge margin then I'll be really disappointed in myself, if you know where I'm coming from, cos it's sort of like a race, but I know I'm a lot better than them so I want to beat them by a huge, huge margin. I know I'm going to beat them but I want it to be as big a margin as possible, so again putting pressure on myself

- J Anything else about in training in general?
- N Em not really, as I said the most thing I find stressful is the fact that other people don't.....take it half way serious, they're not going to take it as seriously as me because I haven't really met anyone that I've trained with who has got.....that annoys me, just other people and them not really listening to me, not doing what they're told!
- J You mentioned the stress relating to your training partners then, do you have any stress with your coach at all?
- N Yeah, yeah, when.....it tends to be, when I think I know better about a training session or I think I know what I should have taken from a session and what should have been positive and what would have been negative. It tends to just be me thinking that I know what I'm talking about more than he does when really it's, deep down I know it's not true because he's been a coach for several years and he's excellent at what he does. It's just me being stubborn probably. That's the most stressful part of our relationship
- J Is it a sort of conflict of ideas would you say?
- N I think we have but I ultimately end up doing what he tells me because I know he's right but there's part of me that likes to put in a bit of a challenge and be stubborn
- J Do you ever experience ever stress relating to the physical aspects of training?
- N Stress like injury or tiredness?
- J Or pain or....yeah
- N Yeah obviously because you have to hurt yourself physically in order to improve, well most of the time, em, sometimes you do have extreme fatigue, sometimes you feel physically sick, sometimes you can't walk because you're so exhausted, but that's part of the job and as I said before there's obviously a sick side of me that obviously wants that extreme physical pain, and I know that ultimately it'll be fine in a few minutes and I'll be left with some sense of achievement and a goal to set for future sessions and a marker to improve on
- J Can you talk me through one of your sessions which is particularly stressful from that sort of point of view, talk me through what sorts of things are going through your head?
- N Em, a Saturday interval session is probably, can be extremely tough because it involves running for....it tends to be three minutes, you're running round an extremely wet, soggy, hilly course and eventually, ultimately you're given a very short time to recover and it just becomes so physically tiring that you can't breathe and you're legs feel as if they're going to fall off and what is

most physically stressful is the fact.....probably it's the weather that makes it more physically stressful because your mental state may influence you feeling physically tired. You may start to make yourself feel more tired than you actually are, but physically it tends to just be the ultimate fatigue and the dead on your legs feeling!

J Any others at all?

N No, not really

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

J Finally in the sources of the stress section I'd like you to consider if there's anything in particular about the sport itself which causes stress for you, so try to think as broadly as possible about the specific demands and sacrifices associated with sport and also organisational aspects such as team management, timetabling of events, registration/declaration procedures which may cause stress for you. I wonder if you could identify any of these sources of stress, you've actually already touched upon the fact that you find being an athlete, you have less time for friends, you have to explain yourself a lot about how important it is to you, so I suppose we've already touched upon that point, anything else?

N Em, maybe the organisation of some of the events, especially within Scotland. I sometimes get the feeling that the officials feel that the event has been organised for their social enjoyment and that they sometimes forget that they're actually there to provide a service for people like me and when I ask for something I should ultimately be given it and I shouldn't be questioned because I'm ultimately there to do my job and they're there to provide a service for me that'll help me in doing my job, so I think they could be more dedicated in their approach to organisation and more professional definitely and treat it less as a social event, that can sometimes annoy me

J You mentioned earlier about if the timetable's running late. Could you expand a bit on that?

N Em, the greatest annoyance about the timetable running late is the fact that your warm-up is carried out in such a way that it's pinpointed to everything running perfectly so that you're physically and mentally prepared for the competition and as soon as that preparation is thrown out by an event being running late, it just makes competing more stressful or more, not more annoying, but it can add a difficulty in your preparation for your competing, so if something runs late then it can sometimes throw your preparation off which isn't good because you want to be standing on the line knowing that you're ready for what you're about to do

J And how do you feel when that happens?

- N Em, I tend to try and just, I'll get annoyed but it'll last a very short time and I'll just move on and deal with it and change my warm-up and change my approach because getting really stressed out about it isn't going to change the fact, but after it, after the competition I may get annoyed and I may get angry and really pissed off and may moan at some people, but actually before the competition I'll be annoyed for a short period of time and then I'll just deal with it and move on because it's not going to help my preparation being annoyed - preparation's already been thrown off by them so I'm not going to add another hindrance
- J Anything relating to the financial costs of the sport?
- N Em, I do have to get into debt sometimes to go to competition and to pay for travelling costs, but I just basically ignore that because I don't care what I have to do because I'm getting to....I want to go to a competition - I'll go regardless of what I have to do. I want to get to training - I'll do what I have to do and I don't care if, financially it can be a struggle but I don't mind getting into debt for it. I really don't care, it's just secondary, em, no matter what happens I'll always be training, so I don't really see that as a hindrance. It can be a struggle sometimes though, but regardless of what happens financially I'll always train. They can even jail me if I'm not paying my debt, but I'll still train when I'm in jail!
- J You talked about the sacrifices perhaps with part of your social life that you have to make for the sport. Are there any other sacrifices you have to make?
- N I don't have relationships for the sheer fact that whoever I was in a relationship with would not figure highly compared to athletics [TAPE ENDS]
- J OK before the tape finished we were talking about the fact that you've made a decision not to have a relationship because of athletics, so could you tell me about that again?
- N Yeah. I think it would be.....first of all I wouldn't figure them highly in the relationship, compared to my athletics they would always take second place, em, so really I wouldn't have time to commit to someone, em, to be honest it wouldn't be fair to enter into a relationship with someone and not offer them my full commitment and not expect them to understand because this is my job and I don't expect anyone to deal with me and deal with my job and that's fine, that's understandable, they didn't choose this life, it's me who chose it
- J So is it the fact that that's a sacrifice that you've had to make and that in itself could be a little bit stressful for you then?
- N Yeah, but not so stressful because ultimately it helps me do what I want to do, not having a relationship allows me to focus all my attention on my athletics which is good, so it's not really that stressful
- J What about, are there any more organisational aspects you find stressful?

- N In competition or training?
- J Em, anything really just in general yeah
- N Em, not really, sometimes the selection process can really piss me off. I can remember actually when I won the Under 20 Scottish 800, that an athlete who was slower than me was picked for the World Junior Games, which I didn't find out about until after the Winter and that really pissed me off for a long time, but it was good in a way because it also gave me motivation to work even harder, be even more dedicated and, just to perform even more, just so that I could show people that they'd made a huge mistake and when they did select me I could say no, which I did
- J Did you?
- N Yeah
- J Any others?
- N No that's really everything

OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS:

- J OK, so we've obviously talked about stress relating to these three particular sections. Are there any sources of stress which you experience as an athlete which we haven't covered, completely out with these sections?
- N I don't think so cos that's really covered everything. My life really just revolves around competing and training
- J What about any environmental demands, anything such as the weather conditions, competition venue, even the specifics of the track you're racing at. Has anything like that ever been stressful or you?
- N Not really, just weather, but we've focused on that in training. That can sometimes be stressful because as we said that can't be changed and that can be a huge annoyance. The venue of the track doesn't really bother me cos I'm not concerned, I mean 400 metres is 400 metres and I don't particularly care where I run. I'm just there to run 800 metres and as I said, 800 metres is 800 metres regardless of whether there's 10,000 seats in the stadium or there's no stadium at all, just a track, it doesn't bother me
- J You mentioned at the beginning that sometimes one of the problems that interferes with your training is motivation. Is that something that you would ever describe as being stressful?
- N I don't describe it as being stressful. It's probably more something that you can learn from and use as a challenge to improve on and for myself it doesn't

really occur that often because I don't find it difficult to motivate myself and the very few occasions that it happens which is mostly Winter, then I try not to find it stressful. I try just to think about how good it's going to feel after completing a difficult session and that tends just to be motivation itself em, and you can make it less stressful by just reminding myself how much I actually love the sport and why I'm doing it and that it would be very easy just to be like everyone else and just say, "no," or just switch the alarm off and not train, and I don't want to be like that, so being unmotivated doesn't really occur that often and when it does it's mostly in the Winter, because of the weather, cos I like the sun, we don't have it here

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

J Let's move onto the final section now. In this section I'm interested in finding out if there's anything about you as a person which might influence the stress that you experience, things like personality differences, differences in the way that you tend to cope with stress. What aspects of you then do you think influence the stress that you experience?

J You mentioned there, it sounds like you're a very organised person and you mentioned the word perfection there. A typical definition of a perfectionist would be someone who sets themselves pretty high personal standards, someone who's very critical of themselves on their performances and someone who really doesn't take it well when they don't meet those expectations that they have of themselves. To what extent would you describe yourself as a perfectionist?

N Em, everything you've said really, em, I do find that it can make training more stressful the fact that everything has to be the way I want it to be, everything has to be right and everything should run as smoothly as it can em, the fact, maybe what makes me a perfectionist if I am one is the fact that I want everything to be controlled and I want everything to be right, em, and that includes other people's behaviour, em, but it does make me a perfectionist as well, but as a good thing and something you have to have is the fact that you're always looking for ways to improve and you're always looking for things that can change to be made better, just general.....and constantly picking up on your bad points because that's what makes a good athlete. A good athlete is someone who doesn't dwell on winning and doesn't dwell on having a good performance because that's not ultimately what's going to make you improve. What's going to make you improve is changing the things that you've done wrong because if you change something that's gone right then you're going to make it wrong again so focusing on what I've done badly and trying to improve that, it's the only way that you're going to improve as an athlete but not only as an athlete, in anything in your career or in your life, in order to improve at whatever you do then you have to be critical and you have to focus on the bad points, and some people think that's being negative, it's not being negative it's being.....

- J In a twisted way positive
- N Yeah, yeah, yeah. It sounds like a.....
- J Paradox?
- N A paradox, exactly
- J OK, so it sounds like what you're saying then is you agree that you are a perfectionist and that that can cause you stress sometimes and you gave the example that in training it can sometimes cause you stress, but also there's almost, there's a positive side to that as well in that it helps you achieve higher standards
- N That's not....I don't see, em, being a perfectionist as being negative although it's been stressful, stress sometimes helps people perform better. I know it does for myself, I will not do whatever I can do well unless I have stress because it can.....if you don't have stress then it can sometimes invoke laziness in people and when I have stress then, it's not negative in it tends not to make me worry or under-perform, it tends to make me get switched on and make me perform better
- J Is there anything else about you as a person that you might think might influence your stress at all?
- N Em, I think athletics being so important can induce stress because it takes up so much of my life sometimes and maybe if I stepped back every now and again and gave myself more time to think and relax away from the sport then when I'm going back to it, it can make me more dedicated and motivated. I think because sometimes I'm so wrapped up in it that I can't see a clearer picture if that makes sense, so maybe stepping back now and again and forgetting about athletics for maybe an hour or so will reduce stress, but the fact that its so wrapped up can sometimes.....the fact that it surrounds everything in my life can sometimes make it stressful I think, but I don't mind that because it's what I love, and it doesn't take up everything cos there's still 1% that it doesn't take up, but that can be improved to make it 100%!
- J Anything else at all about you, anything that influences your stress?
- N Em, not that I can think of, I think that's the lot
- J Well I think that's just about all I need to ask you. All the information you've given me has been very helpful, thanks very much
- N No problem
- J Before we finish though, do you think there are any important factors that we failed to discuss in relation to your experiences of stress?

- N Not really, I think I'm all talked out. I'm not going to say the word stress for at least another year!
- J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?
- N Not really, no. I think it's been very good and I enjoyed it
- J Thank you, excellent
- N I may think of something and then I'll write to you and let you know!
- J OK well thanks again and good luck for next season
- N No problem

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

RACHEL

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J Right, OK S, before we start discussing athletics, it would be useful for me to get some background information from you, so I wonder if you could begin with by telling me maybe a bit about yourself, your age, where you live and what it is you do just now

S Right, well I talk about my circumstances up until now, rather than about my change?

J Yeah, we'll probably end up covering both, but if you talk about...

S Right, OK, I'm 25. I'm a 400 metres hurdler. I live in Edinburgh and I was living with my parents, well I was at University until '98 and then I was living with my parents until about sort of the start of 2001 and then I now live in a flat on my own

J OK and do you have a job just now, or...?

S At the moment, no, I'm just full-time training for athletics

J OK and what sorts of things do you enjoy about being a full-time athlete?

S Em, I enjoy the flexibility of having time to train and not really having to worry about fitting training or physiotherapy in or massage in around a job. I mean I did have a job the first year I graduated, but it was like only 20 hours a week and that was fine. It was just like every afternoon but then I was quite lucky that I didn't get injured. When I did get injured it was good to know that whenever the physio was free I could see them and you know it was good because the girls that I trained with were doing Uni courses, so whenever they were free to train, you know, I could train and there was no sort of hassle trying to fit round everybody. It's good for like warm-weather training or, you know, if you need to go away for whatever reason to like a, you know, a squad meeting or whatever or you need to see a physio or something, you can just do it without having to worry about getting time off

J Are there any aspects of the lifestyle that you don't enjoy?

S Em, boredom I suppose, a bit of a lack of routine, like although I've said I'm quite happy not having a job, I think I'm going to get one this year, cos I quite enjoy having the routine of working, you know, just having the routine of something, it's quite good, em, just I suppose the lack of structure and I suppose it's easy to maybe I don't know, get a bit lazy or something I suppose when you're not used to doing a lot

J So apart from athletics, what other things do you do in your free time?

- S Em, em, I suppose I see my friends quite a lot. That's probably the main thing, em, just I don't know, watch TV, go to the cinema, em, go out and eat. I don't know, nothing majorly exiting really
- J OK, so let's talk about athletics now. Obviously you're a 400 metres hurdler. Have you always done that event?
- S No, I used to be a sprinter up until about '96 until I came out of the Juniors and I tried 400 hurdling a couple of times and quite enjoyed it and I think I wasn't progressing at the sprints and I knew it was time to move up to 400's, so I thought I'd move up and hurdle as well, like cos I knew when I was coming out the Juniors I would have a couple of years until I was realistically going to be trying to get anywhere in the Seniors. I thought it was the best time to do it and if the hurdling didn't work out I'd have the 400 metres background to do 4's anyway so I thought it was a sensible time to try out something new
- J And I know that your circumstances are about to change, but taking things as they are at the moment, I'd like you to describe your training structure for me, what I mean by that is how many coaches you have, how often you train
- S Em, well the way it was, like during the Winter I'd em, do four sort of running track sessions a week, em, sort of generally before Christmas I'd do hill running on a Sunday, em, I'd do a 20 minute run in the morning on the Monday and weights in the evening and then Tuesdays track session, Wednesday would be a 20 minute run and weights, Thursdays track, Fridays track, Saturdays rest, just really involving one coach and when I started hurdling I would go across to Bob Sommerville sometimes, but it was quite difficult to have times when we were both free, you know we both had different commitments so it was quite difficult to coordinate it so generally I was just really here apart from, I went warm-weather training which was just for a month of the year
- J OK and how would you describe the relationship that you have with your coach at the moment?
- S At the moment, it's kind of in transition cos he's not really my coach anymore, em, it was pretty good. I mean I'd say because I started training with him when I was about 12 or 13, it was definitely in the past more of a em, like a kind of teacher pupil thing I suppose, you know like a "You will do this and that's the way it is and just get on with it," shut-up basically, which is less so now. I mean I have more input into my training, especially in the Summer. In the Winter it's pretty much, "This is what you're doing. This is it," unless something happens that I'm ill or I'm injured or if I'm really run down or there's been a specific reason why I can't do the session, he's very much like, "That's your session, that's what you're doing, get on with it." I'm not allowed more rest unless I'm absolutely dying, you know, which is what I need I think and it's good but in the Summer I have a lot more input into training, especially when I'm hurdling and preparing for competitions we'll

discuss what I should do, but you know, once we've decided then, you know, it's pretty much set

J And what age were you when you started, well you said you've been at it for about 12 or 13 years. How exactly did you get involved in the sport?

S Em, I used to be, I used to be good at athletics at Primary School, you know just doing school sports and whatever, you know, I was always like sort of the fastest in the class and that so, em, my Dad saw an advert in the paper for an open day where you go down to Edinburgh Athletic Club and try out all the different events so I went down and just tried out, there was like running, em, you know like standing high jump and throwing a cricket ball and all that sort of thing and then got asked to come back and join, so then I started then and started with Walter just kind of by chance....

J And it was something that you wanted to do, it wasn't coming from anywhere else?

S No, not at all, I'd never thought of doing athletics. It was just when my Dad saw this advert he said, "Oh you know you could do it to go and have a try." I mean initially for the first year I maybe only trained once a week and then you know twice a week and then three times a week and then it just gradually built up. The first year I did athletics I wasn't all that good at it really, I mean it was really the second year that I started getting, you know, medals at the whatever, Scottish Schools and stuff and I thought, "yeah, I quite like this," and, you know, "I want to do this a bit more seriously," so....

J I'd like you to briefly talk me through your progression from the start of your athletic career, maybe if you could maybe just tell me about your main achievements

S OK, well, I suppose when I was young I was a sprinter so I mean I went from I suppose getting medals at the likes of the Scottish Schools and the Scottish age group Championships, Under 15's, Under 17's or whatever, progressed from maybe Under 15's I was medalling and then from Under 17's I was winning I suppose indoors and outdoors, like 100 and 200 and I think I medalled at the AAA's when I was Under 17's and when I got to the Under 20's I suppose I was medalling at the AAA's and I got to the World Juniors and got to the European Juniors, em, at sprints, and I suppose I got my first Scottish Senior International at 16. I think I first won the Seniors at 17 at 200, em, and then when I moved to Under 23 there wasn't a great Under 23's set up when I first started at Under 23's when I was hurdling, but I think I was ranked first in my age group the first year I did it in '96, em, but there wasn't a good set up. The following year they had Championships but I had Glandular Fever so I didn't run at all that season and then, em I suppose in '98 I missed out in getting to the Commonwealths, but I think I was the best 400 hurdler in Scotland and maybe one of the best under 23's, and then in '99 I had my huge break through year where I won the AAA's indoors at 400 and outdoors at 4 hurdles, em, I came 4th at the World Students, em, got a medal at the, got 3rd in the relay at the World Students, got to the semi-final in the 400 hurdles at

the World Championships. It was just all a bit of a shock, and then I suppose in 2000, that was probably my best year really, in 2000, I mean I didn't run far off that, I came 3rd at the AAA's and got to the Olympics but wasn't happy with how I did. In 2001 I won the AAA's, em, got to the semi-finals of the Worlds, but still time wise didn't progress, so...

J How satisfied would you say you are with your achievements so far?

S Em, fairly satisfied, I mean I hope that I haven't fulfilled my potential as such. I hope that that isn't all that I'm going to do cos I can't really believe that in one year I could go from running like 58 to 55 and then never get any better. I can't believe that one year's training is going to do that. I'd hope that there's more in me that...I mean that's why I'm moving really, just to try and see if I can progress further cos, I mean I believe I can but it's a matter of I suppose getting the right set-up, getting the right coaching, having the right people to train with and especially in hurdles getting the technical help as well cos I mean I've got to where I am with very little technical input. I mean when I was in Glasgow I did get a lot of technical input, but after I left I've had very, very little, so, that's what's probably the main advantage I'll have of going to Birmingham is that I'll get a lot of technical help and hopefully it'll help to decrease my differential between my 400 and hurdles

J I'd like to talk now about your goals and targets in athletics, so taking this season that's just come to an end, could you tell me a bit about what your goals were for that season?

S My main goal was to make the team for the World Championships, cos the qualifying time to actually get there had actually gone up about half a second from what it was to make the Olympics, so I knew that realistically, although I'd made the time the last two years it wasn't just a kind of foregone conclusion that I would do it and that I would get picked, so that was like my main target and then in addition I mean...I suppose I'm more of a person that I think I can only do the best that I can do. I can't control what someone else does, so although I'd love to be the quickest in Britain, the winner of the AAA's, you know, if somebody else is running 54 seconds, you know, like I can't control that so obviously I would like to win the AAA's, come out top ranked, get to the World Championships.... I mean I made the semi's of the last one, so ideally to at least, you know, do what I did last time, ideally get further, but you know, that was my main aim for the season

J And how close to meeting them did you come?

S Em, I did win the AAA's. I did manage to make it to the World Championships. I did get to the semi-final of the World Championships, but I didn't really do it in the way I would've liked. I didn't manage to make the qualifying time. I got picked off having done it last year, which isn't really the way that I wanted to go about it and I won the AAA's really because one person wasn't running all that well, one person was injured, so it wasn't as if I did it through real merit. Although the season overall I did OK, it wasn't quite what I would've liked it to have been, you know

J I'd like you to think back to a time where you had one of your favourite performances, one that you felt you were particularly successful in and if you could describe how that felt for me

S Em, I think maybe when I made the final of the World Students, it was probably my most....either that or winning the AAA's which was quite close together were probably my most happy moments in athletics, cos I think at the World Students my PB had been like 56.4 and I just basically ran round thinking, "Right, I want to be in the first two so try and get a good lane. I came second and I ran like 55.3 and was just like, "Where the hell...", you know like, "How did that happen?" you know just total shock and I think that was it, it was just like the shock of it and not having expected to do it, em, you know, I was just completely so surprised by it I suppose, you know, I just felt really happy and I suppose....I was more happy that like, you know, I'd trained really hard for a year and to feel like it had really been worth it and like it had paid off and I'd done better than I ever thought I would and, you know, in one race I'd managed to....I knew that I'd get to go to Seville then and I knew that I had a good chance of winning the AAA's and I'd like, I don't know, I think I'd come up to like third on the all-time list and done all this sort of thing in one race and just been like, "Oh my God," like I just wasn't expecting it at all, so that's probably the best. The winning the AAA's was after that when, you know, there was about three of us had a good chance of winning it and to actually win it I was really happy

J So what about a time, if you've had a time when you've had a performance which you've been very unhappy with, then if you could explain that for me

S Em, I'd say my performance in Sydney, I was really disappointed with...

J At the Olympics?

S At the Olympics, yeah, and I just, I felt very disappointed, mainly disappointed in myself that I, em, had the opportunity to, you know, I was there, I had the opportunity to run well. I just hadn't taken it. I hadn't ran well. I couldn't even really explain why, I mean the conditions were shocking, but then the conditions were shocking for everyone so I was just like really disappointed in myself and then I suppose when I thought about it disappointed at the fact that....I suppose that I'd given up a lot for it in that like my family had really helped me, my coach had helped me, the Institute had helped me, the, I'd been getting Lottery money. When you think of all the sort of supports that I'd had and then really felt that I'd sort of let everyone down I suppose, you know, that a lot of people had faith in me. I had so many good luck cards and, "You've got messages," and then you know you were just like, "Oh God, that was absolutely shocking," so I just felt really, mainly disappointed in myself I suppose

J Do you ever doubt your ability to meet your goals?

S Em, sometimes I suppose yeah, sometimes. I think maybe more recently, you know, I start questioning myself because I haven't improved for the last couple of years, just start wondering, "Oh well, is that the best I'm ever going to be?" so I suppose so, but I think that if I really had serious doubts about it then I wouldn't keep going or I wouldn't want to keep going at the same level and I'd want to try and, you know, get a job or start to get a career. I don't think I'd give it more time, so I certainly hope that I haven't run as fast as I will

J What problems have you encountered whilst trying to achieve in the sport?

S I suppose when I first finished Uni, em, I had the problem of, I didn't get to the Eommonwealths and I really, there was all a big problem about that. I should've been there, but the, em, decision got overturned by the Games Eouncil, so I mean that was like a huge disappointment, but it also meant that I didn't get Lottery funding then, like for that year, so although I was trying to, not so much go full-time in athletics, but to try and get a part-time job and train and be serious about it. It meant that I had no funding. I was relying on my parents to sort of give me, sort of, free board at home and em, you know it wasn't easy. I mean fair enough, I ran well at the indoors and I got onto Lottery straight away and there's been no problem after that, but that was a problem at the start, and then after that year, injury has been a problem, em...

J What injuries have you had?

S Achilles tendonitis in both Achilles, em, hamstring problems as well. That's been really it, but just kind of, you know, niggly things that haven't allowed me to train as well as I want to

J And what impact have your injuries had on your progression would you say?

S Em, I hope that it's my injuries that've been the main reason for me not really progressing cos I think I was quite lucky in that in between sort of '98 to '99, I think I literally missed about two sessions in the whole Winter and I trained non-stop, whereas with my Achilles I missed, you know, three months or something, you know, and OK, I didn't miss an awful lot with my hamstrings, but enough, you know, at the start of the season I missed three races and then you find it hard to get into good quality races after that and, so it has been, it has been quite hard, you know it's been quite stressful I suppose

J And how have you felt emotionally when you've encountered these injuries?

S Em, a bit frustrated I suppose, just a bit....I found this year particularly frustrating because I felt like I was going really well, I mean I'd ran, I broke the Scottish record for 400 indoors and thought, "Right, I'm definitely running better," all my times were better at training. I went to America, em, I just felt that everything was going really well and then just before my first 400 hurdles race, like about three or four days before I pulled my hamstring and that was me out for about three weeks, and three weeks at that time in the season is quite a long time.... and then I missed, I'd had two races arranged for me

abroad and I missed the first one and then in the second one I won it, but my time wasn't fantastic so then I couldn't get into really a lot more races abroad so I was doing races here which I was winning, wasn't really getting pushed. I was worried about, you know, I think I lost one race until I ran at Erystal Palace, which was the week before I went to the Worlds, about two days before I went to the Worlds, so it's kind of hard, you know, trying to get to where you want to be without being able to get the competitions that you need to get there. I just found it quite hard and I felt like it was such a stupid injury that I had that I was like, I think it was definitely preventable. I suppose I try not to dwell on it. I'm somebody that tends to just kind of gets on with things and don't let it bother me too much, but when I think back it's like, I do think it was preventable and I think my whole season probably would've been different, you know, if it hadn't happened, so, it was quite irritating really

J What would you say that your reasons are for taking part in athletics?

S Em, I suppose probably the main reason's like personal satisfaction I suppose. That's probably the main reason for it, em, I think I'm quite a goal orientated person and I like having goals which, you know, to try and achieve, em, I mean I enjoy, I do enjoy training. I enjoy, you know, feeling fit, feeling healthy. I enjoy the friendships that I make in athletics. I enjoy Ehamppionships, em, I suppose although kind of mixed feelings, the actual feeling of racing, you know, although it's quite nerve racking I think, you know, you must enjoy it, you know, I do enjoy it as well, em, and I enjoy like, I suppose going on trips and meeting different people and, you know, making friends and just the whole.....and I suppose the fact, I'm lucky that I can do it full-time as well, you know, rather than I don't know, nine to five like most of my friends. I'm quite happy what I'm doing

J I'd like to get an idea of how important athletics is to you. Obviously I already have an idea, but perhaps to get a more specific idea, I'd like you to imagine that your life is a cake. How big a piece is the athlete part of you then would you say?

S Probably about two thirds of the cake

J And what makes up the other pieces would you say?

S Em, it's probably like mainly family and friends. I mean at the moment I'm not working so I can't say a job, although you know, if I did have one I suppose obviously that would be a part of it

COMPETITIVE STRESS:

J I'd like to move onto the second part of this interview now and discuss your experiences of stress as an athlete. Here I'd like you to think of stress as referring to those occasions where you have felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation which has had important consequences for you. To

help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, we'll split our discussion up into different areas from which stress might arise: competition, training and the demands and specific features of the sport.

I'd like to start with competitive sources of stress and I'd like you to take some time to think back carefully to a competition which you found particularly stressful and can remember well and if you can just go through the event in your mind, thinking about all the things which you found stressful, going through like your registration procedures, warm-up, talking to your coach, if there was anything at all that you can remember as being stressful there and tell me about that if you can. Can you select a competition to discuss with me or would you prefer just to talk in general?

S Em, I think I'll maybe do it more generally, but think of a major competition like a major championship like AAA's, like one where it's specifically important for me to do well, rather than just a...you know, league meeting or something, yeah....em, I think the stress starts like a long time before. I mean certainly, when I think about the likes of the Olympics I probably felt that I was worried about it from about a year before because I knew that, em, there was pressure to even, like get there and you know, a lot sort of expected of you to get there, em, I think, I think as it kind of gets closer to the time of the competition, I think each training session becomes more important as well. I think....I mean I try not to let it get to me too much, em, I think I more take the attitude of, "Oh well, I'll be OK on the day," but especially in hurdling, you know, if I go through a session and I suddenly can't meet my hurdles or my times in between are rubbish or, you know, maybe the wind's in my face, I can't get my strides and just like, "Oh," you know, it is, it's quite sort of worrying if you know that the next time you do it it's going to be in a race and it matters, so, but I do try not to worry about it cos I know that, you know, that in the race I'm usually fine, em....

J You talked about the pressure there, like to get to the Ehamppionships, to get to the Olympics. Who would you say that that pressure's coming from?

S Em, mainly from myself, really but I mean also, I wouldn't say I had pressure from family and friends but obviously, you know, they're, you know, wanting me to get there I suppose for my sake as well....eh, from the media as well, em, from your own Federation, from the Lottery, em, from the Institute. I suppose it's like everyone who has invested time or money into you, I think, is, I wouldn't say so much as in the respect as the returns, but, em....

J You would like to give them something back?

S Exactly and I think especially when it's a financial input from, like the Government Lottery, then they are expecting a return for there money, so yeah, I mean that's kind of another, another kind of pressure I suppose and the media, you know, if somebody's writing about you and saying, "Oh yeah, and hopefully she'll be in Sydney bla, bla, bla...", and you're like, "Oh my God," you know, "What if I'm not?" you know, so it is, it's kind of stress from a lot of different areas, em, shall I just move on to the actual competition, or...?

- J Yeah, anything at all that you've, connected with competition that you've found stressful
- S Em, I suppose like the whole thing, like....em, I think just, I suppose there's worry in the days that are leading up to...say if I take the AAA's, like the days leading up to it you're a bit worried, kind of getting your stuff together, getting, I don't know, even just packing your bag or preparing your drinks, or just stupid things like that, you know, you....
- J What sorts of thoughts are going through your head at that point?
- S Just constantly have it on your mind that well, like this is....like it's coming closer and, you know, as in more, like when you're organising something or packing your bags, you're like, "Oh this is what it's for and this is where I'm going and...", even like....
- J So, as the event approaches and you're describing that it's almost like that the stress or the pressure or the worries or whatever, increase, what exactly is it do you think that's causing the worry? What exactly do you think it is that you're worrying about?
- S I don't know if I would really class it as worry. It's more....half of it's kind of a bit exciting and half of it's worry, but I suppose it's fear of, maybe fear of failure, fear of...I mean I have to say, I don't think many people know this, but whenever I enter the AAA's, I always enter the 400 flat as well as the hurdles in case I fall over the first hurdle or something, but seriously, it's fear of that sort of thing, like, "What if I get half way round and I fall or something?" you know obviously you don't have to worry about that so much in the flat, but in the hurdles it is something that you have to think about, or....it's just I suppose things can, you know, you have, it's kind of in the back of your mind all the time, but especially like, say you're doing the AAA's to try and make it to a Ehamptionship thinking, "I still haven't run the time," for example, like this year, "Am I going to run the time? Am I going to do what I need to do to get there? Am I going to...."
- J So in a way it's about fear of not meeting your personal expectations?
- S Yeah, uhuh, yes, that's probably the main thing, the fear of not performing the way you want to perform or the way you believe you can perform, so I suppose just, you know, you get to the hotel and, em, I suppose like, you know, you get up in the morning and have your breakfast, feel like you can't eat anything, em.....
- J Is that stressful for you?
- S I don't know if it's stressful, yeah I suppose it is a bit, you know, I suppose you get in a routine though, like I'm used to now like what I'll eat and when I'll eat it and I think that kind of helps, almost having a bit of a routine and knowing like when you're due to do things, em, I suppose if it's something

like the AAA's when you go down the track you probably see people you know, you'll sit and chat to them and....the heats are almost worse because I suppose when you make it through to the Final, you know like that's it and, you know, that's what you're there to do, whereas when you're making it through the heats you might be a bit worried about, "Oh, what if I totally mess up or what if I fall or...."

J So it's like fear of getting knocked out in the earlier rounds?

S Yeah, yeah, or fear of not making it round or, that kind of thing, em, I suppose, declaration, I don't find that particularly stressful, but, you know, you go and declare, get your number, get your pins, put your number on, do your warm-up, I suppose you sort of see people that you're competing against and, especially if it's something bigger like a Ehamptionship and you're kind of eyeing up people going over the hurdles and that and thinking, "Oh my God, she looks really good", you know, but.....

J How does that make you feel when that happens?

S Em, I think I'm, I'm not too bad in that I kind of think, "Well lots of people can look good," you know I could go to a Scottish League match and someone could look really good, but it doesn't mean that they're going to beat me, you know, it just is like, people can look good and it doesn't necessarily mean that, you know, they're going to be better than me on the day, but I suppose if it's one of the really top ones in the World I'll be like, "Oh well," you know, obviously she's going to beat me, em.....

J Is there a sort of fear then of also being beat as well would you say?

S A little, yeah I suppose so, uhuh, yeah I suppose at the likes of the AAA's, especially like last year and the year before when there was like three of us all with probably about an equal chance of winning it. When you're looking at them you're sort of thinking, "Oh what are they doing?", and I know you shouldn't be, you should be thinking about yourself, but it's quite hard not to look out the corner of your eye, em, I find it quite hard when you actually go into the tent or you go into the, you know, the actual like call room and you have to sit down, you have to sit like in order of your lanes or whatever and, especially when it's something like the AAA's where it's all people that you know, people that you get on with and you're kind of, you don't really want to talk and you feel a bit awkward and, not awkward, but just, you're kind of focused on yourself I suppose, but you almost feel like you're being a bit rude because you're not talking to them. It's not so bad at a Ehamptionship because you don't really know people and, you know, they can be a bit ignorant and I don't really care what they think of me that much, whereas at something like, you know, more domestic, it's like, you know, you'd quite like to be able to talk, but you sort of think you better not....

J In a sense then would you say that in a way, you mentioned there you don't really care what those kind of people think, but you do maybe for people that

you know. Is there a sense at all that you would say you're the type of person that is concerned with what other people think of you, or.....?

S Yeah, probably I wouldn't, yeah probably. I mean I think that, I suppose how I perform is the most important thing to me in terms of athletics, but yeah, I mean, I don't want to be thought of in a bad way, you know, and yeah, I suppose. I suppose it is important

J So the bigger the event would you say that the stress increases?

S Em, I wouldn't say that I particularly care what people who I don't really know think of me, like spectators or anything, but em, I suppose the bigger the event the more importance is placed on it, the more importance I place on it and the more important it is for me to do well at it, you know, if I... but I mean I've been to things like Grand Prix where I've not done that well and I've not been that bothered cos at the end of the day it doesn't really matter, maybe that's a bad attitude, but it doesn't matter to me as much, whereas if I don't do well at a Ehamptionship it does matter cos I feel that Ehamptionships is really what athletics is all about, not really Grand Prix, not really making money, like to me it's about Ehamptionships and the performances at them and that's why I suppose I care a lot more and I feel a lot more pressured, as a consequence I think I usually compete at my best when I'm at them because I really care how I get on, em, so I suppose to going back to being in that wee room, and I think I find it, I think just the whole experience is quite stressful, you know, like and then you get led out to the track and you're all sort of, and you kind of know what you're about to do and, especially at a Ehamptionship you might get led half way and stop and then you can see, either on the big screen or you can see the people ahead of you and you can see them doing the race ahead of you and you can see what it's won in and if you want to you can look at the screen to see everyone's times and see roughly what you're going to have to run to qualify which I try not to do cos I think that that just can totally freak you out. I try not to really look at it, but yeah

J So what's going through your mind at this point then, you're coming out the declaration tent and they're leading you down to towards the race?

S I try and...I suppose I try and have almost like a race plan that's in my head, what I want to do. I'm conscious, especially hurdling of the conditions and the way the wind's going and what my likely stride pattern's going to be so I kind of have it set in my head. It's a way of almost, not calming myself but just focusing on my, like what I'm going to do rather than thinking, "Oh my God, I'm so nervous, I can't do this," cos you do have a little bit of that inside you but I think it's more trying to plan out, "Well, if the wind's going in a favourable direction well I'll manage this many strides to here and then I'll change and then..." you know, if I know what lane draw I've got as well, thinking about, you know, if there's somebody outside that I'm going to try and stay with, if there's somebody inside that I'm not going to let past me or, just trying to think of more a race strategy as such....and then I suppose obviously getting down, setting up your blocks, doing your practice, em, and I suppose one strategy I do have is that usually when I get to the call room I

take my watch off cos I feel like after that someone else is completely in control of me so there's no point in like looking at my watch every two seconds and thinking, "Right, I've still got this amount of time," em, cos I do feel like as soon as you get out onto the track as well, you don't have a lot of control of what's going on, you know, other people are telling you when to take your kit off, set up you blocks and...

J So what stressful emotions are you experiencing at that point?

S Em, just I suppose really hoping that I'm going to do what I want to do, really hoping that I'm not going to disappoint myself and that I'm going to perform the way that I can perform, that I'm going to get my stride pattern right, that, you know, not going to do something stupid and fall over or whatever, but that's not a big stress factor, it's mainly just that I'm going to perform the way that I want to perform, that I'm not going to feel really tired half way round or whatever and...

J Is that...I was just going to ask you there actually if there was anything connected with the physical aspects of the race itself

S Yeah, it is quite stressful I think, em, something like, you know of you're doing like a 100 or a 200 it's not really that worrying. I think if I'm going to do 400 or the hurdles it is, you know, it's a bit worrying, you know that you're going to feel tired, you know, but you just have to hope that you don't feel tired enough that it really affects you, you know, that you're going to be stronger than everyone else or stronger than whoever you really need to beat, you know, so it is

J So it's like a fear of not holding on at the end?

S Yeah, uhuh, yeah

J What about the pain?

S Em, I wouldn't say that's a massive fear cos generally that's something that more hits you when you've actually stopped and so that's like well, "I've stopped so I'm not really that bothered," so no, fear of pain isn't a huge one. I suppose it's the same sort of thing though, you know, being tired, but I am sort of worried about getting half way round and totally breathing like an idiot, struggling to get round I suppose

J Anything else?

S Em, I don't know, I don't really think so. I mean I suppose if you haven't done well, if you're at a Ehamptionship and you haven't done well and you have to walk up past the press and either get ignored or have to talk to somebody and really not want to talk to them and not really know what to say, em, it's not very nice. It's OK if you've done well, em, but if you haven't it's quite hard

J You mentioned earlier about, when you had your breakthrough in 1999 and you used the word “shock,” all of a sudden you had amazing performances and you surprised yourself a lot. Different people think of stress as meaning different things, but would you say at the time that that was something that was in fact quite stressful for you?

S Not really cos it was quite....not really, I wouldn't say it was stressful. I mean I'd say my mind set actually changed quite quickly because as soon as like I ran fast even in my first race then I had expectations of myself after that, although if somebody had told me in '98 like, “Oh next year you'll be able to run 56 or 55 or whatever,” I'd be like, “Oh right, OK,” but because I ran 56 in my first race I think then I had expectations of, “Oh well I should make it to the World Students, eh, hopefully I'll make it to the World Championships,” you know, it was....

J You got your head round it quite quickly

S Yeah, I kind of got my head round it quite quickly and adjusted and I didn't really feel like....I suppose I mean I wasn't the athlete I was the year before so then I did have expectations for myself with like how well I wanted to do as soon as I knew sort of how, em, what kind of shape I was in as such

J Anything else at all?

S I don't really think so

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

J I'd like to move on now to the sources of stress that you may experience during training and I'd like you again to think back in as much detail as possible to stressful training sessions you may have had and if you like if you want to talk about the sources of stress in like Winter versus Summer or if you just want to talk generally it's up to you, whatever's easiest.

You mentioned before that training before competition's stressful. It's almost like what you do there might reflect what you're going to do in a race so we've covered that aspect. Anything else at all?

S Em, I suppose like Winter training the main thing's, although I wouldn't say I find it stressful, but I'd say the whole pain aspect of it is a bit worrying, like if you know that if you've got a hideous session coming up or especially, what I find most worrying is a new session. If I have a new session so I don't know what to expect, you know like, cos if you have sessions that you do all the time and you know that they're hard and you know that you're going to do them and they're going to hurt but you know what to expect, whereas when it's something new that maybe someone else has done or maybe you've seen them do and then like you're going to do it and then you think, “Oh God, how's it going to be?” I find that quite worrying and, like to be honest they

never really turn out to be as bad as I think they're going to be, but I do sort of worry, or if something gets suddenly sprung on you then that can be a bit...you know, cos you don't have time to kind of get your head round it and you just have to do it which doesn't happen very often, but I did have to do a 600 metres time trial last Winter and I wasn't told about until I was actually down and just about to start and I thought I was going to die, you know, so things like that, just when it's something new, something that you don't know, em, you don't know how you're going to cope with it, you don't know how your body's going to cope with it, that kind of thing, but I wouldn't say it's majorly stressful, it's just a bit of a worry, but by in large I find training OK.

I find training a bit of a stress if, I suppose if I'm worried about an injury, em, and I'm constantly thinking, "Oh God it's sore, is it going to go again?", that kind of thing, or thankfully it doesn't happen too often but if I have problems with my hurdling, which sometimes will happen at the very start of the season like before I've started actually competing, em, that I can't get my strides to...even the first hurdle or the second hurdle or, you know, it's just, em, I suppose it's quite difficult to get back into it cos your stride has to be different from like actually running on the flat to hurdling and it takes a wee while to kind of get the hang of it again and you do I suppose worry about, "How am I ever going to manage this?" em, but other than that I wouldn't say I really find it stressful

J Obviously just now I'd imagine there's a lot of stress associated with...you were actually telling me before we switched the tape on about your move to a new coach. Could you tell me about, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but any stress relating to that?

S Em, yeah I mean I've got a lot of worries. It took me a lot of time to decide that I was going to move and now I've decided I suppose I don't really know exactly what to expect. I suppose every training session I do now is going to be new and I hope that it's the sort of training that's going to suit me and, you know, that I'm making the right decision, so I suppose there's a lot of sort of worry about that kind of thing

J So it's like the uncertainty about, is this going to help me progress sort of thing and making the right decision?

S Yeah, uhuh

J Is there any other stress associated with that just now?

S Em, I mean the whole sort of lifestyle change as well's a bit worrying, you know, going to a new city, not really knowing anyone, em, trying to find somewhere to live, leaving home, you know, there's a lot of stress in that kind of respect, em, but I mean I know that I've made the decision and I think it's the best decision for me so I'm sure everything will work out OK, I'm trying not to worry too much about it, but yeah, I know it's going to be quite hard until I get settled in and have somewhere to live and even like training in

different places and, you know, not knowing my way about and that kind of thing. I mean I'll be OK but it's just worrying

J Have you ever had any stress relating to relationship issues within your group or with your coach or any problems regarding your coach's training methods, anything like that?

S Em, not major, a bit in that sometimes maybe he can be a bit fixed on his ideas and I could disagree about, em, about sort of certain sessions or that sort of thing, but I mean generally it's been OK, but I suppose we're both quite, em, stubborn I suppose, so sometimes he might want to do something that I don't think's a good idea or vice versa, so it's a matter of compromise or we usually do what he says really

J Any others at all?

S I don't really think so. I've been quite lucky in that I've always got on with the people that I train with. I think that that could be a potential source of stress but I personally have been quite lucky

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

J I'd like to move onto the final section on the sources of stress then and here I'm looking at stress relating to the sport itself, if there's anything in particular about that, things like the demands associated with the sport, time demands, cost demands, the sacrifices as well associated with the sport which you did actually touch upon earlier, and also organisational aspects such as your team management, timetabling of events, that sort of thing. Can you identify any of these sources of stress?

S Em.....

J If we actually go through what you've said already, at the start you mentioned something about funding and this was when you were back....before you had Lottery funding, it was difficult trying to sort of juggle your athletics with whatever else you were doing at that time

S I think by in large I've been really lucky in that, like I got Lottery funding in the first year that it came to be and then I wasn't funded for a couple of years and then I've been funded ever since, so I generally have been really lucky, even as a Junior I got em, like Sport Aid Foundation Awards and things so I've never really had I suppose big financial problems, just like I suppose in '98 when I moved home I was a bit conscious of the fact that, you know, that it was really my Mum and Dad that were supporting me and that, you know, if it hadn't've been that I was coming home I think I would've had problems financially, em....

J You said that at times you've missed out on competitions in this country, I can't remember exactly what you said, but you were talking about.... I can't

remember your precise reasons, but you were unable to get the bigger competitions abroad. Is that something that you've found stressful?

S Em, this year a little bit, yeah because I have somebody...I have like an agent. He finds me, like competitions abroad because I think like at 400 hurdles in this country there isn't a lot of depth at the moment, so it's quite difficult to get the competition that I need in this country, especially as one of the girls was in America, so really unless I get races in Europe it's quite hard to get races that are going to really bring me on, so but em, the problem with that is that maybe at the start of the season you're judged on your performances from the previous season so it's quite easy to get into races at the start, but then after that they judge you on your performances this season, so the problem for me was that because I got injured, I missed my first few races and then when I came to compete I'd been winning races and not managing to break like 55.6 or something which isn't really good enough to get in anything big, so then I was having trouble, you know, being able to find, em, races that were really going to push me and so that was a bit stressful because you kind of felt a bit out of control. There was nothing much you could do about it, but at the same time losing in this country there wasn't, you know, a lot...there wasn't the competition that I needed, so that was a bit....

J You mentioned as well about your injuries and your Glandular Fever, obviously that's something that could have been stressful

S Yeah, I mean, I think Glandular Fever's probably worse in that, em, I ended up missing the whole season because of it and I think I perhaps didn't realise, you know, how much I'd miss athletics until I wasn't able to do it for a season and it was, you know, it was difficult just adjusting to, you know, being at home just like working for the Summer and not really having anything to do and not being able to train, not being able to do anything physical really, just trying to get over it, so it was quite stressful, and I suppose all injuries are quite stressful in that, you know, you're aware of them holding you back and you feel a little bit out of control and, you know, you're hoping that the treatment you're getting is helping and that you're going to be able to get back to where you want to be and that missing the time you've missed isn't going to play a major part in your performance next season, that sort of thing

J You mentioned as well about not getting to the Eommonwealth Games. Is that something that you found stressful at the time, was that a selection procedure issue that..?

S Yeah, yeah. I found it extremely frustrating cos what happened was the athletics....SAF had been told that we were guaranteed at least 20 places for athletes so I think they put 21 or 22 places and then the Eommonwealth Games Eouncil rejected 4 of us and said, "No, we're only going to let you have 18 places," even though they'd been told they were guaranteed 20, so in the end they changed their mind on one person so they took 19, but, em, it meant that I had just missed out and it was very frustrating because, like we knew that there was space for us, we knew that it wasn't as though...I don't think it was...there was funding there for us, there were spaces on the plane,

there was...and it was very frustrating in that it was out of our hands, there was nothing we could do about it. In the end, although we tried to fight it and SAF tried to fight it, they only managed to change their mind on one person and not us, so yeah it was, just felt a bit hard done by I suppose

J Sounds like it. And you mentioned as well sometimes there's a, maybe a bit of boredom associated with your lifestyle as an athlete. Is that something that you would describe as being stressful at all?

S I wouldn't say it's stressful, but it is a factor, especially in the Winter when you're just doing the same thing kind of week in, week out and not working and, you know, just sort of times when you've only got one training session at night and you just.....I think I definitely respond better to having a routine cos I think you can end up getting a bit lazy and just putting things off and not doing them because, you know, "If I don't do it today I can do it tomorrow," and it's just kind of a cycle that doesn't really help at all

J Anything else associated with the demands and features of the sport?

S I don't know, I mean maybe it's bad to say funding's a stress but I think that maybe is a stress a little bit, you know, I would say I've been lucky with funding but, you know, staying at the level of funding you're on or, you know, I suppose you're aware of if you don't perform the way you want to or if you get injured, you might lose your funding and what are you going to do if you have financial commitments, you know, how are you going to manage to make them and, you know, that kind of thing. I think you've just got to try and be sensible and try and make sure that you've kind of covered yourself if that does happen, but I think that's quite worrying, em, just the whole sort of uncertainty of the sport and what you're doing. You know that it's not like being in a job where, you know, you have a set salary, you know that you can like buy a car, buy a house, do whatever you want and you know how much you've got coming in. You're very much aware in athletics that you don't have that security, so it is.....still, you know, it's what I want to do and I enjoy it. I wouldn't say that that's like a major stress or anything but it is something that I think that I kind of keep in mind

J Anything else?

S I can't really think of anything else

OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS:

J Do you think there are any sources of stress which you experience as an athlete which we haven't covered, anything out with those sections?

S I don't really think so. I mean, I think you said something about timetabling of events. That perhaps is a slight, can be a slight source of stress. I mean I know that the likes of this year I think that at the Scottish Championships they

only timetabled something like an hour between the heat and the final of the 400 hurdles where they had an entire day to do it in and I just thought that was stupid, but it's something that's out of your control. It's something that...I mean I don't think that....I think they did that in a few different events and I don't think it's such a big problem for somebody that doesn't have to run at their best to make the final, but for somebody who might have to run a PB to make it it's ridiculous, you know, to do that. I think that that's something that could be quite stressful, worrying about being able to cope with it and see like next year having the Eommonwealth Games one week and the European championships are the next, knowing that, you know, if you're involved in an individual event and the relay, you know, is your body going to be able to hold up to the demands of the rounds and, you know, going straight onto the Europeans and having to do the same again, you know, I mean hopefully people will be OK, but I think that's just something that's a bit worrying at the back of your mind, you're just hoping that everything's going to be OK and you're not going to have to sort of sacrifice doing something, you know, you ideally want to be able to do it all and not have to pick and chose and stuff

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

J OK let's move onto the final section. Here I'm interested in finding out if there's anything about you as a person which might influence the stress that you experience. Here I'm looking at things like personality differences, differences in perhaps the way that you cope with stress that might influence the stress that you experience. Can you think of anything here at all?

S Em, I'd say that overall I'm quite a calm person. I try not to let stressful situations bother me too much. I think I have reasonably good coping strategies for them and I kind of think, you know, I can control my own performances. I can't control that of others, you know, but at the same time obviously I know that...well I mean athletics is, it's what I'm doing full-time. It's important to me. I want, you know I want...I mean I suppose I pressure myself that I want to achieve my goals and as I said before I'm quite a goal orientated person so if I don't manage to achieve my goals, you know, it's a disappointment, em...

J So is there a sense there then that you are goal orientated and you want to achieve that in a way that's predisposing you to stress?

S Possibly in that I suppose if I don't achieve then I suppose I'll feel disappointed in myself or, you know, when I know I'm coming up to the important competitions....I mean I think it doesn't particularly worry me too much. I don't think it causes me an awful lot of stress because I know that in the past I've competed at my best at the most stressful competitions because, I suppose because I want to achieve my goals and because it matters to me how I get on, em, it does tend to be where I run best, you know, it would be very unlikely for me to run my best at something like a Grand Prix or wherever where I'm not really that bothered how I get on. I mean obviously I want to do

well but if I don't it's like, it's just a race, so it's not really as if it's sort of meaning a lot to me, em...

J Anything else?

S Not that I can think of

J How do you think the stress that you experience compares with other athlete's stress?

S I don't know really, em, I suppose, I suppose I'm quite lucky cos I haven't had any problem with things like funding or travelling far to training or...I think probably I've been fairly lucky. I haven't had any major, touchwood, any like major injury problems. I think a lot of it is to do with em, you know, people's circumstances and maybe not getting funding and having to work full-time, having to travel far to train, you've broke your leg, I don't know, whatever, you know, obviously that would be a lot more stressful. I would say I've been quite lucky overall. I can't really complain

J well I think that's just about all I need to ask you

S OK

J So before we finish, do you think there are any important factors we failed to discuss in relation to your stress?

S I don't really think so

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

S No I think it was very good

J Thank you. Well thanks very much for your time and thanks very much for your honesty and I hope you get on well with your new coach and things go well for you

S Thanks

J Good luck

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

ERIN

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J OK J, before we start discussing athletics, it would be useful for me to get some background information from you, so I wonder if you could begin with by telling me a bit about yourself, maybe your age, where you live and what it is you do just now

E Em, I'm a full-time athlete just now. I'll be 23 on Saturday and I stay in Dunfermline, just across the bridge in Fife

J OK and who do you live with just now?

E My parents

J And how do you find life as a full-time athlete?

E It's not gone to plan this year because I got injured

J OK we'll come back to that later

E So it could've been better

J In terms of like having a job and doing what the majority of the population do though, do you feel content being an athlete?

E Well I finished Uni a year past in July so, I mean, I've got my degree and then the plan was to take a year or two out to see how far I could go, but then I got injured so I'm in a catch 22, I don't know whether to get a job or to give it another year or so

J Right. Apart from athletics then, what other sorts of things do you do in your free time?

E Just now it's going to the physio, but when I'm a full-time athlete it's pretty much a lot of training and in my free time I just try my best to relax, unwind from the running

J OK. How would you describe your social life?

E It's good, I mean I've got a lot of friends who I still keep in touch with from Uni and I've deliberately kept them separate from my running, so it's complete switch off when you go out and meet them

J OK let's move onto talking about athletics now. So I believe you're an 800 metres runner

E I am

J Have you always done that event?

- E I have actually, yeah
- J OK. I'd like you to describe your training structure for me, what I mean by that is, could you describe your training group, how many training partners you have, if you have a coach, how often you train, that sort of thing
- E Eh, well I've got a coach. I train at Meadowbank and my group is, it's basically guys I train with, em, students from the Uni, they come down, it's just usually who turns up on the night, eh, it's Tuesday, Thursday track session and then anything else is done by myself, just at home
- J And how do you feel about that – training by yourself?
- E It's OK, it's where I stay, it's kind of awkward going out for runs cos there's not many places to go so you tend to get a bit bored, but if there's somebody there, you just blether away and the time just flies, but it's not too bad, I'm not high mileage so I don't go for huge long runs anyway
- J OK. And how would you describe the relationship that you have with your coach?
- E He always speaks to me everyday. I've known him since I was ten, so there's probably no one that knows me better
- J So you're in regular contact with him and you feel that you have a good working relationship?
- E Yeah
- J OK and how often do you train?
- E Six days a week
- J What age were you when you first got involved in the sport?
- E Nine
- J So you've been at it for a long time?
- E I have, yeah
- J How did you get involved?
- E Eh, it was, I think it was just being fastest in my class when I was in Primary one and my teacher said about joining Pitreavie, the local club, so I went down, but you have to be nine before you join, so I just went back, that was just after my ninth Birthday and I've been there ever since
- J Keen from the start then?

- E Yeah
- J So that was really just at school then, that's what introduced you to it?
- E I asked my Mum that question this morning actually when I read it, and apparently when I was young I just used to run everywhere anyway – a natural!
- J Oh right, yeah, that's interesting
- E Burn off some energy
- J So it was your decision – you weren't sort of pressured into it by a teacher or...?
- E No it was my decision
- J I'd like you now to briefly talk me through your progression from the start of your athletic career
- E This is hard
- J Just tell me about your main achievements then
- E I mean I've always done 800's and the occasional 15's as well, but em, I was top of the UK rankings Under 13, Under 15, top of the Scottish rankings in all age groups, I mean I've always been there or thereabouts and that's it really
- J Excellent. How satisfied would you say that you are with your achievements so far?
- E It's been difficult cos every year since I was 17, when you should really be coming to the forth, em, I've been injured and it's through no fault of my own or my training or whatever, so I've never really achieved my potential for what I should've achieved at that age, which is a bit annoying, but in saying that it drives you on until you get to your potential
- J How do you feel about these injuries then?
- E A pain in the back side in all honesty, it's...it's really difficult because they started happening at the age where everyone else was dropping out, you know, you grow up through all the age groups with a group of people and then each one of them drop out and you begin to wonder, "If it's putting me through so much pain, why do I bother?", but it's something I've always wanted to do with my life
- J OK, we'll come back to talking about the injury later, but in terms of how satisfied you are with your achievements, what I'm hearing is basically you're happy with what you've done but you feel that your injuries....

- E Could've done a lot more. I mean you're five years as a Junior, Under 20, Under 23, when the Internationals come out, eh, I've only had two years of the five, so I've missed all the major Ehampionships that I could've gone to as a Junior, but in saying that, nobody remembers a good Junior. It does count when you're a Senior, so I'll focus all my attention on that
- J OK I'd like to talk a bit now about goals and targets in athletics, so obviously this year will be difficult for you because you have been injured, if you could maybe think back to the last sort of season that you had, where you had set yourself goals and you were able to attempt to pursue them, could you maybe tell me a bit about what your goals were?
- E In all honesty, I've not set goals for years, em, before my first injury when I was 15,16, just, you don't set goals, you just race every week and if you win you win, if you don't you don't, but em, every year since then I've always come back from a major injury, so it's surgery in the Winter, absolutely no training so I've never known what shape I'm in anyway, going into the season, so I'm kind of standing on the start line just thinking, "God, what's going to happen?", so I've not set myself goals. My goal's to get through the season uninjured, which'll never happen. I've kind of given up
- J So you don't.....do you have any sort of expectations of yourself before you race?
- E I kind of know, I've got a rough idea from training what I should expect from myself, but I mean it's....the past, certainly the past three or four years I've been starting the Summer season, not even being able to run in spikes, but a couple of weeks training, so you never know what you're going to be like
- J What I'd like you to do now, if you can think back to a time when you achieved your goals. I'd like you to describe how that felt for me
- E I've not set goals for as long as I can remember....
- J OK, let's think about a time when you had a particularly successful performance, if you could describe how that felt for me.....maybe setting your PB, or...
- E Yeah probably, if I take you to the, well the Scottish Ehamps last year, 2000 then, em, I mean again I stood on the start line and didn't know what shape I was in, I mean I suppose a goal, it wouldn't have been unrealistic to say I could've won it before the race, let's just say that, em, and I won it with a PB, great relief when I crossed the line, it was just more relief that anything else of the feelings that you get
- J Why do you think you describe it as relief?
- E Em, there's a lot of pressure on you. When you've kind of made a little name for yourself before your injury and then everyone, they don't realise the weeks

you've spent on crutches or the pain you've gone through, they just expect when they see you again, you'll be 100% fit and I mean, you never are and I mean, just to cross that line first and just to show everyone, "Right, I'm back now," that's the relief that I get

J I'd like you now to think back to a time when you had perhaps a disappointing performance if you have done and describe how that felt for me

E I was reading this and I couldn't think. Failing to achieve my goals would be a case of, well again this year that's just purely down to injury, em, I think any race that I've done that I've not run well in it has just been because injury, there's always been an outside factor, it's not been down to, you know, not having it in the head or anything like that. It's always been for circumstances that are out with my control

J Do you ever doubt yourself to prove yourself in competition?

E The first race of the season I always have a nightmare run, no matter where I've been. When you come back from injury, you stand on the start line, there's girls that you can beat by about ten seconds and like you always just like turn round and like, "What if, oh God, what....", you know, doubts, but that's just the first race. The bigger the race, the more you get into the season it's fine

J What sorts of doubts are you experiencing? What sorts of thoughts are going through your mind?

E Just like, sometimes when you stand on the start line and say, "Well, the worst I can finish here is third and you're like shut-up, come on!", you know, but as I say, that's just the first race of the season. When I'm racing against the likes of Kelly Holmes I feel great on the start line, eh, but it's just like your small club runners about the first league race or something, you just can't help doubting. I've always been like that and I think I always will be like that so...

J OK, I think I know what the answer to the next question's going to be. What problems have you encountered whilst trying to achieve in athletics?

E Injury!

J OK, you've told me a little bit about the injuries you've had, could you maybe go into a little bit more detail now, just maybe describe the actual injuries you've had, how bad they were and the impact that they had on your training

E Em, well when I was Under 17, that's going back to '95, half way through the Summer I got pain in my knee, so I had to stop and I had an operation to release my left patella tendon in July '96. I know the dates off by heart as well, eh, that was absolutely no running till about, from the middle of '95 till probably about Christmas '96, em, I had a brilliant year in '97 and then I got pain in my right knee, exactly the same as what happened to the left knee, so I missed the whole of '98, had an operation July '98

J Was this an operation connected with the original injury or was this something completely separate?

E It was the same operation on the right knee as I'd had done on the left knee the year before, and I had half a season in '99, again with no Winter training, and then I got pain in my left Achilles, so I had an operation to release that on my 21st Birthday of all days – I couldn't even have a drink! I missed the whole Winter, came back half way through the year 2000 and then I got a pain in my ankle just after 2000 and had an operation last November and I've missed the whole Winter again. I didn't start jogging until the end of February, so I've missed quite a lot of time and I'm injured now, and I've missed another year

J Right, what impact would you say that these injuries have had on your progression?

E Quite a lot. I've not been able train at all when I've been injured and I'm forever coming back from injury and you can't train as hard and as often as what you'd like to, eh, I've always missed out Winter training. I don't know what kind of shape I'd be in if I had Winter training so all my competitions are just from a few week's background, so obviously if I had trained I'd be running much faster, so it's a bit frustrating

J OK, you said it's frustrating, what other sorts of emotions do you feel in relation to this?

E Why me? Em, the first injury was OK, but then the novelty wears off with being injured all the time, em, you begin to wonder if it's worth it. It's not a professional sport, you don't get paid, there's no contract with it, so I mean there comes a time when you need to seriously consider what, you know, you have to earn money and you might have to look elsewhere from athletics, em, seeing everyone else progressing that you could beat before and you're forever playing catch-up, so it is really, it's disheartening, but, I like the sport so there must be something good about it to stick with it

J Any other problems that you've encountered apart from your injuries?

E That's tempting fate! Em, when I changed coach I had a nasty fall out with my old coach, em, after my Achilles operation which really didn't help and we're no longer on talking terms, so it all adds up – plus I sat my Finals that year and that was in civil engineering

J And what impact do you feel that these events have had on your athletics?

E Eh, well when I sat my Finals that was actually the first time that I didn't em, I didn't train through any exams. I've usually always been adamant that I can train through them, but em, I had to take a good, well at least a month off by the time that I was sitting them and then I had my dissertation afterwards, so I mean that's just at the beginning of the season as well so it's not the best

preparation going into it, so I missed time there again, but it had to be done, it's the rest of my life

J And what about the problems that you had with your coach? What impact would you say that that's had?

E Eh, well he mucked me about in the head a wee bit, em, you know who he is eh? I won't mention him on tape, em, he's quite a dominating figure so he can easily kind of get in your head if you know what I mean and eh, he mucked me about just before my Finals, which I wasn't too grateful for, not one to accept criticism, let's say that, like he is

J Right, OK. I think we'll probably come back to that one later as well

E Yeah, it'll all come out

J What are your reasons for taking part in athletics now would you say?

E Eos I enjoy it. I've always wanted to run, em, I enjoy doing it when I get the chance to do it, but em, I could never forgive myself, one of the reasons I'm a full-time athlete now is the career I would go into the civil engineering, which is really demanding it's, like you're out of sight from dawn till dusk, so I just couldn't work myself up, sitting behind a big desk when I'm 40 and just think, "What if?" I could never forgive myself. It'd be the biggest regret of my life so I really want to get as far as I can, try and realise my potential before I move on

J Any other reasons?

E I mean obviously you'd want to earn some money from it, you know as a career with it being, well strictly an amateur sport you don't earn the money until you get to the big thing, but em, if I could retire realising my potential whether that be winning medals or whatever have you, em, I'll be happy

J OK when you say you enjoy it, what exactly is it about it that you enjoy do you think?

E The feeling I love is when you get your spikes on and you run round that track fast. It's just the best feeling in the World, nothing can come close to it, so em, as long as I can do that I'll be happy

J So to sum up then, your reasons for being in the sport just now are, sounds like predominantly you have a sort of built in need to achieve and it sounds like it's fear of regretting it in later life if you haven't reached what you feel your potential is

E I think one of the reasons I've stuck with it through all the injuries as well is the occasional window that I get between injuries, I've run a PB, and you know the potential is so much more, you always get, I think if I'd had all these injuries back to back I'd be away a long time ago, but you can just see these

glimpses of what might happen so I'm like, "What if I get a Winter? I'll stick on it, I'll try and get a Winter next time," and you just keep....

J So it's almost like you've been born with a mega talent but it just, you feel as if you're constantly being impeded?

E Yeah, cos when I was younger it's obvious you can see the talented athletes when they're younger, em, but then there comes a time where talent....you've got to train, you know talent's only so much of the, you've got to train to keep up with the other folk that do work hard, but that's the part that I'm missing out now so if you add that on I think, well, I would be looking forward to seeing what I could do, let's just say that

J Yep. OK, I'd like to get an idea now of how important athletics is to you, well I've obviously got an idea, but maybe to get a more specific idea, I'd like you to imagine that your life is a cake and that being the case, how big a part is the athlete part of you would you say?

E It'd certainly be over three quarters. I couldn't put an exact figure on it but it would certainly be three quarters, I mean I've chosen it as a full-time career just now, how long for I don't know, so em, it has become my career just now, so you've got to work hard and it does take up an awful lot of your life and you've got to make a lot of sacrifices

J How important would you say it is to you that you see yourself as an athlete and other people as well see you as an athlete?

E I think because I've always run from being so young, everyone just....well I've made a lot of friends through running for a start, I mean they know you as an athlete, but even through Uni and that, everyone I've come in touch with has been so supportive, eh, they understand if I can't go out with them every night, I can't get drunk at weekends, I can't go clubbing every night, em, I've got to go training at night, you know stuff like that so they've been really supportive so I think probably most of them know me as an athlete, like not just as an athlete, but they know that it's an important part of my life and it's something that I really do take seriously and I don't appreciate people that, you know, don't respect that

SOURCES OF COMPETITIVE STRESS:

J I'd like to move onto the second part of the interview and discuss your experiences of stress as an athlete. Now one problem here is that different people have different perceptions of what stress actually is, so to make sure we're on the same wavelength, I'd like you to think of stress as referring to those occasions where you have felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation which has had important consequences for you. I'm interested in like, the sort of minor sources of stress as well – basically anything at all that you've found remotely stressful, and to help you identify as many sources of

stress as possible, we'll split the discussion up into three different areas from which stress might arise: stress in competition, stress in training and stress relating to the demands and specific features of the sport, and obviously stress may come from other areas so I'll ask you about that once we've covered these three sections

So let's start with competitive sources of stress. I'd like you to take some time to think back carefully to a competition which you found particularly stressful and can remember well. To help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, I'd like you to go through the stages of the competition in your mind, thinking about even the days leading up to the event, if there was anything stressful leading up to the event, if there was anything stressful leading up to it, during the event and after the event as well if there was anything stressful there. To trigger your memory, just go over in your mind the things that you did such as your registration procedures, warming-up, talking to your coach etc. Try to remember how you felt physically and emotionally as you experienced these things and identify what caused stress for you. Can you select a competition to discuss with me?

E Eh, I'll go for the Scottish Ehamps in 2000 again

J OK. What was particularly stressful about that event then?

E Em, again I was as per usual coming back from injury, em, I had a race the week before, a GB Under 23 one and I was actually pushed off the track so I came back with a bad time, eh, it was my second race of the season so I mean I didn't know what shape I was in again, em, plus my old coach was present and he's not a very reasonable man and I knew he would do something and he was expecting me to fall flat on my face, em, I'd been dropped from my club for the UK League match, a few weeks before, they didn't want to know so and it was in Glasgow so they would have to stand and watch me race and I hadn't had a Winter training, I had an operation, I was coming back from that. I had to prove something to myself and to everyone watching

J OK, you've covered quite a lot there. Let's go though each one individually then. The first thing I think you said was, it was almost like there was ambiguity surrounding the competition because you didn't know what to expect from yourself, you'd missed a lot of training, sounds like there were a lot of issues going on as well. What exactly was it about that particular part of it then that you think you found stressful?

E I'd had two races before hand and they were mediocre times, I mean, the time I ended up running at the Scottish was a huge PB. I surprised myself, so it's just.....I mean at that stage, because I had no training before hand, I mean a lot of athletes, if they miss a couple of week's training it makes absolutely no difference, but that two weeks training could be like double my training for the entire Summer, so my performance two weeks before reflects nothing to what I could be capable of then, so I really don't know what kind of shape I'm in. I can honestly say that when I stand on the start line that a week's training

would make a whole lot of difference, you know, I could improve my time by a couple, two or three seconds...

J And what exactly is it about that that's pretty stressful?

E It's just forever not knowing, you know, if you knew you were in great shape, you could really put the foot down and go for it, but you're forever, I'm not in that great shape, when I get to 600 I might blow up, you know, you want to finish the race and finish strongly, but I mean you never know when's the best, if you're in the shape to go hard from the start or whether it would be best to tuck in or whatever

J So it's almost like the uncertainty regarding how good you are can also then lead onto doubts which are stressful for you, like you mentioned blowing up at 600?

E Yeah I mean it depends who's in the race. I mean the race I had the week before, it was against France and Germany or something, em, the thing is when you race in Scotland you forever know who's in the race and when you know you're not 100% fit yourself... Everyone else is always gunning for everyone else in Scotland, you know, it's everyone wants to be number one in Scotland, but when you're racing against people you don't know your mind's at ease, so I think with the Scottish Ehamps, although you can convince yourself that you're not worried, there's always a doubt, you know, everyone's gunning at each other and if you know you're not 100% fit you might let that get to you, but I'm usually not too bad with that

J So when you said you might let that get to you, what exactly is it you might let get to you? Is it not being, losing your status?

E I don't know. I always find it more difficult racing against Scottish athletes than...stick me in a race in the AAA's with like a couple of Scottish athletes and other folk I'm fine, it's just, I don't know it's just, I mean when it comes to my athletics I am confident, I mean I think it goes back to that first race of the season again where I'm forever doubting myself if I'm coming back from a long injury, em, you're running against Scottish athletes that you've known since you were ten or eleven or something, em, I don't know

J OK, the next thing you mentioned was your old coach being there. Could you tell me about what was stressful about that?

E Em, well when I moved I knew for a fact he doesn't like the coach I'm with now, there's no love loss between them, em, he was expecting me to fall flat on my face because an athlete, I mean I trained with him for a long time and I knew what he was saying about other athletes when they moved on and I knew he'd be saying exactly the same about me, em, so I was determined not to let it get to me, to go out and really show him, em, I was aware of him during the race when he was, he came across to the fence, he was standing with his chest out arms, you know, folded and stuff, expecting something to happen, em, and

I wasn't, I must admit I wasn't feeling the best when I passed him, but I saw him and I was like, "To hang with you," so if anything it spurred me on, em....

J But his very presence was quite stressful in a way, in a sense?

E I wasn't bothered about it before the race, but when I saw him, the way he was standing, I knew he was going to, I mean I heard afterwards that he was actually going to shout something derogatory at the side of the track, but then the rest of my old group, like his training group started encouraging me and then he must've remembered where he was and shut-up

J OK and you talked about being dropped by the club for a UK League as well, can you tell me a bit more about that?

E Eh, I think they just really forgot I was an 800 runner and just didn't ask me to do that meeting at all, eh, it was a home one in Glasgow as well and I never got asked

J And how did you feel about that?

E I was absolutely gutted cos I could've done with that race, I mean, with every race I would've got faster that year so it was a race that I'd lost, so I wasn't best chuffed

J And then you said that you felt at one point that you had something to prove to yourself and you also had something to prove to everyone else. Could you elaborate a bit on that for me?

E You do hear things about people, you know, people are forever gunning for you. I think it's, it's not unreasonable for me to say that there's a lot of people that line up against me and their sole goal is just to beat one person. I want to go out there and I want to prove...you know, a lot of people are content just to be best in Scotland. I don't want to do that, I want to go further, I'm not bothered if I'm the best in Scotland, cos if you want to be the best in the UK, you've got to be the best in Scotland anyway, bla, bla, bla, but em, I don't know, there's just a lot of sniping that always comes back to you from word of mouth and stuff from athletes, from other coaches, from just people that you know through running, and em, team managers and the like

J And how do you feel about that?

E It upset me at the time of it because a lot of people wanted John to fall flat on his face as well, my coach now, John Lees, em, I don't know if they thought he would be capable of coaching, I don't know but em I think we've proved people wrong, well hopefully. A couple of years down the line we can really prove them wrong

J You mentioned there you felt you had something to prove to yourself, you also mentioned that you felt you had things to prove to other people. Would you

describe yourself as being the type of person that is concerned with what other people think of you?

E Em, sometimes, em, when you stand on the start line nobody knows the crap that you've gone through before hand, just to get on that line, you know, it's an achievement for me to reach the start line for most of my races, em, and so many people don't appreciate the heartache that you've gone through in the Winter, you know the lack of training, they don't understand that, they just expect you to be able to run, churn out PB's week in week out, run at your very, very best, em, sometimes you can't do that, I mean I've, it's from coaches, other athletes, they just don't understand and eh, as an athlete myself, I know what other athletes will be thinking, you know what I mean?

J Yeah, yeah

E So it can, you know it does knock your confidence a bit, but you've just got to try and put it to the back of your head

J So basically then what I'm hearing is, there are times when you may not necessarily hear what other people's comments are but being an athlete yourself you can make a guess at what other people will be thinking and sometimes, you said, you're the type of person that'll let that get to you, but then sometimes you're not, but when it does then obviously that's an added pressure

E Yeah, I mean, it's usually the first few races where, I mean I can run myself into shape pretty quick anyway so I mean by the time the middle of the season, the big races come, eh, I'm OK, I don't have to prove anything to anybody, em, if I have a bad performance there is a reason for it and that's, I've not had the background to do rounds and stuff like the AAA's and stuff, but again it's just these first few races that nobody realises what you've gone through, I mean, nobody sees an athlete during the Winter, they just see them for that three months competition window, so em, they just assume that, like if an athlete's training, they just assume that everyone else is training just as hard

J So it also sounds like, it's almost quite stressful that there's almost like a pressure coming from the audience and that is stressful because it's almost like they don't really empathise with what you've been through?

E Yeah, kind of, I mean even when you're younger as well and you win races by margins which, it would be impossible to win Senior races by em, I mean a lot of spectators have the ignorance, which, fair enough, I mean if they've not been in the sport themselves, but, "Och, she's not as good as what she used to be," or stuff like that, em, I don't let that bother me because people are quite ignorant of the sport that they watch so it doesn't really bother me

J What other sorts of competitive pressures do you experience then?

E I can't really think of anything else, I'm usually pretty chilled when it comes to the big competitions, em, it's something my coach always said just now that

he was amazed that I could just immediately switch off and go into race mode. He was quite impressed with that, so...

J How do you feel physically before a race?

E Em, I've got a really short warm-up. I just take about half an hour to warm-up and I feel absolutely fine until I go to prepare for my warm-up. I get the, you know the adrenaline starts pumping, I don't em want to get myself so worked up that I can't compete or anything, eh just the adrenaline that you always get that you need, that's all I get

J And that's not something that you would interpret as being stressful?

E No, I wouldn't say I'm ever stressed before a race because if you are you're not going to compete well. No matter how much pressure you're under from whoever, yourself or from other people, you've got to try and put that to the back of your mind. I mean that I think can be building up before the race, em but, I'm usually OK

J And you mentioned pressure there from yourself or other people. Do you ever perceive that there's pressure there from other people?

E I think it's more a case of, you're standing on the start line and you want to, you want to perform to the best of your ability and your performance reflects on your coach's performance as well, em, so I think he's, he wants to always see me do well obviously, em, and he's forever worrying that there's something wrong with the training, if for some reason that I have a bad performance or you're injured, he's forever wondering if it's because of that, em, so I mean your performance reflects an awful lot on other people, but if they don't like it they can lump it, basically

J So if you, you don't ever then feel any stress relating to, letting your coach down, when you mentioned your coach there?

E Not really, I mean me and John have got such a relationship that, och, we know each other inside out. He knows, he can tell if I'm.....no I mean, we're a team – should I have any bad performances, there's something wrong on both sides and we will correct that, you know, it's not a case of like he'll never talk to me or go in the huff with me or anything like that

J In terms of preparation, rest, nutrition, mental preparation, how do you tend to feel before a competition – obviously you've already covered the physical side of things with your injuries – you've said that a lot of the time you've been unable to do the training so obviously you don't feel physically prepared, are there any other aspects of preparation which cause stress for you?

E Eh, well with the likes of nutrition I think it's just force of habit that I'll never have anything to eat before a race, like so long before a race, that's just force of habit and something that works for me. Em, I think everything else is OK to be honest

J To what extent do you perceive stress relating to rivals in competition – like some people talk about, you know, a rival beating you or....I'm just wondering if there's anything relating to that

E It depends, I don't know, there's so many different rivals. I mean you've got, the rivals you face at league meets are completely different to the ones you get in National leagues and different to the ones you get in championships to GB matches and stuff, em, I must say, I prefer going into a race where I don't know the rivals, em, you can just think, you know, tag onto them and most of the time you surprise yourself about what you can do, but eh, I think it's really external pressures, like away from the race itself, like the people in the race that would, if anything would bother me it would be more that

J And is that things that you've already covered?

E Yeah

J OK does anything else happen to come into your mind at all relating to stress in competition?

E Eh not just now, no

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

J OK, lets move on now to sources of stress in training then, if you have any. I'd like you to think back again in as much detail as possible to stressful training sessions you may have had and isolate what it is about them that you've found stressful. From my experience of training, I would say that sources of stress vary according to the time of year because you do different training and obviously there's different stress associated with whatever kind of training you're doing. Is that something that you experience as well – if you're able to do a Winter!?

E That's the thing, I'm that stressed out because I'm not able to run in the Winter, em, I don't get stressed in the Winter because I've never been running being honest, it's as simple as that

J Because what I was going to say to you was, if you wanted to break the year into different sections and then tell me about sources of stress relating to different sections, that may have been easier for you, but.....

E I think it's a case of in the Winter, I'm stressed out because I can't run, I'm not able to run and then if you're stressed out in the Summer, it's a case of not being able to run fast enough

J OK, well since you rarely get a whole year's worth of training then, it might be easier if you just treat training sort of as in general, the sources of stress

that you experience in training in general, OK, so when you're ready, tell me about what sources of stress you experience in training

E I can honestly say that I enjoy training so much that I very rarely get stressed. I would say that there's only one particular thing that stresses me out and it's, when your training's geared towards a big race, I always do fast running the week before, like a time trial over some distance or whatever, just to see what kind of shape you're in and when you turn up to training that night, you've done all the weeks hard work and the weather is appalling, it makes it impossible to run fast, that gets on my wick because again you go into the race kind of, had you run a fast time as a confidence booster, I mean that happens a lot when you're in Scotland, the weather's unpredictable, but it's something you can't change so it's something you've got to live with

J So it's almost like, you're seeking a confidence boost, but the weather's preventing you from getting it?

E Yeah sometimes, yeah, but you can't change the weather so....

J So would you say that's the only really thing that you tend to....? Apart from your injuries of course

E Yeah, I mean I just like training that much that, no, that's the only thing

J You don't ever experience any stress relating to training partners or with your coach or anything like that?

E Not with my coach, no. John's got such a big group now that there's always going to be someone there for me to train with when I turn up and I'm finding the training's that varied that I never get bored, eh, so even when I've got to do stuff on my own. It's all different, I mean it's practically a new session every day I go out, so I don't get bored or anything

J OK. And you mentioned earlier that where you live it can be awkward going out for runs, sometimes when you have to do training on your own. Is that something that you would describe as ever being stressful?

E I'm somebody that gets really bored if you've got to do the same route over and over and over again, cos you can never like get to the end of, like get to the traffic lights and like, "Oh I feel tired, I'll stop and tie my shoe lace," but I think that once I get back running I'm just going to jump in the car, go somewhere, park the car and just run somewhere, get some variation, so hopefully I won't get bored as much in the future

J But the boredom itself, is that something that you'd describe as being stressful at all?

E No, it's not stressful, you can live with it. You've got to go out and do it so you just try and switch off as much as you can and it can be bit of an effort

getting past these points where you're kind of wanting to stop, but I mean once you've run past it you're, "Yeah, I've made it!"

J You mentioned, em, when you were sitting your finals, you had to take some time out from training. Was that something you felt stressed with at the time as well?

J It was cos it would have been, I made a big improvement that year so I mean, it could've been a kind of break through year had I...as I say your Finals are the rest of your life, you've got to prioritise and that was number one, it had to be number one, em, so I had to focus all my time on my Finals, get my degree and then you can do what you want

J And you mentioned in competition that sometimes you experience doubts, sometimes there's pressure there. Is that something you ever experience in training at all?

E No, I can honestly say I turn up training and my training sessions are just, I feel great when I'm training, you just forget everything else about the outside World, you just, you're there to do something that you enjoy doing

J OK is there anything else that you experience in training that you find stressful?

E Funnily enough, now that you mention it, yeah, em, I get exercise induced asthma and some sessions really, that possibly have to be done, they really stress me breathing wise and I....that sometimes blows it and of course with asthma attacks, the more uptight you get, the worse they come, so I need to learn to relax, but I mean, when I changed coach, John had to find out how hard he could push me so he had to deliberately [TAPE ENDS]

J So you were saying about your coach....

E Yeah when I changed coach, John had to deliberately find out how hard he could push me, em, so it was a stressful part I had to go through, but it only lasted a few weeks and then he could alter my training regime that hopefully...it's forever going to happen, especially on colder nights but we can keep it to a minimum, em, and cos I mean your health, you've got to look after that more than anything else

J OK, anything else that you find stressful in training at all?

E No, I must be a freak!

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

J OK, let's move onto the final section on the sources of stress then. Here I'd like you to consider if there's anything in particular about the sport itself

which causes stress for you, so I'd like you to think about the specific demands and sacrifices associated with the sport and also the organisational aspects such as team management, timetabling of events etc., which may cause stress for you. Can you identify any of these sources of stress?

E Eh, I think timetabling because well A, I've got a short warm-up so if I've got to stretch it out it'll tire me out physically, em....

J Under what conditions would you find yourself having to stretch out your warm-up?

E Well I mean at the Scottish Ehamps this year em, my warm-up just takes half an hour, if it's a hot day it's less than, you know, about 20 minutes, em, and the race is running about half an hour late so I've doubled the length of my warm-up, you can't sit and do nothing cos you'll cease up so you've got to try and keep on the move

J And what goes through your mind when you're having to double up your warm-up?

E "Oh for God's sake, get a move on!", em, you try not to let it bother you again but it does tire you out a bit. If you're doing double what you're used to it's inevitable that you're going to have some effect, but em, and there was once I had a barmy with a referee who was going to run a race early, but I've, being an asthmatic I've taken, it's taken years to get a mixture of medicine that works so I mean I've got to take one inhaler 40 minutes before I race and another one 10 minutes before and this race is going to be running about 15, 20 minutes earlier when my inhaler's meant to be working, so, but he relented after I said to him that he'd be responsible if I ended up having an asthma attack on the track, so he kind of understood. And again if an event's running late then I don't know if my inhaler's still going to be working or anything

J So the timetabling of events, if events are running behind time then that can lead to two sources of stress for you, one because your warm-up is prolonged which has obvious implications for fatigue etc and has implications for whether or not your inhalers are going to work

E Yeah I mean usually, you've obviously got to look at the time-table for your race to see if they're running behind, but again I'm not there for a whole day. If I'm racing late in the afternoon, I'll just turn up just really to declare, eh I don't need to be there much less than an hour before, so...

J Anything else?

E No

J Are there any demands associated with the sport?

E I mean, I've got to the stage now where yeah, I've made a choice between my career, putting that on hold to focus on athletics, but obviously you can't live

on fresh air and you can't live with your parents forever, so when they brought this, it's when they've set the targets for me to get the funding, em, I've had a lot of bother with that from one thing to another, but I've been done out of an awful lot of money last year which is, I couldn't afford the treatment this year and I got injured....

J So obviously you're currently on the Lottery scheme?

E I've been on the Lottery scheme for the past two years...

J But they've recently cut...?

E I don't know, I'm not expecting anything this year, em, I had three thousand pounds the last two years but I've had it admitted last year that the guy had the wrong time sitting in front of him. I missed the Institute by a tenth of a second. It should've been at least ten thousand that I got last year, judging by everyone else's amounts and he had a different time in front of him

J And how do you feel about that?

E I'm not really impressed with people in SAF or people at the Institute of Sport, I'm really not impressed with them. I mean judging by the people at SAF, I can't believe they would give.....I ran the Loughborough race, I can't believe they would give somebody a Scottish vest one week and then I got injured the next, I heard absolutely nothing from them and that's been the same for all through my injuries. I think it's absolutely.....I just don't understand them, it's true what they say that when you're running well the phone doesn't stop, but there's a deathly silence when you're not running well. And I'm sure I'm not the first to say that and I'm sure I won't be the last

J You're certainly not. Any other demands associated with the sport that you find stressful?

E I'm unfortunate that I've got a kind of pushy parent. My Dad's the type of person that, if he's got something to talk about in the office on Monday morning he's happy, but if he's got nothing to talk about then he's a bit disinterested and unfortunately because of the lack of funds just now at the moment I've had to live at home. I've had a lot of fights with him, but....

J What impact has that had on your training?

E It's really been since I got injured so I've not been training, but em, I'd imagine if I was training it would have. I've been feeling quite lousy for a bit, you know.

J Is that, I'm sorry, I don't fully understand what exactly you're getting at there. Is it, sorry if I'm wrong, is it relating to pressure from one of your parents?

E Em, he just, well I don't get on very well with him in the first place. He doesn't really know the sport, he just wants to.....I think it's because I had so

many years when I was young forever bringing home medals, trophies, top of rankings, bla, bla, bla, that he's just got used to that and he immediately assumes that everything will follow and it should go straight into Senior rankings and what have you, but he just doesn't understand, I mean, it bugs me that

J Is that something you'd describe as being stressful?

E Yeah, it causes a lot of hassle, yeah

J And obviously you've mentioned the team selection procedures within your club that weren't too impressive at the UK League when you were....

E I think they're a bit better now, I made sure! They're phoning me up now just to see if I'm OK

J To what extent have you experienced that at a Scottish or British level?

E Em, there is a lot of favouritism, I think you can't deny that within the Scottish system certainly, em, when I've been away with GB, the GB set up's fantastic, em but, in the Scottish system there is undoubtedly favouritism aimed at certain athletes

J And how do you feel about that?

E It's not, I've got nothing against the athlete, it's the people in charge you know, there's no Ealousy or anything with the athletes involved, it's just the hierarchy that just, it's "jobs for the boys," you know? It's handshakes behind closed doors and what have you, but....

J Is that something that causes stress for you ever?

E Well it kind of does because you miss out on the things that could make a difference between a full-time athlete or going to get a full-time career, full-time job, em, a lot of funding issues are kind of up in arms, I'm sure you would agree, em, if you're not willing to conform to their system, which I made clear I wasn't, eh, I've got my own back-up system, it's really money that I need, they didn't like that, so you're not one of the boys

J What system exactly were you....?

E Because I've been injured so often and because I've had doors closed in my face from SAF, I was forced to go out and find my own connections. I mean now I can get in to see the best orthopaedic surgeon in the UK within a week, that's the kind of connections I've made now

J On your own though

E Yeah, on my own. My physio and my masseur's actually seeing me free of charge just now, em, and I can get into see them whenever I want, but I've got

a system now that SIS couldn't offer me before, em, I'm not willing to change from that cos everyone's done so much for me, em, I don't know if it's about Ealousy on their behalf. I don't know, but....

J OK, let's go over what you've said anyway just to see if that can spark off anything else. Timetabling, you mentioned the timetabling of events. That can cause stress for you in relation to your asthma and mucking up your warm-up; the lack of support from the Scottish Athletics Association, for example the fact that you've had to make your own connections for treatment, their team selection procedures haven't been very fair and that's caused stress for you and also their incompetence regarding financial issues. Anything else?

E I think that's pretty much it, but it's quite important stuff

J It certainly is

E They just never seem to learn. They promise all these changes and they just never come up with the goods

OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS:

J That's us covered the three sections on the sources of stress now. Are there any other sources of stress that you experience as an athlete which we haven't yet covered?

E I can't think of anything, just the stresses change from when you're younger to when you become a Senior athlete, it completely, obviously enjoyment's a big part of your sport but it becomes a lot more important to try and, you get to the stage where you really need to try and earn, make a living, em....

J So it sounds like in a way as you progress, as you get older it's like the pressure increases

E You're not playing at in anymore, it's not a game, em, it's serious. It's your job

J And talking about jobs, you've obviously talked about the dilemma you've had with whether to pursue your athletic career or whether to pursue your life time career. These carer direction issues, are these something which have caused stress for you at all?

E Yeah, I was wanting to move out of home, but to do that I'd need a full-time salary coming in, so I'd got everything written out to companies em, EV's, envelopes, addressed and I was speaking to somebody, em, you might know them and they happened to mention that they were going to be living at home and their parents are going to be supporting them and I'm like, "What am I giving away here?" So I'm actively looking for a part-time job, continue living at home and train, practically full-time, but hopefully get some money coming

in from a job. But it's a big year next year and going into your first full-time job, it's going to turn your life upside down, you're going to be exhausted, it's going to be hectic trying to fit the training of a full-time athlete in along with full-time work, so em, I'm putting the full-time career on hold just now and looking for a part-time job

J And going back to the issue with your Dad, em, and it sounds like perhaps there has been a bit of pressure there but because you're unable to train, that hasn't really had much of an impact. Is that something that ever impacted on your training when you were younger, when you were able to train?

E Em, my Dad's not, I've never had pressure on me to go down to the track and train to go out. My Dad knows nothing about the sport, so he didn't have the knowledge to go out and push me, train me extra or whatever, em, and I always wanted to go training anyway, so it's nothing like training for pressure from parents or anything like that, em, the problem with him is, when I first got injured he didn't want to know, em, he thought I was putting it on to begin with, this is this year, em, so I chose not to tell him anything to do with it, cos it just started an argument basically, em, and then people phoned up, like my Uncle was asking how I was getting on, he didn't know, he couldn't answer the questions cos he hadn't talked to me, so when he thought he'd be ready to talk, I thought, "To hell with you, I'm not saying anything," I'm just refusing to speak to him about it cos it just blows up into an argument, even still, like because he's ready to talk about it, I'm not....

J So that's how you're coping with it to avoid the stress?

E Yeah, that's how I'm going to treat him from now on

J OK then, any other sources of stress at all that....?

E I think that's it

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

J OK, we've covered a lot. Let's move onto the final section now. In this section I'm interested in finding out if there's anything about you as a person which might influence the stress that you experience. As I'm sure you're aware, different people experience stress to different degrees and this is generally due to differences in a number of factors such as personality or the way you tend to cope with stress. I wonder if you could have a wee think and tell me if there are any aspects of you that you think might influence the stress that you experience

E I certainly, I can be honest and say that if you look at my academic life, when I was at Uni and my athletic life I set, I definitely set very different standards. I was never one for studying all hours of the day when it came to exams and I never wanted to be highest in the class. I was always just content to go along

with the pack, if you know what I mean. I did enough work plus a little bit more to pass exams, em, high grades never really bothered me like A's, A+ and what have you, but when it comes to running, it's fair to say if I have a bad training session I'm really quite upset for the rest of the night, eh, quite angry with myself, you go over it in your head, em, but I do set myself high standards for training. I suppose when it comes to racing one of the reasons, I don't know if this is anything to do with it, but I'll tell you. One of the reasons I sometimes don't like racing in Scotland is because other Scottish athletes, they don't seem to want to compete at the same level as me, they're content to stay behind me and I don't like that. I can't be bothered with people who are just willing to trundle round behind you and come out with an adequate, a moderate time, whereas I want to go out in big pack and push myself higher and improve my standards. Does that make sense? Is that relevant?

J Yeah, what I'm hearing here is basically that you're describing yourself in the sport as being someone who is very, very driven, perhaps setting yourself pretty high expectations

E I mean, obviously in the future, yeah in the future I wouldn't mind being, obviously one of my main goals is to be one of the best in the World and to do that you need to be probably the best in the UK and to do that you're going to have to be the best in Scotland so you shouldn't have to worry about what's going on at your home

J So, you've described yourself as being pretty driven. Would you agree with that, yeah?

E Yeah

J So how is that influencing the stress that you experience would you say?

E It's quite frustrating competing against other athletes who aren't so driven, they don't seem to set the same standards as yourself

J And in what way is that stressful for you?

E Well as I say, when I'm running in Scotland I'm forever front running races

J So it's because it's not providing you with the competition that you need?

E Yeah, I mean I'm not getting pushed on, I'm not....I'm losing out on races up here cos if anyone wants to take me on they leave it till the very end

J Could you give me an example of that?

E I could, eh, there was a race in Latvia earlier this year and the starter mucked up – there was no gap between, “On your marks,” and “Go,” so when they fired the gun I was about four or five metres from the line so I put my hand up, everyone else ran, to stop the race but he never stopped it so I had to carry on about two and a half, three seconds behind everyone, so I mean they slowed

down ridiculously so I did catch them up easily, I was in the lead with 400 to go, but whereas I went round in 60, possibly even 59, they dandered round in 63 seconds it came up, so when it came to the end, they had the kick to go past me, whereas I actually ended up, I ran a 2.07.1, but I actually ended up doing a sub 2.05, which will never be recognised, that pissed me off because they had the legs just to scoot past me, but I ran a truer race, but it will never be seen as that, if you know what I mean

J Right, I could be wrong here, I'm going to tell you what I think you're saying to me, tell me if I'm wrong. Right we're talking about aspects of you which influence stress. It's almost like the thing about you which is influencing your stress is that it's almost like you have different aspirations from other athletes and it's almost like you're willing to run truer races because you're willing to take the race out at the start, you're willing to go off fast at a better pace than the rest of the athletes which results in them just sitting behind you and obviously that then causes stress for you because, A, you're not being pushed or B, it's almost like other athletes are cheating you because they're taking advantage of you and then coming away from you at the end, would that be right?

E I would agree

J Excellent

E It's so hard to front run a race

J Yeah, I can imagine

E The energy you waste just by front running and when I've got to do that for an entire race, I'm losing out on the second lap because there's nobody there to push me, whereas I'm pulling everyone round at a faster pace than they would normally be at

J So a short way of saying it really would be, the way you tactically run it

E Yeah, I mean although I may hold on and win the race, I've still lost out because I always finish with no legs

J Is there anything else about you as a person which you feel might influence your stress?

E No

J How would you describe your personality in general?

E I don't know, just ask somebody else, I don't know. I'm quite shy.

J The reason I asked you that question was just in case there were any words that you used to describe your personality which I could then probe you with to.....

- E Some areas I could lack self-confidence but to do with my running, I'm usually quite confident with things to do with that
- J So how would you describe your athletic personality?
- E Pretty confident when I get given good breaks
- J And to what extent do you feel that your confidence influences your stress?
- E When I'm confident, I'd imagine you wouldn't have stress and you'd be relaxed and when you're relaxed, you will run well
- J When we talked earlier about how important athletics was to you, you said that it made up about three quarters, 75% of your life, em, it's obvious that it's very, very important to you. Do you think that in itself could influence your stress in any way?
- E It will do without a doubt, I mean it is, if you asked somebody that's, I don't know, a high powered business man, who's career obviously takes up a lot of his life, I mean you get a lot of people in stressful jobs, eh, that affects their whole life and what have you, so I think it's really the same, in the same boat as that
- J How would you say that you generally tend to cope with the stress that you experience?
- E When it comes to injury, I don't, em, I actually got taken to a sport psychologist when I got injured again because I just, I just forever break down, cos all my injuries are so long-term and I know they're going to be long-term from the start but I don't know, sometimes I get through them. I couldn't tell you how I get through them or how I cope with it, but somehow I do. That doesn't really answer the question!
- J Thinking back to being injured, you can't remember how you got through it then, or you don't know what you're doing right now to get through this one?
- E No, I just, well especially with this one, I just got so worked up trying to get in touch with people, doing what basically other people should be doing for me, em, but because of the lack of support from SAF what have you, bla, bla, bla, I've had to go out and find it all myself and I've been making myself ill, em, so I do get really, I wear myself down when I'm injured. I know I shouldn't be doing it, but I can't help it
- J So then you've touched upon another source of stress relating to the stress of finding your support, finding your assistance, when really someone else should be doing it, oh we actually have covered that anyway. OK, so we've talked about aspects of you that influence your stress, we've talked about the way you tactically run a race can cause stress, your confidence alleviates stress, the fact that you have, I suppose a high athletic identity, you've

invested a lot into the sport, so that can cause stress for you. Anything else just off the top of your head?

E I think that's about as much as I could cope with, physically!

J How do you think that your stress compares with other athletes?

E Well you can tell me, em, I really don't know. In terms of injury I think it's fair to say that I've gone through more than what a lot of athletes have gone through by the time they're 23, em, I really couldn't answer that question, I don't know, different athletes would have different stresses from different things

J OK, well that's just about all I need to ask you. Before we finish though, do you think there are any important factors we failed to discuss in relation to your experiences of stress?

E I hope not

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

E You've done your stuff very well, you're doing good research

J Well, I'd just like to say thanks very much for your time and your honesty and I really do genuinely hope that your injury clears up so you can get out there and have a decent season

E Cheers, thank you very much

SOURCES OF STRESS IN ELITE TRACK ATHLETES

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

EWAN

DEMOGRAPHICS:

J Right then E, before we start discussing athletics, it would be useful for me to get some background information on you, so to begin with, could you tell me a bit about yourself, your age, where you live and what it is you do?

E Yes, I live in a village called Old Kilpatrick, it's just outside Clydebank, em, I'm 20

J Who is it you live with just now?

E I still live with my family, so my Mum and Dad

J And do you have a job, are you a student, or...?

E No, I'm a full-time athlete

J OK. What sorts of things do you enjoy about being an athlete?

E Em, you've got a lot of time, just to relax, so you don't have to go out and work or go to Uni and sit through lectures everyday, so it's good, you've got a lot of time and you get a lot of just relaxing

J Is there anything about the lifestyle that you don't enjoy?

E It can get a bit boring. If you can't manage to fill up your days it's, it does get a bit boring, just doing, sitting just doing the same sort of stuff every day

J OK, do you have any plans for the future, once you stop athletics, or...?

E I don't know, I never really think about it. I'd rather think that I can keep going for a good ten years anyway, so...

J OK. Apart from athletics then, what other things do you do in your free time?

E It depends who's about. I go out and play golf, play pool, quite a bit when my friends are off work, we usually just go out at weekends, just depends what's happening about me

J How would you describe your social life?

E Em, it's quite bad, oh, I don't know, it's not great

J Why do you think that is?

E Eh, mostly because I'm away so much. I'm not about an awful lot at weekends, I'm running, so I don't get a chance to get out much whereas most of my friends do

- J And how do you feel about that?
- E It doesn't bother me at all. It's something I've decided that I want to do. It's how I make my living, so it's not too bad. I've got time to go out during the Winter, but no, just sometimes I don't get time when they're going away on holiday, but, no it's never a problem, it's something that I've decided that I want to do
- J I'd like to move onto talking a athletics now then, so tell me a bit about what event you do
- E I do the 110m hurdles
- J Have you always done that event?
- E I haven't
- J What did you do before that?
- E I started when I was younger doing 800 metres, cross countries
- J Oh really?
- E Yes, then moved onto doing high jump, did high jump for a few years then moved onto doing hurdles, long jumps and multi events and I just moved onto concentrating on my hurdling over the last three or four years
- J OK, I'd like you to describe your training structure for me now and what I mean by that is, em, basically the number of training partners you have, the number of coaches you have, how often you train, that sort of thing
- E Eh, the group contains about six, seven people in the group but that's down to, it's usually only about three four of us together doing the same sort of stuff at the same level cos and others, some of them are girls and some of them do 400 metres hurdles and they join us for longer stuff, and, coaches I'm really, I have one coach really, em, Bob Sommerville who does all the track work and hurdles work and he does he got his advice for most of the other stuff with the conditioning and weights which is done by Kirsty Law
- J OK. How would you describe the relationship you have with your coach?
- E How would I describe that? Em, it's quite good, we do get along, just argue about a few things
- J What sort of things do you argue about?
- E Mostly training, mostly the fact that I disagree with a lot of things. I sometimes decide that I kind of know better than him, which sometimes is the case, but...

- J Can you give me an example at all?
- E Em, weights mostly, the fact that I've been away with Eolin Jackson, I've picked up ideas from them and he's going from what's he's known and what he's used for years and what Kirsty's saying, it's just things like that, and then some of the track sessions, very different stuff, just coming into different stages in the year, I might think we should move onto something a bit different, which he might not agree with.
- J OK that's interesting, we'll come back to that later. And how often is it that you're training?
- E It's usually six times a week, over the Winter it's six times a week right through, and em, as you get through it'll, well depending on how much you're running in the season. It can go down to twice a week or if I'm not competing it's usually about four or five times anyway.
- J What age were you when you first got involved in the sport?
- E I was young. I think I was about nine or ten, very young
- J How did you get involved?
- E It was really through my family, well Ross started in his early teens
- J Ross your brother?
- E Ross my brother, yes, and with my Mum and Dad being involved and they were taking Ross with them, so I was getting dragged along down the club, so
- J At that point was it something that you wanted to do or was it something that perhaps you were pressured into?
- E I wasn't really pressured into it. I had to really go down cos my Mum and Dad, well my Mum was out and my Dad was going down to the club anyway, with Ross, but I had to be there I didn't have to do anything. It was something I decided I wanted to join in with, the stuff he did.
- J Right, and what sort of input did your parents have?
- E What sort of input?
- J Were your parents athletes when they were younger or...?
- E Yes they were, they were both athletes. My Mum was a long jumper and a hurdler and my Dad was a 400 metres runner
- J That's where you got the genes from then, eh?

- E Yes, yes. But no, em, they tend to push me a bit, but they would say they haven't. They never really were involved in anything to get us started in it. They were happy for us to go off and do other stuff, but they wanted to see us getting into it and doing something that we seemed to be good at, so...
- J And what about now, are they still pushing you that wee bit, or...?
- E Yes, yes, em, it's more just with eh, my injuries and stuff, they keep pushing me to get massage and see physios and get proper training done, which has been lacking. Yeah, em, they're always going to be pushing me
- J OK, and how do you feel about that?
- E Em, it doesn't bother me. I know that they were always involved in athletics, they were always going to be about, so it doesn't bother me at all
- J OK, we'll maybe come back to that later then. I'd like you now to talk me through your progression from when you started your athletic career. If you could maybe just briefly outline like your main achievements
- E Eh, how early do you want me to go?
- J Em, yeah if you maybe start from when you, go back to when you started and just briefly just talk me through, I know there's been a lot of achievements for you...maybe the major ones
- E Yes, em, when I was nine or ten I was with Elydebank Athletic Elub and I was there doing, I think it must've been Under 11's or something doing 800's, just the Elub, em, then went from Elydebank Athletic Elub to Victoria Park, who I'm still a member of, em, still doing some 800's, move up, doing a bit of hurdling, high jumping, long jumping, went through Under 13's, set a Scottish Record at high jump.....em, it was such a long time ago, em, yeah I went through Under 13's and Under 15's and I definitely moved away from doing any longer stuff. I realised it was too long. I was mostly a high jumper at that age, em.....
- J What about recently, what've been your main....
- E Recently, my main stuff, em, recently well Under 20's I've been the European Junior Champion, '99 I made the World Junior final, Under 23, bronze medal at the Europeans, this year as well as I got my first GB Senior International
- J How satisfied are you with your achievements so far?
- E Em, quite satisfied, most of them, some of them have been a few disappointments, but I thought I could do better, but I'm pretty much satisfied with what I've done, knowing that I can get better hopefully

J I'd like to talk a bit now about the goals and the targets that you set for yourself in athletics. Taking this season which, has that now come to an end for you?

E It's come to an end, yes

J I wonder if you could tell me a bit about the goals that you'd set for this season

E Em, my biggest goal was the European Under 23's, to get a medal at that, em, which really, because I was first year in the age group was a big thing I thought to get a medal so that was, and I was hoping for the World Championships. I felt that the third place in the hurdles was realistic to think about getting, so they were the two biggest aims

J Right. how close did you come to them?

E I got the medal at the Under 23 Championships and World Championships, I ran the qualifying time, windy, just and I was well I ended up 4th ranked, no fifth ranked in Britain, so I just missed out, but em, Paul Gray ran the qualifying the week before the deadline so he beat me in that race and ran the qualifying so...

J How do you feel about that?

E Em, I was quite gutted, yeah, em, I don't know if they would've taken me into consideration how close the wind reading was, but when Paul ran that, I knew there wasn't much left I could've done so it was a bit annoying but at that point in the season I'd really thought, well after that I knew, when I knew I wasn't going everything really stopped, so

J OK. I'd like you to think back to when you achieved your goals, a time when you felt a lot of, you felt that that you'd been particularly successful and I wonder if you could maybe talk me through the emotions that you felt when that happened

E Em, probably the one where I really did meet my goals was the European Junior trials, Ehamps in '99 where, em, it was one of the closest races, there were four of us within a hundredth of a second, em, I won it, I was first equal with the Spaniard, so it was a bit strange, just coming off and you could see it was so close, and nobody really knew who'd won so em, I had, after the race I did have a feeling that I thought I'd won a medal. I thought I had won it, but it was hard, so we're all mostly walking about and em, nobody really had any sort of clue, nobody could tell us from the sideline who'd got it so.....waiting, just it was the fact that we were waiting about for so long, waiting for the score boards. The score boards kept coming up and changing so when they got the score boards up first of all it was I think the Spaniard had won it, I was second and the other Briton was third and the German was fourth. and then they changed it to being first equal for us and the German third and the British guy fourth, then they changed it again, so it was a bit confusing at that point, but it had been confirmed that it was first equal with Garth so I kind of

bounced about. It was really good to win yeah, cos it'd been a hard year for me that year with my brother's death

J That must've been very hard

E Yes, it was, it was hard so, em, just to go out and do that and then, it was a good thing and then being on the podium was just so good, a completely different feeling from anything else I've ever had

J Can you think back to a time, the opposite, when you had a really disappointing performance and tell me about how you felt then?

E Em, I was disappointed when I got to the World Juniors and I finished 8th in the final. I went into it being injured, prior to the final I'd come back from injury I'd tore my hamstring, so, em, I had a lot to deal with, but I went into it still thinking I could win. I didn't see anybody that could, running the way I could going into it I didn't see anybody that could beat me, cruised through the heat, cruised through the semi, got to the final and still thought, I really thought there was only one person there that could've beat me, that was the guy that eventually won it. I just came out, started doing my usual hitting hurdles, and by forth hurdle I smashed through it and the guy on the outside of me took about two metres out of me, so at that point my concentration went and I just totally blanked everything. I got to about the 8th hurdle and I had really no want to run anymore, gave up the race and was 8th and that was probably the worst thing about it, it wasn't even the place I'd come, it was the fact I had given up. It wasn't the fact, even with the position I was in at half way, with my concentration gone I could've been in the top five, but the fact that I'd just given up half way through a race, it was more annoying than anything, so a lot of people were disappointed in me at that point which was a bit different.

J How did you feel about the fact that other people were possibly disappointed in you?

E Em, it didn't bother me, it was more, em, I was more disappointed in myself because the fact that I'd given up. There was people like Bob who were...and my parents sort of thing

J Bob your coach?

E Bob my coach, yes, em, my parents weren't fairly impressed, so, but I think they understood why and other people kind of wondered what happened to me. It was concentration which, you need to be able to hurdle

J I can imagine. Do you ever doubt your ability to meet your goals?

E No, never have, em, I've an awful lot of confidence in my own ability, sometimes too much confidence in it, where I think I can run a lot faster than I've proved, but no, em, I've, even with injuries I still feel I can do what I've set out to do. I don't see any reason why I can't.

- J What problems have you encountered whilst trying to achieve your goals?
- E What problems? An awful lot. Em, mostly injury. I went through the season of 2000 pulling my hamstring, tearing my hamstring. I pulled my hamstring four/five times and then tore it, tore my left hamstring quite badly and then I think it was the end of the July so that was about three, four months, so it was, it's a hard thing to deal with injury because the fact was that one I didn't know it was torn, you know, nobody came out and said that I had actually torn it. It felt good enough for me to train on it, so I was wanting to get out there and train. My physio was telling me not to and telling me not to run, so I think I ran twice with it torn, which I didn't know. I did manage to run my PB doing it though.
- J Did you really?
- E Yeah
- J My next question was going to be, how did it affect your progression, but.....
- E I don't know how I did it. I couldn't walk after the race. It went that bad, it just ceased up. It was after that I found out I'd torn it - I got a scan done on it.
- J Did you tear it actually during the race?
- E I tore it, em, in training, two days after the Scottish Championships in that year where I'd done, I think it, was three races in an hour and a half, without being able to keep my hamstrings warmed up between them. I came out to train a couple of days later, just easy running, as soon as I opened out my stride it just went on me, so yeah, em, I got a scan done on it, a month after it was done. The tear had nearly healed but it had been an 8cm tear in the hamstring, so that put me out for near enough two months without full training.
- J And how did you feel during this period?
- E Frustrated. It was very annoying because with my hamstring, without being able to go out and run on it, it felt really good. I could walk on it without any pain. I could jog a bit without any pain. I could lift weights, everything without any pain, so I felt I could go out and run on it and everybody was holding me back, cos I knew I had to get, try and get myself fit again, so it was frustrating and very hard to deal with, but yeah, and then from that it was just a case of trying to get myself fit for the World Juniors which I didn't quite get, but yeah, that was one hard thing, always injuries.
- J What other sort of problems have you encountered, if any?
- E Em, the death of my brother. That was right in the middle of the season, so it was very hard and very exceptional circumstances to deal with cos I found out, I was in Germany at the time so I actually ran the next day which was

hard because with being out there it was a case of either be out there, sit about at hotels or go to the track and run

J So was this an International that you'd been selected for at the time?

E It was a small team that went out to Mannheim for the Juniors, so yeah, em, everybody that was there was great, people like Richard McDonald who knew Ross and Joanna Ross as well

J And of course your brother was an athlete as well wasn't he?

E Yes, he was an athlete as well, they all knew him really well, so it was hard for them as well, so that was a pretty hard race to do, really had to try and keep my mind off everything else that was going on, yeah and then use my training as just a way to get away from everything that's going on for the next three or four weeks before getting ready for the Championships that year

J And you would imagine that something as horrific as that would have a huge, huge impact on your training and on your performances

E Yeah, em, I don't know if, I can't really remember much about that season, em, I wasn't winning races at that time. I wasn't the top Junior in Britain at that time. I was finishing third and fourth in my races before that and stuff so I was, I was going out, I was running as well as I had been which wasn't as well as I knew I could. I just came out about a month after everything had really settled down again and I really started getting into it. My training had been going really well because that's what I was doing to get away from everything. I just came out, everything started to go well for me, leading up into the European juniors that year so it seemed to go right at the right time, so....

J So do you feel that that's something that still has an impact on....?

E Em, it probably does, it's not something I think about, it's not, em, it's something everybody keeps asking about, whether it's helped or do I think about it. I think it's helped me go into competitions which now blank out anything. I've got the strength in me now that I can just blank out anything that's going on when I step on the line, so I think it's helped a lot in that way.

J How exactly do you feel it's helped, sorry?

E Whenever I go to race I can just, if anything happens, any problems in warm-up or anything I can just blank it out, I know that em, I've got the confidence that I can go in, even if I fall in the warm-up, I can go in now and I know that it's a totally different thing in a race. I just blank everything out of mind

J Well thanks very much for telling me about that Ehris. I appreciate that. Any other problems at all you've had?

E I don't think so

J OK, I'd like to ask you now about your reasons for taking part in athletics. I wonder if you could tell me about that

E My reasons.....money, no em, not really, em, I love competing. It's just this competitive streak that I've got, em, I don't think I could go through the training if I couldn't get to compete at the end of it, em, it's really what, it's really why I started. I love the sport, keeping fit, em, it's also keeping me active, it's a great way to.....yeah and now it has to be a bit about money since I'm using it to live on, so I'm getting to the stage where I have to be running fast to keep myself going without having to go out and work for it, so em..... but no it's mostly the fact that it's a good part of my life now and I love doing it, I love sports so it's a great way to live

J OK, to sum up then your reasons for taking part in the sport are because naturally you have this competitive streak in you and you love the sport, it keeps you fit and active, you enjoy the lifestyle that's associated with it and also because it's keeping you away from work at the moment!

E Yes

J OK. I'd like to get an idea now of how important athletics is to you so I'd like you to imagine that your life is a cake. How big a piece is the athlete part of you?

E Oh, most of it, it is, with it being what I'm doing as most people seeing as a job now, it has to be, it's basically what my life is. I do my athletics and training most of the time so it is pretty much most of it

J If I asked you to give a percentage would you be able to?

E Em, it's hard, hard one how much, em, 75% probably anyway

J So you feel that you do invest a lot of yourself into the sport?

E Yeah, yes

J Have you ever considered how you might feel when your athletic career comes to an end? Actually you've already answered that, you try not to think about it

E Yes, that's true. I want to keep it going for as long as I can, so

J And I guess if you were unable to pursue it for some reason, you'd be pretty...

E Yeah, em, if I was, if there was any reason why it did get to the stage where either injury or other circumstances where I wasn't going to be able to keep going in the sport, I'd have to stop and really sit and think about what I was going to do with my life, but I'm sure once I start getting a bit older I'll have to start to think, once the realisation that my career is going to come to an end,

I'll have to sit down and think what I'm going to do after, whether I go into coaching or go to Uni and get some degrees and stuff, no, em, it's going to always be, wait and see what happens with time

J When you're meeting new people and you're introducing yourself, is it important to you that you introduce yourself as an athlete? Is it important to you that other people see you as an athlete?

E No, no, em, I very rarely would say that, unless they asked about what I did, I wouldn't just come out and say that I did it, I would just go along with, what we're doing, em, even if they knew I was an athlete I'm not likely to go and say that I've won this and won that like some people that I know do. I know some people that do that, so, no em, I'm not somebody that's looking for other people to look up to me, em, I'd rather have just being treated like anybody else.

J Doing it purely for yourself then?

E Yeah

COMPETITIVE STRESS:

J I'd like to move onto the second part of the interview now and discuss your experiences of stress as an athlete, obviously we have touched upon this a bit so far. I'd just like to make sure that we're on the same wavelength with stress here, so I'd like you to think of stress as referring to those occasions where you've felt under pressure to meet the demands of a situation which has had important consequences for you. OK, so I'm interested in hearing about all the sources of stress, not just the really big ones. To help you identify as many sources of stress as possible, we'll split the discussion up into sources of stress you may experience in competition, sources of stress in training and sources of stress relating to the demands of the sport. Obviously stress may also arise from different areas so I'll give you an opportunity to discuss them as well.

So let's start with competitive sources of stress. I'd like you to take some time to think back carefully to a competition which you found particularly stressful and can remember well and just go through the stages of the event and even the days leading up to it and after it if there was anything at all that you found stressful, you know, go through the things you did such as registration, talking to your coach, getting into your boots, all these sorts of procedures, just to trigger your mind to see if there's anything that you can recall as being stressful. So first of all, can you select a competition to discuss with me? If not, if you want to just talk in general if that would be easier

E I'll just talk in general

- J Sure
- E Can I think of anything stressful? Em, a lot of stress has come from pressure for me, em, especially when I go away with teams it's a lot of people about you, especially once you've had some success, they're all on at you saying, "You can win". It's hard. Other people, yeah, other people is basically where a lot of the stress is coming from, especially when they're all on at you saying, "You need to win, you need to win"
- J What sorts of people are saying these sorts of things to you in general?
- E Em, you get some from team management, you get some other athletes say it to try and get you motivated, but sometimes it just works on different parts
- J And how does it make you feel when people say things like that?
- E Em, it doesn't really bother me too much, it's once it starts piling up with other people saying it, the pressure sort of starts to build upon you, especially when you get into the big competitions where, especially well, the last couple of years with the Junior team I've been away running against the Germans, the Spaniards who I've run against at other Championships – I know we're basically at the same sort of level and it's the case that it's basically neck and neck who's going to be able to win
- J And is that something as well that you find stressful – being so close to your competitors?
- E Em, sometimes, sometimes, em, with me not liking to get beat it's, em, it is hard in the last few years I've had Rob Newton as one of my rivals who's from Britain who I've had. We've grown up running against each other through Under 17's so it's, it's kind of eh, quite strange, em, I have had once where it's really got to me. It's the only time I've ever sort of sat there and concentrated on somebody else and it just didn't work because I'd sat knowing that I'd wanted to win, winning it, everybody else saying that I needed to go and win it and just, the pressure just got to me, just stressed, I just couldn't handle running while concentrating on something else, which isn't the best way to run.
- J And you say that you're not the type of person that likes to get beat by your rivals, well, who is! How did that make you feel when that happened?
- E How did it make me feel? Em, it depends, really it depends on how I've run. If I've had a bad race and I'm getting beat it was really going to annoy me. If I'm just getting beat, the way I'm running doesn't make much difference actually. I just don't like getting beat very much. I'm not the best of losers, but, em, it just makes me want to get back on the track and actually go and beat them, go out and run again and win races but it's a strange thing to happen, strange to try and convey your emotions of these things

- J Being close to your competitors as well, like having competitors that are at a very similar standard, in what way would you say that that's stressful?
- E Em, in what way it's stressful? Em, I think it's more the fact you know they're going to be there the whole time, they're going to be with you the whole time, it's eh, a case of, especially if you, it's more if you know that you should be beating them. If you know that you should be beating them all the time and you think that if you've got a niggling injury or something then they might beat you, it's more stressful that you know you have to go out and you can't race. You really don't want to get beat by somebody who is, I'm not going to say worse, but who you really should be beating. That's more where the stress comes from, trying to concentrate on not getting beat by people you shouldn't be. There's people that should be, it's going to be close between, it's not quite as bad, but people you should be beating it's harder to deal with.
- J And you mentioned a niggling injury there as well, is that something that you would find stressful during competition?
- E Yeah, it's stressful at all times, em, it's competitions it's a hard one to deal with, especially if you're going into it with, you're coming out of training and going into competition with a niggling injury, you know what's going on, you know how bad it is, but it's if you come out of the warm-up area and have problems, twinging your hamstring or, it plays on your mind a lot more. At least if you've trained and stuff you know you can get through it, but it's when you hit it in the warm-up area it's, it plays on your mind, you're not sure if it's going to hold up for a race so you're always thinking about that. It stops you concentrating on what you want to be doing, makes you concentrate on something total that's unrelative
- J Anything else you can think of?
- E False starts
- J In what way is that stressful for you?
- E It's more stress, just trying to keep yourself concentrating on what you're doing, whether it's you that's got a false start or people false starting all around you, and with hurdles it kind of happens an awful lot. It's a case of you're getting yourself fully concentrating in your blocks, going through the starting process and get yourself totally concentrated at the start and then a false start goes and you've got to come back and re...., just blank everything out for a bit and then build yourself back up into it and when it keeps going for two or three times it's, it starts to really get to annoy you, play on your mind, whether it's going to keep happening, whether it's going to keep jumping or you're going to get a chance to actually get out and run. It does get, it gets frustrating after a while
- J It sounds like maintaining your concentration is a general thing for you that....

- E Yeah, it's something I do sometimes have problems with during races, especially if I get out and I'm leading a race, I can't actually feel anybody next to me, like if I'm ever away from my competitors, I've got this point in the middle of the race where concentration will go and I start to think about where people are, so they start coming back at me and I've got to gather myself again and get up, so concentration is something that I does get a bit of a problem, so it's not something unusual, it's usually after the races I get the fact that I've got to go into this
- J Is there anything else?
- E Eall-ups, call rooms
- J How's that stressful?
- E Em, it's sometimes not, it's just when you get to E championships and it's the long calls and it's when you've had 35 minutes sitting, you've gone through your warm-up and you've got to just sit and most of the time you've not got any sort of room so you're sitting there with everybody else and you can't even go out and stretch and then if it's, that's just hard cos you're stuck there with your competitors in an environment where you really not you can just sit and talk to, you can't have your personal stereo in with you, you can't have anything in with you, everything's taken off you, so you're basically sitting there and thinking. It's always what you do – just sit and think
- J And what are you thinking?
- E “Get out this place!” em, it's strange, em, the worst one I had was the World Juniors last year, especially in the heats because in the heats nobody really knew, especially, well I knew the European athletes that were there but the rest of them, the E Chinese were there, Eubans....so there all in and I'd just done in my knee in the warm-up area and I was doing my drills, doing fast stuff with my trail leg and I caught the corner of the hurdle on my knee and basically put a whole in it, so I had the whole of my knee strapped up to the point that I couldn't fully bend it so that was sort of playing on my mind, keeping stretched everything and the rest of them walking about, relaxing. It was like OK, strangest ?, especially when you don't know people, cos when you're in Britain and most, a lot of places in Europe with age group people, you know everybody that's there, you know how they're going to react in these situations, but when you're put into something when you don't know people, you don't know what they're doing, whether they're bouncing about because they're nervous or that's just the way they get themselves, they keep themselves moving or whether they usually just sit down and just be quiet
- J So in a way it sounds like the call-up itself, the declaration itself is stressful because you're sitting there, you're huddled up beside your competitors and you can't really get out of that area, but also sometimes when you don't know your competitors you described that as being quite....

- E It's off-putting. It starts playing, because you've got nothing else to do you start thinking about what, what they're like, why they're doing what they're doing, if they're getting up and bouncing about and running about the place and stuff, whether they're doing it because they're really confident and they think they can put you off by doing this or they're doing it because they're really nervous and you're just sort of sitting and you're stretching, you're doing stuff that you sometimes wouldn't normally do, just to keep yourself moving
- J So in a way if another competitor gets up and starts moving about does that then put you under pressure to maybe do the same thing or...?
- E Em, sometimes. It depends how long you know you're going to be there for. If you know you're going to be in, say right you're going down to the track in five minutes and they're bouncing about you just leave it, it's when they say, "You've got 20 minutes in here," and you've got to get up and move, you can't just sit and relax, you can't concentrate on it, you've got to be able to get up and keep yourself warm basically and with everybody else about it's not easy to do that and then they get late, most of the time these things get held up
- J Right, we shall cover that later. Em, anything else?
- E I can't think of anything else
- J Let's cover what you've talked about already, em, you've talked about the pressure that you sometimes experience when other people are placing expectations on you; em, being in races where your competitors are of a very similar standard, that can sometimes be stressful as well for you; when you get beat by a rival; so that's stressful, niggling injuries; false starts; as a general thing, maintaining your concentration during races as well; declarations/call-ups - not knowing your competitors and not knowing why they're doing what they're doing.....anything else at all? OK, let's go over what you've mentioned in the first section and see if there's anything you can....Do you ever feel any expectations from your parents during competition, does that contribute in any way?
- E Em, from my parents, not really, em, I know that, I know what they expect from me but they'll never come out and come up to me and say things to me going into competitions, they'll leave it, they're more likely to come and ask me how I think I can do rather than say, "You will do this....," yeah. They know what I'm like, that I'm more likely to put myself, put higher expectations on myself than they are, so, they just leave me.
- J How do you feel physically before you race? Can you maybe describe that for me?
- E Physically before I race, em, it really changes from race to race, depending on how important it is to me, so I can go into League competitions I'll just, I'll go into I find it very hard to motivate myself, I can be very relaxed, just strolling, do what I need to do and leave it, but when you get to, once it gets more

important, the more nervous you get and the longer you start thinking about it before it, like going into Ehamppionships is a strange one because with you getting rounds you're nervous for the first round because you don't want to go out in that round, so a few days before that's when you're thinking about it and you've got to try and switch off at that point then try and switch back on for Finals which I'm quite bad, but I'm nervous for most races, it's always good, it just puts you a bit on edge in what you're doing, so...

J So the nerves themselves, the way you feel physically, that's not something that you find particularly stressful?

E No, em, I don't, I get more worried if I don't get nervous because I think if I don't get nervous it more or less means I'm just really not bothered what's happening and I'm not worried about anything in the race, I'm less likely to actually get out at the start, get the sharpness going as quickly as possible, so...

J What about that then, I suppose that's like a lack of motivation. Is that something that you sometimes find stressful?

E Em, it's not quite, I wouldn't say stressful, it's just something that happens, it depends just how I rate the race [TAPE ENDS]

J Yeah so, em, sorry in League meetings when you're going down South.....

E When I go down South for these things I'm travelling a lot. It's either the day before or sometimes flying down first thing in the morning, so I'm not, I'm tired, I'm not quite wanting to run at the time, but, em, when I go down I'm not entirely motivated to go out and run, so it's a bit strange. It's a strange feeling, it's more I want to be able to go out and compete well, but I can't get myself up to.....

J So in a way like would you say that not having the comfort of your own home and just the usual procedures that you get, having to fly down or your transport down to an event, that in itself can cause stress because perhaps that interferes with your approach?

E Travel always causes stress. Travel's just change I think, more than anything it changes....Travelling, well where ever you travel it causes it, and just being in different circumstances, you always sleep better in your own house, so it's strange to be moving hotels with a mountain of bags

J You must be used to it by now though!

E Yeah

J Em, you also mentioned there heats are quite bad because it's almost like there's a fear of going out in the heats. Would you say then in that sense that Ehamppionships that have rounds are particularly stressful?

E Yes, yes, em, heats, a lot of people will say that. The heats are the harder ones. The first round, if you're going into it you might have had a week or so where you've not run competitive, a few weeks where you've not had competitions, you go into it, not knowing about the people, not knowing how other people are running, especially if you've not had competitions with them and you're going into it with the expectation of making the final which means if you're going into that heat and expecting to make the final you don't want to be going out in the heat, if you've made the semi and just miss out it's fine, but if you go out in the first round, you've got to make sure everything's ready for that one, so.....

J So I guess that's like the uncertainty of who's there, just what's going to happen because you haven't got through like the first phase?

E Yeah, it's uncertainty of not making your expectations because you're coming into it, nobody's really wants to go out in the first round, so it's a case of what to do. It's the same with any Championship, anything could happen you could fall, two false starts, whatever, so, yeah

J Is there anything in particular about your actual event that causes stress for you?

E They're a bit high!

J The hurdles?

E The hurdles are a bit high! They're in the way, em, not entirely just....em, I wouldn't say there is really

J And do you generally feel quite prepared before a competition? Is there anything relating to that that you ever...?

E Em, most of the time I'm pretty prepared

J What about when there are important people in the audience say watching you, what impact does that have on you, if any?

E Very little at all, really, em, don't pay any attention to anybody that's about, that's something that you can control, you can control whether you're going to bother with it, you've got to do what, it's on the track, you've got your lanes, especially in events as short as mine where you can't have anybody coming in pushing you out the way, so it's kind of got to be done on your own, em....

SOURCES OF STRESS IN TRAINING:

J Right let's move onto sources of stress that you may experience during training. Again I'd like you to think back in as much detail as possible to stressful training sessions you may have had and isolate, em, what you've

found stressful. Now from my experience of training, I would say that sources of stress I experience vary according to the time of year because of the kind of training I'm doing. Is that something that you experience yourself?

E Yes

J Right in that case the it might be more helpful for you to go through like different times of the year and try and isolate sources of stress. If not, if you want to just talk in general that's up to you. OK? What sources of stress have you experienced in training?

E In training, em, it is different in the Winter and Summer training, em, with the Winter it's more a case of getting your mind into putting yourself through the hardship of training, day in day out for six days a week and putting yourself basically, especially in track work to virtually being sick.

J So then basically it's because the training at that time of year is so much harder, that in itself is stressful?

E Yeah, em, it's stressful, em, because you're training so hard it's the fact that physically you're so sore after each training session and still sore when you try to go to do the next one. It's just getting your mind into the right state to go out and go into the track again and try and run

J So you talked there about the physical pain that you experience. Is the stress relating to that then something that you experience before the session, like anticipating it, or is it during the session or even after it, or all?

E It's probably not after, I probably just try and get away from it, em, I don't know if it's before – it's been a long time since I've done a Winter session, em, it's more just the knowing what's coming before it, knowing that you're going to be put under strain at the end, put under all this work and then during it it's just trying to block out anything that you are feeling, all the lactic coming into the legs, everything, to just getting the session finished and being able to get relaxed and get away

J So what goes through your mind then, let's just imagine you've got a really tough session coming up and you're about to start it. What sorts of things are going through your mind?

E What sorts of things are going through my mind? Oh, eh, I'm not sure, eh, probably just trying to remember, just work out how fast everything needs to be, it's not something I'm....I'm not good at pace judgement. I'm not somebody that likes to run easy, so if I've got a session of 150's, I'm more likely to hit out fast, quite hard and not be able to hold, basically struggle to finish and basically collapse at the end of it, rather than getting them all even paced, I'm usually getting slower as it goes on and getting cowed, but it's just the way I am, em, I don't see the point in running slow, so eh, I've just got to really try and work out how I'm going to run them, how I'm going to make sure that I can get through it, so I'm not doing two then being so sore that I

can't move and do the last one, em, and then getting into it, it's just a case of trying to keep myself without thinking of it, just keep yourself going until you have to stop

J Anything else in the Winter?

E In the Winter, em, I can't think of anything really

J What about in the Summer?

E Summer it's totally different because everything you're doing is specific to going out and competing, so you're concentrating more on what's going wrong in races, what you're thinking's not gone right so far, what you think you're lacking in speed or in strength, so it's a case of.....it's more a case of getting into it, trying to work out proper sessions to let yourself improve, and that's where arguments come with your coach

J Right, OK

E Which is more the stress

J Right let's deal first of all with what you were talking about here, trying to isolate what's going wrong in races and really that's what all your training's geared towards. What exactly is it about that then that's stressful for you?

E What's stressful? Em, it's more trying to work out where I can improve, em, and just getting down to getting your head round, especially if you've not been running well, it's getting your head back round, eh, getting into it, getting things running faster, getting your legs turning over again, so it's more, it's more concentration than anything, just what you're thinking, just trying to work out where to go, trying to work out how much you're going to be training so you're not killing yourself

J So it's getting the balance right as well?

E The balance, yeah

J And what about, obviously you've mentioned earlier the disagreement with your coach and I said we'll come back to that. I gather that this could cause you some stress then?

E Yeah, em, just the fact that we have disagreements about, especially once you get into the Summer, about how we go about getting competition preparation ready, how we split it up into the hurdling stuff, how we split it up into track work, how much we're in the weights room, what we're doing in the weights room which happened this year. When we came down I felt that we didn't need to be lifting heavy weights, wanted to go back to lighter stuff and do it fast, but he wasn't agreeing with me, so, but I won.

J You won

- E I won
- J You won that, that was OK then!
- E Yes, em, but no, em, it's just, em, especially when it gets to when I'm feeling that I'm not, especially when I'm feeling that I'm not running fast enough, I've not got the sharpness and whether does he, he'd rather try and get me to run over hurdles when I'd rather do some actual flat stuff, getting my legs working which is kind of frustrating, some of the hurdles stuff, I feel I should be doing different stuff than he wants me to do sometimes.
- J So when you have this conflict of ideas, what sorts of things are going through your mind?
- E I'm right. I am right, no, em, it's really just trying to get my point, what I think would be better and more beneficial to me somehow, instead of what Bob's saying and not what eh, sorry what Bob's saying and what he thinks. I'm just going from what my experience is telling me, and what I think I should be doing and not just going back to what we were doing the year before, so it's a strange one. It's strange to deal with and half the time he wins
- J Half the time he wins?
- E Yeah
- J So how do you feel when he wins then?
- E I just get on with it, It just, it causes more stress if you don't. It just gets ridiculous at times. It's really really, it's just, it's because once you really start, once the session's there and the mind's made up that you're doing, you've just got to get onto the track and do it, rather than stand and trying to disagree with it, try and change what he's doing, it's not going to work, once everything's been agreed anyway it's usually OK
- J How do you get on with your training partners then? Do you ever experience any stress relating to that?
- E Not really, more than anything at all, more than anything it's Alyssa just being Alyssa
- J That's one of your female training partners?
- E Yes, one of my training partners is extremely loud, so she gets on my nerves sometimes, so
- J Is that to do with your mental focus for the sessions or...?

- E No, cos I'm not very focused on sessions usually. I usually just go out, have a laugh, but she's just extremely loud and just starts to get on your nerves, she can be a bit too loud usually, so
- J OK and how exactly does that cause stress for you would you say?
- E How does it cause stress? Oh, em, it's just the fact she doesn't shut-up
- J Irritating?
- E Irritating, yes, just a wee bit
- J Do you feel that that impacts on your performance in training at all?
- E Not really, not really, it's just when she starts to moan that she's not running well and she doesn't like running with us and stuff, it puts you off when she starts complaining, but it's usually not too bad when you actually get on the track and start to run. I can usually concentrate enough
- J Any others? Shall we just go through what we've covered anyway?
- E Yeah
- J Em, in the Winter you talked about the physical pain associated with the sessions that you're doing, em, in the Summer it can be quite stressful balancing the amount of training you're doing with keeping yourself fresh for competition, em, and then there was the issue of the disagreement with your coach regarding preparation for competition, em, and sometimes when you feel, sometimes you get put off in training because one of your training partners, when she starts to complain a bit. Anything else jump to mind, or...?
- E Training? Injuries
- J Injuries, of course
- E It's one thing that's always there
- J Is that like a fear of or..?
- E It's not fear of injuries, it's just, it's more knowing how much you can do on it, especially niggling injuries, if it's niggling injuries, small injuries and you know you can train on it, it's whether to go out, keep going at full training or ease down when you know you can run, ease down on it and get it on, it's always going to be on your mind, whatever you do you know there's something there, it's really trying to, it's trying to get everything out of your mind to do the training session without injuries, and then they crop up during training as well
- J And you just can't win

- E You can't win, no
- J So again I guess that's about the balancing between, "Should I run on this injury or should I lay off, but then if I lay off then am I going to miss out?"
- E It's more a case of it's a major injury you've got to stop and if it's just a small niggling injury you've got to try and do what you can on it at least, if you can't do everything, do what you can do, at least if you can't go to the track go in the gym and do weights, it's a case of just balancing everything out, getting everything right, keeping fit and keeping going

STRESS FROM DEMANDS AND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SPORT:

- J OK, I'd like to move onto the third section then on sources of stress and this section's dealing with the demands and the specific features associated with the sport, so I'd like you to consider if there's anything in particular about the sport which causes stress for you, you know thinking about the specific demands and sacrifices associated the sport also organisational aspects such as team management, timetabling of events, obviously we've already talked about the declaration procedures, that sort of thing which may cause stress for you. Can you identify any of those?
- E Em, I'm not sure if there is, but travel is probably the worst
- J Is that with what you were saying earlier then, just change, the idea of change?
- E Yeah it's just change, flying, travelling in the car, especially when you're doing, especially if you're going away training somewhere. I've been to America and I've been to Australia. That's one of the hardest things, trying to get your body to realise that it's not in the same time, so it's very, very different circumstances that you're moving to, em, just trying to, em, it's just the fact that it's just messing about with you, you're not used to what you're doing, your travelling tires you out, it does your legs in as well, em, it's just a pain, if you could run here all the time...
- J The weather's not good enough
- E I know, I know, em, but yeah, just getting used to everything because nowhere is the same, especially when you go about Europe, the food's different and....
- J Is food something in general that you ever find stressful, like eating the right stuff or diet issues, or..?
- E No, I don't eat the right stuff. I would never've given it thought. My diet's not the best, so
- J But that's not something that you causes you stress?

- E I've never had any problems with it, so....
- J What about, are there any demands associated with the sport that you find stressful?
- E I don't think so
- J A lot of people have discussed like the time and the cost demands of the sport, but I suppose if you're a full-time athlete and you're financially assisted then that doesn't, may not or may apply to you?
- E Em, no it's not too, most the athletics stuff's covered, well all the athletics stuff's covered, so money's not a problem, just time it's what I'm doing, the rest of my time's the problem I've got, em, no that sort of stage is fine with me, it's more the stuff that comes into training and competition stress
- J OK, you said sometimes that you can get bit bored at times being a full-time athlete, is that something that you would ever say has been stressful for you?
- E Em, it probably is, it probably is. It's just the fact that I'm, especially at the moment, a lot of friends are working right through, em, away on holiday and stuff at the moment so the ones that are working different shifts, so I'm just lying in the house, just watching the TV, lying on the couch and just more or less it just does my legs in and really it's not the best way to train on, so it's just the fact I'm timetabling everything I've got to do and finding stuff to do and that's going to get sorted once I start training, cos that'll leave as little time to lie about as possible
- J So it's particularly bad at the moment because you're on your annual sort of break?
- E I'm on my break so I'm not even at night I'm not training so I'm still in the house which is not, the TV's worse. I can find stuff to do for a few hours during the day, it's... but most of the, I end up sleeping an awful lot which I think's not too good
- J What about, are there any organisational aspects? You mentioned earlier when you missed out on the World Championships and it sounded like there was maybe a query regarding the wind reading. Is that something that...are there any sort of organisational aspects such as that that in general you find stressful?
- E Em, not really, I've never had any sort of problems with selections, em, most of the time I've been able to get a right.... but em, I really most, I've never seen any problems where anything's gone wrong with myself, most of the time they've picked the team that deserves to be picked, most things which....World Championships it was the right team that was picked, it wasn't the fact it was, Eolin Jackson wasn't running, so behind him the fastest three went, and that wind reading, it was a race at Scotstoun and the wind gauge stopped at 2.01, so with the rules they had to round it up to 2.0, to 2.1,

which took it over the legal limit so that was a bit annoying, especially, well most people came to me and said anywhere else in the World they would round it down, anywhere else they would round it down just because it was so close, because it's, well, .01 it's nothing

J So was that quite stressful for you at the time that they'd rounded it up

E I didn't find out 'till, it was after the race, it was quite as bad as that, em but, yeah, it was more the fact that I'd ran the World qualifying, it would've been a Scottish native record and a PB, everything. It was something that...I knew I'd run well. I knew I was going to get on all right in the race and I came off it feeling good and then they came and told me this. It was more stressful getting the rest of the athletes just wanting to laugh at me, yeah, just winding me up about it

J When you say it was stressful having other athletes winding you up about it, are you the type of person that cares what other people think?

E Not really, not really, no, it was just the fact that I'd come off the race, everybody came up and said that you'd just missed out on it, the wind gauge reading should have been different, so they all just had a laugh at me

J Em, anything else in this section you can think of? What about timetabling of events?

E I've never really had any problems with that, it's just the fact that they're always late, nothing runs on time

J And is that something that is stressful for you at the time?

E It can be, it's just the fact that if you're sitting and looking at the timetable and you know you've got to be warmed-up for a certain time then you're half way through and you find out they're running late, it just throws off what you're doing

J Sure, and how do you feel when that happens?

E Em, it's very strange. You've got to try, well if you're half way through your warm-up you've got to try and ease down the warm-up without really knocking yourself right back so you don't have to warm yourself fully up again, you've just got to slow everything down to try and get in which is not the easiest way to try and do stuff and then it's even worse when you get to places like call-rooms and you find out that it's going to be late, so instead of sitting in for 20 minutes, you're there for 40 so it's, em, it's something that's got to be dealt with in athletics and it happens an awful lot so...

J You mentioned as well there's a lot of pressure on you to achieve so that you can maintain your funding, financial funding. Is that, would you say that's been stressful for you?

E I wouldn't say it's stressful really, no well as it's been at the moment I've no intentions of.....I've worked things out that I know exactly what I need to do, well this year it was getting a medal at the Under 23 Championships, so I got that, so I'm pretty much guaranteed I'm going to get it, but it's once you get out these age group stuff, you've got to go out and you've got to run in the European circuit and run well to make money, survive, so that's when it's going to become a problem, once you've got to actually run, you want to be running fast to make your money, you've got to make sure you keep everything going and have got the chance to get the races, so.....

OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS:

J Are there any sources of stress which you experience as an athlete which we haven't covered?

E Don't think so

J What about environmental demands? Anything ever to do with like the weather conditions or track conditions?

E Em, well not really. The weather's something you have to put up with. It's the same for everybody in the race, so it's not going to make any difference to the outcome of the race, you've got to try and block it out

J What about the media? Have you ever had any issues with them?

E They can be a bit annoying. They can be a bit intrusive which came about Ross, about the death of Ross. They really were trying to push how I felt about it, how I felt about that, and especially after I won the Europeans, everybody was interested in this because of the story, that it was eight weeks after Ross's death, so they were all trying to push that angle, but you've got to say, you've basically just got to let them know what you're going to say, you just leave out that you'll say..... you'll say what you're going to say and you're not going to let them push you into it, which is the harder part.

J Sure. So is that something that you found quite stressful at the time?

E Yeah, a bit, because it was, it wasn't as if, like if it was a sports writer it'd be fine, cos they'd come out and just ask "How you feeling?" and "Just don't worry about it," but it was when some of them came and it was, em, article writers, basically for page stuff. They were trying to find stuff out and try and go through it all, so that was a bit, that was a bit harder to say, "Right, I can't say anything to you," yeah, em, the sports writers are fine, it's just when you get these people....The sports writers all know where to start

J Trying to make a story out of it?

E Yeah, the sports writers, the rest just try and get everything they can, which, it's a bit strange, but yeah. Most of the time you just make sure you just lay down the law, you're not going to say anything else.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:

J OK, well let's move onto the final section now. In this section I'm interested in finding out if there's anything about you as a person which might influence the stress that you experience. Em, what I'm looking at here is like personality factors, differences perhaps in the way that you cope in comparison with other athletes which may potentially impact on the stress that you tend to experience. Can you think about anything here then that contributes to your stress?

E Contributes to my stress? Em, I'm not sure because I am, as I said before, I am very confident in my own ability in what I can do, which it seems to help me when I go into races that I know that I've got this ability to just blank everything out of my head and just concentrate on what's going on, and I can do it very quickly. I can knock myself off and get back, which is very hard to do sometimes, so I'm not sure of anything that contributes to stress.

J You did mention earlier I think that sometimes you felt that you can be too confident. Do you think that that causes you stress at any time?

E Em, I'm sure it could, it probably does actually a bit, it's more what I say to other people. I usually come out and say to my coach that I can do these things and the times, like this year going into the Scottish Ehamps I think it was, I came out and said I could come out and run 13.70 at the Scottish Ehamps and he kind of held me to it for a few weeks

J And in what way did that cause stress for you?

E Em, just he, he was just on my back the whole time, wondering when it was going to come out. I managed to do it the week after, I think I managed to run it a week after, yeah, em, yeah, stuff like that. It's stuff like that I'll say to people, mostly my parents that I can go out and run these times and then have to kind of go out and try and prove it to, not just myself, but I have to prove it to them after I've told them, so

J Right. Do you feel that by saying, by perhaps being a little bit too confident at times you may be in fact putting more pressure on yourself?

E Yes, I usually am. I put more pressure on myself than anybody else with expectations of myself with the confidence that what I can do, so...

J Do you think the fact that you do put, place quite high expectations on yourself, that in itself do you think impacts on your stress?

- E Em, I think it will slightly because I know that if I don't do it I'm not going to be happy with myself. If I'm not going out and I'm not winning and I'm not running what I think I should be running, I'm not going to be happy with how I'm running. I'm not going to be happy with myself. I'm not going to be happy with very much at that point so it's going to cause it, but I think it also helps, builds my confidence as well. I'm going to be thinking that I know I can do all this, so a bit of both
- J What goes through your mind when, I think we've already actually covered this but, I'd just like to go over again what goes through your mind when you don't achieve the performance that you were looking for?
- E If I don't achieve it, em, disappointment mostly, em, it's very hard to describe that sort of stuff, but em, it's more that I just want to get away from everything and just be able to sit and work out why things have happened, try and analyse just what went wrong in the race, cos there's usually something that I've done that's gone wrong – not started well, hit the hurdles, stuff like that, so...
- J The reason I'm asking again is because it sounds like in a way that you're a little bit of a perfectionist and a classic definition of a perfectionist would be someone that obviously sets themselves very, very high personal standards, but also someone that when they don't get that performance they're looking for they tend to beat themselves up and be sort of very, very annoyed with themselves. That's why I was....would you describe yourself as a bit of a perfectionist?
- E Yes, yes, em, yeah I will do, yes, em, I'm not the best of losers, em, I've been criticised for that because races I've been known just to be getting beaten and just going straight off the track, not talking to anyone, storming off really, but yeah, em, nothing's, you never get a race where everything goes right, but you just want to get as few things going wrong as possible
- J And do you think the fact as well that you're not the type of person that takes losing very well that that as well contributes to your stress?
- E Em, I'm sure it does in some ways. I think I've learned, I've learned from races I've lost now, so it's helped me in that way, but when I've actually lost it has caused stress to know that people have come out and beat me, whether the same sort of thing's going to go wrong all the time or it's just been a one off where I've not been able to, I've not had the strength to finish off the last three or four hurdles and stuff, but most of the stuff I've learned, like when I was concentrating on another athlete, I've learned you have to go out and it's your own race now and there's no point in concentrating on what everybody else is doing.
- J Sure. OK, well, so far we've talked about, you can sometimes be too confident and that can then come back at you and cause you stress, the fact that you tend to be a little bit of a perfectionist, setting yourself quite high standards, not being happy with yourself when you don't meet them, that obviously can cause you stress, and then not being the best of losers, anything

else spring to mind at all? What other words would you use to describe your personality?

E Oh I don't know

J How do you think the stress that you experience compares with other athletes?

E I don't think as much as a lot because I can deal with it quite well and eh, I've learned to be able to deal with anything, if things go wrong or something I'm like, "Right, I can deal with this straight away." I just blank it out. It's not important, it's not something that's going to have any effect on what's going on, I can just blank it out and get on. I know some other people and stuff that worry about it, people worry about other athletes, so most I think I'm quite good in myself. I don't worry about most things

J OK, well I think that's just about all I need to ask you then. Before we finish though, do you think there are any important factors we failed to discuss in relation to your stress?

E No, I don't think so, don't think so

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

E No, it was fine

J OK. Well I'd just like to say thanks very much for your time, thanks for your honesty. It's been really interesting talking to you and eh, lots and lots of luck for next season

E OK thanks, it was a pleasure

STUDY 2

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – SCOTT

- J First of all I'd like to get some background information from you, so to begin with if you could maybe tell me a little bit about yourself, like your age and where you live
- S Em, I'm 26 and I live in the West end of Glasgow, Partick, and I'm a student at Glasgow University
- J And what course are you doing at University?
- S PhD in computing science, em, I'm looking at algorithms to match together...
- J And do you have any brothers or sisters?
- S I have one sister who is 2 years younger than me, 24, and she's a chemical engineer at Grangemouth
- J And is she involved in sport or was she ever involved in sport?
- S Yeah, she is the reason I started athletics. We both used to swim when we were younger, but for some reason she started running. I've no idea why and within about 6 months she was winning British level races, so nobody would give me any peace until I started running, em, but yeah, she was really good at that point. She kept going until she was about 13 or 14 and she still runs now but not seriously, although she did finish in the top 80 in the Glasgow women's 10K out of 9000, so even though she doesn't do that much she's still quite good.
- J And who were the people that wouldn't give you peace?
- S Em, mainly the guy who ended up coaching me and his wife who were the main coaches in the junior section of the athletics club in Morray, 'though I think my dad mentioned it a few times as well. He would never put any pressure on me to go into running, but he did make it clear that he thought I'd be daft if I didn't give it a go, but it was mainly the...'cos the guy who ended up coaching me in running was also involved in the swimming club and he was a good family friend as well so I saw him quite a lot
- J And what made you change your mind to change from swimming to athletics?
- S I was just going to be better at athletics. I'd been swimming since I was I guess 8 or 10 until I was 15, no I must have been 6 or 7 actually when I started swimming and I'd made Scottish finals a couple of times in swimming, em, I'd got a bronze medal at Scottish Schools which isn't as good as it sounds because there's four strokes and you're only allowed to do one stroke at Scottish Schools, em, so I was at a reasonable level, not a great level, em, I made the final of normal Scottish Ehamppionships where you can do every stroke but came last every time I made them and that was after years and years and years, but when I finally took up running, within 6 months I'd led home a cross-country team to take a silver medal at the Scottish Eross-Eountry Ehamppionships and 4 months later at the bottom end of the age group I made

the final of both the Scottish Schools and the Scottish Ehamps, em, so I knew.....you know, after one year when I was juggling swimming and running I was doing as well as at the running when I was at the bottom end of my age group. In swimming you're never in the bottom end, there's only one age group at that age so I knew I was going to be a better runner

J And what about your parents, were they involved in sport at all?

S They both ran at school, my dad was a half miler. He would have run further, he was the endurance athlete, but he didn't do anything further than that I don't think, and my mum was a sprinter. They both were certainly school champions, I don't know if they went any higher than that, em, and my dad is still involved as a recreational runner and walker and skier

J So what event is it that you specialise in?

S Well I've just started 800's, 800 training, but in the last 9 years it's been 400's

J And could you describe your training set-up for me, like your coach and your training group?

S Em, I'm training with a group of entirely guys, quite an old group actually, ok I'm the oldest in the group at the moment, but the youngest in the group's...there's one guy in the group who's 18 and the rest are 22 up to 24 so quite an old group. There's about 4 of us that are very regular and another 5 or 6 that are fairly regular, em, we train under a coach who has been on the go for years and years and years and years and years, eh, we train Monday night, Tuesday night, Thursday night, well 5 times a week, em, mainly on the track, occasionally we do some road work early on in the year but we're mainly on the track and on the gym. The gym work I kind of do on my own, it's not part of the training that my coach gives us. He knows I'm doing the gym work, but I'm in charge of that myself

J And what age were you when you started athletics?

S 15, when I was 15 I was doing athletics and swimming. I was 16 when I gave up the swimming and started to concentrate solely on athletics

J And you've already talked me through how you got involved haven't you?

S Eh, I suppose I have really, yeah

J And I know you mentioned that you did cross-country in the first year of your athletic career. Could you just talk me through your progression from there?

S Well, the reason I did cross-country was because my sister was so good at it and I have to say that even when I was swimming I always, my hero in sport was always Seb Eoe and I always thought I'd be an 800 or 1500m runner because of that, or I wanted to be an 800 or 1500m runner I suppose, em, just because of the whole British middle distance thing that was going on when I

was what, 8 or 10 em, but I quickly found that even during the cross-country season people were saying to me “no, you’re a 400m runner, it’s obvious from your sprint finishing” and I didn’t believe any of them until I got on the track and even doing the cross-country training, my 400’s were much, much better so I started doing them.

I guess I started doing 400’s at the time when I gave up swimming and started to concentrate solely on athletics, em, and at that point within a couple of years I’d...the first full year of just doing athletics I made it to, I was 4th at the British Schools, I won the Scottish Schools title, top of the Scottish rankings, 8th in the British rankings for my age, and the next year I improved by a full second and that was my first year as a junior so I didn’t do anything great that year just because I was a bit younger than everybody else, but things stalled for a bit after that. I had glandular fever for a couple of years and then I seemed to have a terrible string of injuries, em, I’d trained every winter and then at the start of the summer got injured and never got to do much during the summer until 1998/99, got a really good winter in, came out and got a full summer in and got my time right down to 47.4 which is still my PB now, em, I got my first Scottish Senior vest and even when I ran that 47.4 it was in terrible conditions and I thought I was in shape to, well I knew I was in shape to run a lot faster and since then, every year since then I’ve actually been in better shape than I was that year, but somehow or another when I’ve got on the track the times just haven’t appeared

J And what do you attribute that to?

S It’s kind of hard to be exactly sure I think. I think part of it is that I’m expecting too much. I’m going there and putting too much pressure on myself, I’m so convinced that I’m in that shape, em, and one year, 2000, I lost my enjoyment of athletics, I wasn’t enjoying anything, I wasn’t enjoying racing. I was turning up at the start of races and thinking, “what the hell am I doing here?” In 2001 I was injured, em, and in 2002 it’s just been putting too much pressure on myself. I had goals, thought I could achieve them, but I decided in advance that I was going to achieve them which ended up putting too much pressure on me and I just never performed. I ran crap, em, that’s the short version anyway

J You said that you lost interest in 2000. Why was that do you think?

S I never ever came up with a satisfactory answer for that, I don’t know what went wrong. A number of people have made different suggestions to me but none of them meshed with what I think happened, em, I guess I don’t know what I guess, I really have no idea why that happened

J Ok, and in 2001 when you seemed to experience a lot of injury, how did you feel during that period when you were injured?

S I tended to...it didn’t bother me too much because I just kind of put the fact that I was an athlete to the back of my mind and tried to forget that I was an

athlete. I was only an athlete when I was going for my treatment, em, once a week and when I had some exercises to do. The rest of the time I just didn't think about it at all because thinking about it was too...I just didn't want to do it basically

J And in 2002 you mentioned that you were putting yourself under too much pressure. Why do you think that was?

S Probably because it was...I'd always planned 2002 as being my last year as a 400m runner, em, so it was a make or break year. If I'd been successful in achieving my 400m goals em, if I didn't succeed in achieving my 400m goals then I might as well...I could never, eh, I could never...I wasn't going to have a chance to achieve what I knew I was capable of if I didn't do it within this year, on top of which it was Eommonwealth Games year. My target was to make the Eommonwealth Games, em, I guess I just put so much [emphasis] into it, I'd put so much into it over so many years and this was the last year that I had a chance to get any fruition out of the direct 400 training, so I just over cooked it and started to think, "this is it, it's do or die" except it ended up being die rather than do because I over cooked it

J So it's almost as if you had invested so much into it that as a result of that there was a lot of pressure?

S Yep, that's pretty much exactly what it was, I mean it was the fact that I'd invested so much and it was a last chance, you know, which just made it even more pressure. After last year (this year), I was going onto something else regardless of what happened so if I didn't achieve my 400m goals, but I knew I was capable of them, then I'd probably never improve. I mean I might, you never know, some people move up distance and find that their old distance improves, but there's no guarantee that's going to happen

J I'd like to talk about your early involvement in athletics, I know we've already covered a bit of that. To what extent did your family support what you were doing?

S They've always been extremely supportive, em, slightly more so actually when I was swimming. I have to say, em, because my mum was able to get involved in that as well because she was able to take us to training a lot more, em, but even when I've been running they take me here, there and everywhere around the country. I'm saying "they", they used to 'cos obviously this was a few years ago now, you know, I never...if I needed to have some equipment for whatever I would get that so yeah, they were as supportive as they could be. I mean my dad got involved in the running club because of my sister and I. He was coaching, he wasn't coaching us, but he was down there coaching. He wouldn't have been doing that if we hadn't have been involved so, em, yeah they were pretty much as involved as they could be

J And has that tapered off now or...?

S Yeah, well I mean I don't live in the parental home anymore, I haven't done for 8 years. They're still interested in what I'm doing but there's no way for them to support me other than...you know, they'll still come down at like Scottish Championships, things like that. That's a 400 miles round trip for them, but they'll still be down to see that every year but you know, when you're this kind of age and you're living away from home there's only so much your parents can do. If you're still living at home fair enough, but I needed out of the parental home a long time ago! [laughs]

J When you were younger what would you say motivated you to participate in athletics?

S Em, I think, well, like I said, the reason I went to athletics from swimming was because I thought I'd be better at athletics than swimming. When I first started swimming I didn't have any wish to be competitive, but as time went by I got better and better and became more and more competitive and I kind of reached my ceiling and in athletics I had the chance to go further. I could see quite easily that I had a chance to go further in athletics. At that point I just wanted to be the best quite simply. I think to quantify it a bit more, at the point when I started athletics when I was younger I wanted to be Scottish Champion. I was never going to do that at swimming, but I wanted to be Scottish Champion and at that age you can't really see much beyond that, that's the limit of your horizons, but I wanted to get there

J Why do you think it was so important for you to be the best?

S It's just me, I can't answer why that is. I'm like that in everything, em, exams, sport, em, you know, I'm one of these people that even in a group of people and if we have to get out and do a task, I'll be the one that takes the lead because I want to be as good as I can be. It's just pure wanting to be the best all the time, em, I'm just competitive by nature I guess

J How do you tend to feel when you make mistakes or perhaps don't perform to the level that you expect of yourself?

S Well, I don't know if I can answer that in terms of early on in athletics which is what we're talking about here, but in terms of now, em, if I make a mistake I'll dwell on it for ages afterwards, try and work out what I could've done that might have avoided it or...I mean I'll even just sit there and berate myself for ages for making it if I can see some obvious, or maybe even not so obvious, way that I could've avoided it, you know, and I mean I still have little, not just in athletics, in everything in life, I have little things through my life that, you know, years ago and I can still remember them and I can still remember what I did wrong and I still know what I should have done and I still...particularly when I'm trying to sleep at night, one of them will pop into my head and that's me not going to sleep for the next half hour until I play it all over again and get angry with myself and pissed off with myself for not doing something that I can see that would've been better

S And what sort of level do you tend to pitch your goals at?

- J Too high [immediate response, said with conviction], definitely too high. Obviously every year for the last few years I've set goals in athletics, em, if you just take the obvious example of setting a target time, I've never yet achieved that target time, even the year that I ran 47.4 I improved by 1.3 seconds, but I was still shy of my target time, so I tend to over reach
- J Let's go back to your early involvement again. As you were growing up, how important was athletics to you would you say?
- S It was important enough that social life, or anything other than school for obvious reasons, would take second place, em, 'though I think at that kind of age it's a lot easier to juggle things 'cos you don't have to spend as much time training, you can rely on your natural ability a lot more. But it was still...I think other than school it was certainly the most important thing to me and a large part of why school was more important was quite simply because I got a kick up the backside if I wasn't getting on with doing that, I mean the thing is, I had two ways of achieving then, athletics and school and I wanted to do well in both
- J And how much time were you spending doing athletics at that time would you say?
- S Em, I was training Monday nights, Tuesday nights, Thursday nights, Saturday mornings and, you know obviously you could be away the whole weekend at events as well, em, one day, two days, whatever
- J So it was taking up a fairly big chunk of your life
- S Yeah, it was taking up a lot of time certainly
- J And what other sorts of things did you spend your time doing?
- S Em, I don't think I did. Obviously I went out with my friends at the weekend if there were no competitions on, eh, and I'd read and I'd train and that was my life really, and school obviously, em, but that was about it
- J Would you have described yourself as an athlete at that time?
- S I honestly can't...it's too far back to think....does anybody describe themselves as anything when they're at school? I don't, I can't remember would be the most honest answer
- J And looking back, how balanced would you say that your life was?
- S It was balanced, it had to be because my mother and father wouldn't have allowed it to be anything other than balanced. I would say that I had a very, very balanced childhood. I mean, ok, I was doing a lot more sport than most people but having been a swimmer for so long and an athlete for so long,

everybody I knew was doing the same kind of thing so to me that was a balanced lifestyle

J So you wouldn't say that you missed out on anything, or...?

S Yes, you always miss out on things when you're doing something like that, but I didn't miss out on anything that I didn't want to miss out on

J As you got older what plans, if any, did you start to make for future employment?

S I have absolutely no plans for future employment. I have no...in recent days I've maybe started to think that I might want to go to America for my future employment, but I mean I was always going to do an undergraduate degree and after that everything I've done since then has just been a way of avoiding employment, allowing me to keep training and, Ok, I've also made sure that everything has been constructive in that I've been getting further degrees every time, em, but that's been somewhat incidental certainly, em if I hadn't been able to do that, I would still be bumming around now, trying to find some way to keep doing athletics.

J So basically just now athletics is your number one and...

S It has to be, you've only got a few years to succeed at athletics and anything else...I could go to University when I was 60 if I wanted to, so yeah, definitely

J Ok, so these questions are now based on the present. What parts of your life would you say are the most important to you?

S Definitely the athletics, I mean it's pretty much the only reason that I'm still in Glasgow and...it's not quite the only reason that I'm doing my PhD. My reasons are threefold that I'm doing my PhD, but my top reasons are definitely that it allows me to...I'm my own boss so nobody's telling me when I have to be somewhere, so I can go and train in my own time, em, and athletics is definitely the most important part of my life at the moment

J And what are your other reasons for doing your PhD?

S Em, one must admit that one would like to be called "Dr Scott" and for the life of me I can't remember what my third reason is. I do have three but I can't remember my third reason [laughs].

J How much time are you prepared to give to your PhD and your athletics then would you say?

S I will give to my athletics everything that I need to succeed. I will give to my PhD anything that's left over

J Athletics really is your number one!

- S Well yeah I mean, I've got another 4 – 6 years at the most to succeed in athletics. I can finish my PhD....I mean it does help that I'm arrogant enough that I believe that I could finish my PhD easily in time if pressure ever came on, so I mean I have huge faith in my ability to do the PhD, so I don't have to worry about it. I also have huge faith in my ability to do the athletics, but in a PhD you're looking to pass, in athletics you're looking to be at the very top of a pyramid, so which one's going to take up the most time? It's quite obvious isn't it?
- J Ok, so how balanced would you say your lifestyle is?
- S If you're serious about doing any sport at a senior level and want to become an international athlete, your lifestyle is only balanced in that it's getting you through your training, so not at all is the answer to that. I mean, All I do is study and run and I try and fit in going to the cinema once a week, so I mean as an athlete I lead a balanced lifestyle, but as a normal Joe Bloggs, the word doesn't even make sense
- J And are you aware of any consequences of such an unbalanced lifestyle?
- S Yeah, I've never had much of a social life, but my social life now is near enough non-existent. I mean, Ok, in part I do wish that that wasn't the case, but only when I'm feeling a bit more tired than usual, em, you have to accept these sacrifices
- J So in general it doesn't really get to you, is that right?
- S In general, yeah, it doesn't. In specific incidences it does, but as I say that's coming to the end of, you know, just before my rest day. I tend to get more tired then and it gets to me or if you've had a bad training session then it gets to you, but if you're doing well it doesn't bother you in the slightest. The athletics experience, it's like well, I sometimes think, "Oh, if I didn't have to go training tonight, what could I do instead?" But admittedly I always think, "Yeah, what, sit in front of the TV like a great big fat couch potato?" So it never lasts long. It does get to you sometimes but it never lasts long, 'cos there's always something you can think to pick you up
- J You've already given a good example of just how important athletics is to you. Do you have any other examples?
- S Well my mate had his, one of my best mates had his flat warming up in Aberdeen at the weekend, em, I ended up missing half my training over the weekend because I wasn't feeling 100%, but I still ended up having to miss his party as well, em, because I couldn't find the time to drive up to go to the party and even if I could find the time, I wouldn't have done it because that amount of driving would've affected my training all week, so I wouldn't do it
- J And what are your reasons now for taking part in athletics?

S I sometimes wonder that myself. I still want to succeed; I still believe that I can achieve better results in athletics than I have so far. There's still so much I want to achieve in athletics, but also I've done it for so long and I've put so much in that I haven't got out of it what I think I should get out, em, so I have some carrots and some sticks, I guess

J And what would you say you gain from doing athletics?

S Again, sometimes I wonder if I gain anything and I'm not just doing it because like I said, I've put so much into it over the past 10 years and I've not achieved what I feel I should achieve. In some ways I just feel as if I'm having to do it, but that said, you know, I did a really good training session last night and I've been on a high all day, all last night and all day from that, you know? It's a really nice feeling, em, it's a feeling you want to replicate as much as you can. It's a higher high than I get from anything else that isn't...any....what am I trying to say? Any higher high comes from other things within athletics, so I'm getting a boost from it like that and also, I'm fit, I know I'm fit. I'm healthy, I know I'm healthy, em, I'm physically in better shape than anyone except my very immediate peers and the people that are training with me, and even at that I'm in better shape than most of them, you know, so you get that from it as well. You get a lot of confidence and self-esteem from knowing how fit you are and knowing how fit you look as well, which you shouldn't but I think all athletes do

J And what are the major goals that you would like to have achieved by the end of your career?

S Major championship final and to perform well in it [immediate response], em, 'though that said if I can retire from athletics knowing that I've gone as far as I could possibly go, that would be enough even if it didn't involve making a major final. I don't see that there's any chance that if I go as far as I can that I won't make a major championship final, but if I really do feel that I've gone as far as I can go, I'd be happy, em, but you hear people say...I mean as for the ultimate aim it's always Olympic Gold, that's what every athlete's going for, you have to accept that you're maybe not going to get to that level, but I still have a very high level of achievement. I believe I can make it and I want to and that would be, like I say, a major championship final.

J And how important is it to you that you achieve that?

S Well it's important enough that I've already put a career on hold for...I'm starting my fifth year after finishing my undergraduate degree, em, if you'd have told me even up to my final year of my undergraduate degree that I'd have put the start of a career on hold for that long for athletics, I'd laugh in your face, but I've already put it on hold for five years and if I have to put it on hold for another five years, then I have to put it on hold for another five years, em, in fact, I would go further and say that I hope I'm going to have to put in on hold for another five years because that means that I'm doing well

enough to feel that it's worth putting it on hold, you know? So, anything is the short answer to what you asked

J You've already answered this next question a little bit. If I ask you again, if you could maybe elaborate a bit more. How do you tend to feel about yourself as a person when you don't achieve those goals in athletics?

S Em, I would like to say that if I don't achieve them then I can go away and think, "Well I haven't done it, I'll do it next time", but it's not true. It's like I was saying earlier on that there's so many things that I look back and think, "what if I'd done that?" I just get really pissed off with myself. I try and second guess myself for what I should've done to have managed to do it, em it almost makes you want to not...sometimes it makes you feel that you just don't want to be doing it anymore because you put so much in and you've built yourself up and you know...I mean to try and achieve these goals you have to believe you can achieve them, so when you don't you're shattering that belief in yourself and it's not a nice feeling, so it makes you almost want to not be involved for a while because you're taking these massive big knocks right on how you see yourself, em, so when you don't achieve them it's not a very nice feeling

J So it clearly affects your motivation and it sounds like it affects your mood as well. Does it affect your self-esteem in any way would you say?

S Again I want to say "no", but I don't suppose I'd be being particularly honest, em, it does affect your, I mean if you have this image of yourself and it gets contradicted because you didn't achieve the goals for part of that image, then obviously you don't feel as...what would be the word?...I don't know what the word would be but you just don't feel...you just don't feel, I don't know, I guess as worthy, em, but...

J That's interesting, we'll probably come back to some of that later. And how has the importance that you place on athletics changed from when you were younger?

S Em, it's far more important now because when I was younger, ok, I was doing it to achieve something, but it was fun, whereas now I'm doing it because I've got to keep going, I've got to keep...I've put so much into it, I've got to get going until I get out what I believe I can get out, em, and I guess as well that as you become older, that you start to become more serious about things and I've become much more serious about athletics than I ever was

J And how has the amount of effort you're prepared to put into athletics changed from when you were younger?

S I put in a lot more effort now, but had I been allowed to put in this much effort when I was younger I probably would've as well, so how much I'm prepared to put in probably hasn't changed. How much I do put in has changed massively

- J I'd like to get an idea now of how you see yourself. If I was to say to you, "who are you?" what do you think the most important things that you'd tell me about yourself would be?
- S Em, I would probably tell you first of all that I was a PhD student doing research because that's kind of what, you know, people expect, people expect an answer like that, but at the end of it I'd make sure I put in that I was an athlete
- J And how important would it be that you got in that you were an athlete?
- S Important enough that nobody would go away after the first time they met me not knowing that
- J And why do you think that is?
- S Well again...well that's how I see myself. I don't always want to admit it because I see it as being not quite as socially acceptable to say I'm an athlete when I'm only doing it as a hobby and I'm not making a living out of it, em, what was the question? I got lost in the answer there!
- J Just how important it would be that...no in fact, I think you've already answered it. So how big a part of you would you say being an athlete makes up?
- S I don't think you can...are you wanting like a percentage figure? I don't think you can really quantify it, but I see myself as an athlete then as a student, with the gap signifying quite a lot
- J And how important is it to you that other people see you as an athlete?
- S Em, obviously it is important in that I always tell people that I'm an athlete, but ultimately what other people think isn't too much of an issue. It's how I see myself that matters to me. I'm not obsessed with trying to make sure that other people have the image of me that I desire them to have, well because I don't really desire them to have anything, what matters to me mainly is that I am an athlete
- J And how important is it to you that you see yourself as a successful athlete would you say?
- S Well if you're going to be an athlete there's no point in not being successful
- J And who are the people that you spend most of your time with ?
- S Em, well training partners. I was going to say it would be a flat mate if I had one, but it would be training partners, definitely. I mean when I do socialise, half the time I socialise it's with my training partners on top of the fact that I see them at training just about every day of the week

- J And how do you think they would describe you?
- S They would describe me as a twat, an arrogant sod and...to answer the question the way I think you're asking it, they would describe me as an athlete. I think other people appreciate just how much you put into it and I don't think that anybody in my group would disagree with the statement that I'm the most dedicated athlete of the group, em, so I think they would describe me as an athlete
- J In this section I'm trying to find out how the importance that you place on athletics influences your experiences of stress and the way that you cope, so what I'd like you to do is to think of a situation that you found stressful and can remember well
- S That's easy
- J And in particular it should relate to a time when you've not performed as well as you wanted to
- S yeah, I've got one of them
- J I'd like to get a picture in my mind so that I can imagine it, so can you describe it for me please?
- S Eh, I've alluded to it already. This year just past was always going to be my last as a 400 runner, em, it wasn't just going to be my last year as a 400 runner, it was hopefully going to be the year I made the Eommonwealth Games team, em, I'd had that as a target for quite a long time, particularly when the selection standards came out because the selection standard was 46.5 which as I said my PB is 47.4 in really terrible conditions so it was worth 46.9. I did that in '99. In 2000 I was in better shape than that and then as I said I had a bad year where I was just not seeming to want to race whenever I was at the track and then 2001 over the winter I was again in better shape and I just had the misfortune to get injured for about 6 months so I truly believed, no I knew, I still know that I was capable of running 46.5, definitely, comfortably, em, and the whole way through the winter, 2001, 2002 winter I was training better than I had any winter before, so I was certainly...it was right up until, I mean, my training went brilliant right the way through to the end of April. I had my first race in May, em, I ran terribly. I ran really tight and tense and I ran 48.1, em, the best season's opener I've ever had, em, and I did it running really badly. Everybody said I was running tight the whole way and if you're running 48.1 being tight the whole way you're already in shape to run...you know, you're looking at a whole clear second from that and that was my first race of he season, it wasn't in great conditions so you know, everything was looking good.

And then...I still don't know quite exactly what happened, em, I did the race, em, and then the next week I went to the West Districts and I ran really badly, em, at the time I think I concluded that the reason I'd run badly was because

the British Uni's were up until the Monday and I'd done a full week's training after, including a heavy weights session on the Wednesday, so I ran badly at the Districts, possibly because of that possibly not. I think probably because of that. The problem is 2001 I didn't race, 2000 was the year when I had the mental problems where I'd been turning up at races not wanting to do it and that was still in the back of my mind, so I had the bad race at the West Districts and immediately I started to worry that I was going to have the same thing as last time. I had no reason to because I hadn't had any issues before the start of the races, either at the British Uni's or at the West Districts, but just I kind of associated the bad performance with the way I'd been in 2000, em, and it just fell to bits from there. I was in great shape, but I just wasn't producing the goods. I ran 48.1 badly at the British Uni's, I ran 48.7 at the Districts, much more relaxed and I never bettered that time that I ran at the Districts

J And how long did this sort of performance slump last for?

S Eh, well I didn't get any quicker than that 48.7 again. I gave up my season immediately after the Eommonwealth trials which were very early. They were early June, so it was only actually 4 – 5 weeks for the slump where it was definitely there, but if I'd kept on going through the season I might've had it right through the season, I don't know

J And did you have any sort of sense that this might happen?

S I certainly...it was always niggling at the back of my mind that I hadn't got out and done a proper race and enjoyed it since that 2000 season, em, and I knew that that was going to be something that I was going to have to be very careful of, but I thought I'd laid it to rest at the British Uni's, so it had been something I had been worrying about right up until the British Uni's. I stopped worrying about it at the British Uni's and a week later it all went wrong [laughs due to irony], so does that count as a sense that something was going to go wrong? I don't know

J And how important was it to you that you achieved your goal of gaining selection for the Games?

S Extremely, because again, I've been a 400 runner since I was 16. At that point I was 25...9 years, I put 9 years into it. It was my last chance to succeed at that level as a 400 runner because I was moving up to 800's at the end of the season. Whether it went really well or whether it went really badly I was moving up, em, so it was my last chance to succeed and as I say, I'd put so much into it, em, and on top of that, nobody ever likes failure do they? It's not something I...I never count on thinking about failure, success is the only thing that matters isn't it?

J So again it was this idea of having invested so much into it that there was almost like pressure to perform, but then on top of that the perfectionist in you just hated the failure

- S That would be a reasonable summation
- J And what did you feel that other people expected of you?
- S I think, I guess that I always thought...what am I trying to say? I think that other people expected me to qualify even more than I did because I was always deliberately trying to play down...I had goals for the season and if somebody asked me I'd never say I was going to do it. In my head I knew I was going to do it, but if somebody asked me I would always say, yeah I'd tell them what I was aiming for, but I'd always put in a little caveat – "you never know what's going to happen", em, but I guess because I knew I was going to do it I kind of assumed that everyone else was thinking the same. Whether or not they were, you don't know what somebody else is thinking, but I always assumed that they were thinking that
- J Why did you think you didn't tell them how confident you were?
- S Well, again if you tell everybody you're going to do something and then you fail, that's worse than if you didn't tell them you were going to do it and then fail.
- J On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being not stressful, 10 being extremely stressful, how stressful would you say that the situation was for you?
- S 9 ½ 'cos I never like going on extremes on scales
- J So that's basically a 10! So what exactly was it about your underperforming that made it stressful for you do you think?
- S About the underperforming? It was simply the fact that I knew I was in shape to do it, but I wasn't managing it so I was a bottler basically I guess, em, but I knew I was capable of doing it and it wasn't happening, that's the worst of it. If you're striving for something and you don't think you're capable of doing it and you don't make it, so be it, but if you know you're capable of doing it and you don't...
- J You said it's important to you that you see yourself as an athlete, as a successful athlete obviously. Do you think that may have caused some of your stress at all?
- S Well yeah, because suddenly I wasn't a successful athlete, em, not only that, I was saying I was capable of doing it therefore in my head I was an athlete who was capable of, well who was going to the Eommonwealth Games and suddenly I wasn't, you know, and again you have this picture of yourself and it's been shattered
- J And what sorts of emotions did you experience when the picture was shattered?

- S I think the worst thing was frustration, again because I was capable of doing it and I wasn't doing it, so it was, well, anger as well, but it was fed by frustration. Frustration was the feeder for everything else, em, and not only that, but I didn't feel that I was in control of the situation anymore because I couldn't work out what to do to turn it around. I couldn't work out what to do to get back on track and running the way I'd been running in training a few weeks before, em....
- J So it was almost like you felt completely out of control?
- S Yeah
- J And how long did those sorts of emotions last for?
- S At a low level for a very long time, but I accepted quite quickly that it had gone, that the chances of me getting to the Eommonwealth Games had gone and I mean I said a few times that it was going to be my last year as a 400 runner before I moved up to being an 800 runner and I kind of just started to think ahead to being an 800 runner and building a new, building a new set of goals really, em, and starting to think of myself as an 800 runner, so I was doing something positive. I had something else to focus on that was distracting me from the reality of the fact that I had failed in what had been my initial set of goals
- J Ok, we'll probably come back to that later. Going back to the time when you were faced with the situation, would you say that you found it negative and threatening, or at the time was it more positive and challenging for you?
- S No, it was never positive ad challenging, definitely the other
- J What do you think was causing the threat?
- S The fact that I had an image of myself and it was about to be, well it had been shattered...it was about to be shattered. I guess it wasn't actually shattered until the point where the trials were past and I hadn't made the team, but I had an image of myself that was about to be dispelled
- J And how did you feel about yourself in general during this situation?
- S How did I feel about myself? Em, I guess I felt quite low really, I felt that this picture I'd had of myself as an athlete who was capable of making the Eommonwealth Games, obviously it wasn't true. And I'd kind of built myself up around that idea for the whole year and suddenly it wasn't true so you obviously think...again you start to think that you're not the person you thought you were, you're not as good as you thought you were, you're not as worthwhile an athlete as you thought you were. I don't know how best to express it, but you get the idea of what I'm meaning
- J Sure. And how much of your time was spent thinking about it?

- S Probably just about every minute when I didn't have something else that I had to concentrate on I guess
- J And at the time did you feel that it affected the way others saw you?
- S Did it affect the way others saw me? Em...it's trying to get into someone else's head isn't it? I guess in some ways yeah because as I said earlier on, I kind of assumed that other people assumed that I was going to make the Eommonwealth Games, but at the same time, these are your friends you're talking about and they'll take you for who you are, not for who you should be I guess, so kind of yes and no
- J [questionnaire completion]. Ok, so how important would you say that athletic was to you when you experienced the stress source? I notice that you've put in the questionnaire that at times you considered yourself an athlete and at other times you didn't, could you expand on that?
- S It was kind of the case that at some points all I wanted to do was forget about it, get it out of my mind. For example I hadn't had a drink because of training, not entirely because of training but certainly one of the primary reasons since about the preceding November right up until a week before the trials, and at that point I went out for a pint with some friends because I just wanted to forget about it all and relax and chill out, but at other times all I wanted to do was sort out the problem, and you can't sort out the problem unless you immerse yourself completely in it. So when I was out with my friends I didn't want to think about being an athlete, but when I was trying to sort out the problem I had to be more of an athlete than I'd ever been before to try and get right in there and sort out the problem and work out what the hell to do
- J And how important was it to you that other people saw you as an athlete?
- S I think at that point that the less people saw me as an athlete, the better because my failure was linked to athletics, so if they didn't see me as an athlete then they couldn't se me as a failure quite simply, em...
- J And yet you said that it doesn't matter what other people think?
- S At that point in time it did. I guess, I'm saying at that point in time, when you do badly you do not want people to think of you as an athlete. When you do well, I don't care what people think, what matters is that I am achieving my goals. I don't care what other people think, it's all me – I am doing what I want to do and when I do badly, I don't want other people to see me doing badly. If they think of me as an athlete and I do badly as an athlete then they see me as failing and I don't want other people to do that, but as I say when I'm doing well I don't care, so that's maybe where that dichotomy's coming from
- J And what other parts of your life were important to you at the time?

- S Well, like I said, I ended up going out at that point which I hadn't done in ages, just because it was a way of getting away from it all and quite possibly even my academic life became a bit more important as well as another chance to shut it out...I'm guessing now to be honest, maybe I won't say that!
- J And thinking back again to the specific time when you were first faced with the slump, when it first started, to what extent did you see it as being something that you could change or do something about?
- S I couldn't see what to do about it. I was trying so hard to work out something to do, I just couldn't think of anything I could do. I didn't feel that I was in control of the situation, the situation was in control of me
- J What did you think was responsible for the cause of your stress? Who or what did you blame?
- S Who did I blame? Em, I guess...who did I blame? Em, partly myself because I felt that part of it was, I mean I think I said earlier on that I'd done a hard week's training before the West Districts including a heavy weights session. The heavy weights session I chose to do, so partly it was me. Partly I wanted to blame my coach because he hadn't stopped me from doing that, em, and I don't think there was anybody else that I could've blamed
- J And at that point in time did you think that you'd be able to cope with it?
- S I don't think I did. I just quickly associated it all with what had happened 2 years before and in the long term I knew I could cope with it, but I didn't have the long term. So in the time scale I had, I think I probably at least subconsciously admitted defeat very quickly
- J And what skills or resources did you feel you had available to you to help you deal with the situation?
- S Well I should've had...having been through a slump 2 years before when I just wasn't enjoying training, I should've learned a lot from that. I mean I went to see a sport psychologist at that time, em, and I should've got a lot from that but it had been such...again, the timescale was the problem. In the short period of time that I had I just didn't see how I could turn it around that quickly, there wasn't enough time, em, 'cos that wasn't a quick process that time and it wasn't exactly the same problem, it was possibly related or possibly not, so...
- J Did you have anyone you could talk to about it?
- S Not particularly, em, my coach isn't the easiest person to talk to about those kinds of things, em, I do have a good friend who's involved in swimming who I could've talked to and I did, but I found his advice extremely unhelpful so I didn't pursue that
- J What was his advice?

- S Em, I don't even recall now, I just recall not liking it and just not talking to him about it anymore
- J My next question, what did you do to deal with the situation, obviously you've talked about how you started to place more emphasis on different parts of your life such as your social life and possibly your academic life, are there any other things that you did to help you cope?
- S The main thing that I did was, as I've said a number of times it was my last year as a 400 runner and I shouldn't have been doing this, but I started making plans to move up to 800, just to get a head start on it after the trials, em, and while doing that I also started to think about what I could do as an 800 runner and how good I was going to be as an 800 runner and started building myself up as an 800 runner, so I was ready to slip into that role as soon as the failure to qualify was confirmed
- J And what effect did these strategies have on the emotions that you'd been experiencing?
- S Em, directly they probably didn't have any effect but indirectly it gave me something else to look ahead to so it wasn't just this void of where things had gone wrong, there was already a...I could see my path out of there, I knew where I was going, I knew what I was doing, I had a direction to take, em, and I suppose as well that you're starting to build yourself up again aren't you, when you're building this new, this new idea of yourself, so that you know, reinforces a new good image of yourself
- J And did it change the way you viewed the situation in any way?
- S No, it couldn't change the way I viewed the situation but it gave me something else to view so there were more things to think about and the more things were positive things, they weren't all negative things
- J On a scale of 1 – 10, with 1 being not well and 10 being extremely well, how well would you say you coped with the situation?
- S In terms of getting myself out of the trough, very well, 9 or 10, but I'd only give myself 1 or 2 for my perseverance in getting through the situation. I gave up on the situation very quickly and moved onto something else and for that I did well, but for giving up so quickly I did very poorly
- J And I'd like to get an idea of the timescale for the coping strategies that you used
- S Well, let's see. The really bad run was at the weekend. I raced on the Saturday, I raced the 400 on the Saturday. I raced again the next day in the 200, so at that point I was just getting on with what I was doing, em, the big crunch came the very next day I was at training. It was either the Monday or Tuesday, I don't recall, em, and that's where I started to really think that there

was no way I could turn it around, em, and by the weekend I had another race by the weekend but I didn't give a shit, I'd turned the corner by that point. I'd accepted I wasn't going to qualify, em, and I was already starting to think ahead, so it was less than a week. How much less than a week I don't know, but it was within a week. It was probably quite early on the week. I tend to do these things very quickly when I do do them, I am aware of that so it could even have been, you know, well I mean as I say it was Monday or Tuesday before I really started to think that there was no way and by the next Friday or Saturday...so, in 4 or 5 days I turned the corner, exactly when I don't know

J So again the next questions relate to the time during which you were experiencing this situation and you have already answered some of these questions so I'll try not to be too repetitive. The first one is did your involvement with athletics change in any way as the situation unfolded?

S My physical involvement didn't, but my emotional involvement...I disconnected from it as much as I could, so I was still spending as much time doing it but I wasn't as involved with it. I was trying to have other things to occupy my mind

J And did you remain in contact with the people that were involved with athletics?

S Em, yes, I did remain in contact with them but I also started trying to have contact with people that weren't as directly as involved. As I say an awful lot of the people I socialise with are my training partners anyway, but there's some of them who are athletes who aren't my training partners, but I started spending time with different people

J Why do you think you did that?

S Well it gets you away from the situation, you're thinking about something else

J And to what extent were you prepared to still put in as much effort to athletics?

S On the surface I was putting as much effort but you know, that's just because I was still going along to all the training sessions and stuff but in reality I wasn't because what I was doing was, eh, I mean I was going down to training and I'd be half way down to the track and I'd be like, "I don't want to be here. I don't want to be doing this." I think probably if I was to look back on my training diary I'd probably see that the quality of training I was doing was considerably down at that point as well

J And while you were dealing with the situation, how did the importance that you placed on athletics change?

S I was deliberately trying to promote the importance of other things over athletics because I was kind of trying to deny to myself that it had ever been such a big issue as it was. I mean, again I was trying to go out more, see other

people more, just think about anything more than athletics. And I mean there were times as I say when I was thinking about athletics far, far more, when I was trying to work out what the hell to do about it, but that was early on and it didn't last all that long

J Ok and once the situation was over and you had dealt with it, how did the importance that you placed on athletics change then, if it did?

S Well, that's when I started thinking about training for 800's so I started to build up my level of commitment to where it was and beyond again actually. Now I am probably spending more time on athletics than I was before, partly because 800's involve more training and partly because I'm getting older and I've got less time to succeed so I've got to do it. I've got more urgency to do it now than I had before and every year it gets more and more urgent

J So looking back on the situation, how do you view how you reacted?

S Em, I'm quite disappointed at the way that I gave up on it so quickly, but on the other hand I'm quite impressed at how well I came out of it after that so good and bad

J And how do you think you'd react to the situation if you were faced with it now?

S I'd probably do the same I guess, but I would like to think that...well I'd like to think that I've learned from that and that I'd be able to initially cope with it better, not to give up so quickly. I gave up too quickly which is becoming more and more apparent to me as we get further into this interview. I gave up too quickly, em, so I would hope that I wouldn't give up so quickly. But I mean, having got to the point where I would have to accept that I wasn't going to do something then I know I can cope with it after that point

J And has anything changed in your life since you experienced the situation that might change the way that you view it now?

S Em, only in that 2002 has now gone. Next year I'm competing as a 26 year old. I'm that little bit older and I've got that little bit less time to succeed, em, so only that in that I'm starting to get time pressure on me because of the longevity that any athlete can maintain

J That's everything I need to ask you, but before we finish do you think that there's anything that we missed out that we should've discussed in relation to your experiences of underperforming?

S I don't think so, I think it was quite thorough

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview?

S No

J Ok, thank you very much

STUDY 2

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – AMY

- J Before we start discussing athletics I'd like to get some background information from you, so if you could maybe tell me a bit about your age and where it is you live just now for example
- J Age, oh, I'm 29 and I stay in Milngavie, just outside Glasgow
- J And who do you live with?
- J I stay with my husband, Stuart who's also a runner, em, he's a long distance runner so he comes out with me and does my training at weekends and sometimes during the week, which is always good, em, we've been out here for about 3 years now and one of the main reasons we actually chose Milngavie is, sadly enough, because we used to come out to Milngavie every weekend to do our long runs
- J And is you husband still a competitive athlete?
- J He's a club athlete. He used to be an international athlete as a junior, em, right up until he was a senior man and then his work kind of became his main priority, em, but he does still compete, but basically at club level
- J And what's your occupation?
- J I'm a personnel officer for a company called Morrison Property Eare which is based out in Eoatbridge. I've been with them now for 3 years and it's a junior management role. There only is myself and my manager within the HR department and between the 2 of us we organize policies and procedures, rules and regulations for approximately 700 staff.
- J And do you have any brothers or sisters?
- J Sure do. I have 4 older sisters, the eldest is a foster sister and I have a twin sister and they all have children, the minimum being 1 and the most being 4, so it's a huge family, all very close, nephews and nieces are always around at some point, but we're all girls I'm afraid. I always wanted a brother but never got one!
- J I always wanted a big brother! And were your sisters ever involved in sport?
- J My twin sister when we were at school, em, the 2 of us always ran for the school, but only when it came up once in a blue moon at competitions, em, but she never ever followed it through, so it's really only myself that's involved in any kind of competitive sport. My eldest sister does running just for kind of weight maintenance and taking part in marathons for charities, but she doesn't do anything over and above that
- J And what about your parents, were they ever involved in sport?

J My mother was a runner, em, a competitive athlete. My father was never involved in any sports at all but he was certainly a very fit individual. But my mum, she competed for the Elydesdale Harriers right up until she was about 18 or 19, em, competitively. She never reached an international standard, em, but then it wasn't such a big thing through the schools back then, albeit it did happen obviously, so yeah, my mum was an athlete

J And did that play any role in your decision to take up athletics?

J No it didn't surprisingly enough. My mother never ever, I mean I never knew my mother was a runner until I'd actually already joined a club so you know it wasn't until somebody came in and said, "Oh I hear you run for Edinburgh Woolen Mill" and somebody said you know, "your mother also ran", but I wasn't aware that my mother ran, she didn't influence it all. My parents never influenced us over anything that we did, em, they always kind of felt that if we wanted to take onboard a hobby it was our doing and we always got that kind of lecture; "now if I pay for this then you you've got to see it through", but that was about as much as their influence was in my decision to take part in sport

J Ok, and what event is it that you specialise in?

J Middle distance, 800's and 1500's, although now I'd say on the track I'd probably specialise in the longer of the 2, albeit 800's my love. That's the best event as far as I'm concerned, em, and I do do cross country or certainly I would like to do cross country, em, because I think that it's a totally different way of running. It's a more relaxed style of running and for me personally I don't get so stressed or anxious about a cross country race as I do about a track race, em, and probably most of my better achievements have been over cross country, em, but cross country, 8's and 15's. I don't like doing long stuff on the track, but I don't mind doing long stuff on the country

J And you mentioned that you sometimes get anxious before competing on the track. What do you think causes that?

J It's because you're on a track and everybody can see you from start to finish and because you're on specific split times. You know where you should be at 400, at 600, at 200. That's why it's more stressful, 'cos you know exactly where you're supposed to be and if you're not there your brain's just working overtime when you're running and that in itself can lead to an underperformance

J And what's your training set-up like, like your coach and your training group?

J Em, my coach is Bill and we train at Scotstoun show grounds and at the Kelvin Hall and sometimes on the roads and up at parks etc. The group varies in size, but if we're all there it can be up to 20 athletes, all of different calibers and all of different events. Most of us are endurance based, em, and we will always do the same session. There's 3 guys and there's also a top international athlete who's now actually left the group but when she was there

and the group was at it's best then it was excellent because you know, the better the athlete the more it pulled you on, em, but training with the squad's fantastic. We're all kind of friends out with the running group as well so you kind of get a social night out of it, yeah I quite enjoy my training group. We train maybe 4 or 5 times a week, meeting at different places and again at the weekends on a Saturday morning

J And what sort of age were you when you first started doing athletics?

J I started running...I joined a club on my 16th birthday, but I did run before that for the school but it was only ever in competitions, I didn't do any training, you know the school would just put us forward for races, em, I do remember at primary school we used to have school sports every year and every single year from primary 1 to primary 7 I won it, every year and my twin sister was second, every year without fail. Primary 7 was when we were first put into a competition and primary 7 was when both Elizabeth, that's my twin sister, and I won our races. We were actually approached at that time to join a club, but my father was ill so circumstances at home, you know, it wasn't important and my parents at that time did feel that we were maybe too young, em, so it never ever materialized at that point. We then went to high school and first and second year I don't think there was much in the way of competitions, em, but the school itself had a 3K race. Our school was right next to the meadows in Edinburgh and there was a race and there was this one particular girl who ran the race and she won it and I wanted to win it and that's why I started athletics, em, and that was on my 16th birthday, em, so I was quite late getting into athletics compared to most people

J And could you talk me through your progression in athletics?

J Right, em, I joined Edinburgh Woolen Mill, as I say on my 16th birthday and the way it was set-up we used to train twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, nothing else, em, because the coach that trained us felt that we were too young to train anymore, em, and I was actually one of the oldest in the group. There was about 7 or 8 of us, all females, em, and we were the only endurance group. At that time everybody who did endurance ran with the 1 coach and there were about 7 or 8 of us. I had joined in the March, which was just before the track season and I can remember my first race was down at Dam Park in Ayr and at that time there were standards that you had to run before you could run like the West Districts Championships, the National Championships and stuff, and because I hadn't raced I didn't have those standards, so they put me into an 800, a 'B' race 800 at Dam Park, eh, it was the Scottish and North West League and they ran us together and I beat the 'A' runner, em, I was actually 3rd overall and I'd run 2:25, that was my first 800 and from then suddenly I can remember my coach saying, "Oh, you're quite good at that, you could go far", and then from then it just seemed that I raced every single weekend for that entire season. To be honest I think that that first race was the best out the whole season because I then suddenly felt pressure because my coach had said to me you know, "you could be a rare talent and this is going to be great." And I don't remember the rest of the season to be honest, it's only ever that first race I recall, but I don't think I, you know, got a PB throughout

the rest of the season, em, we then went through winter work and I did cross country. I relaxed a bit over the cross country and I did well over the cross country season and the following season, obviously I was more familiar with the athletics scene, em, I had quite a good season, again competed regularly within the 'A' or 'B' races, em, I then started getting involved in competitions throughout my school, like it was kind of league matches and stuff every week so again I was getting further and further involved in athletics and it was becoming more important to me, and at that point I can remember thinking, "I want to do more than twice a week", so I had approached another coach in order to do a bit more training, but I was also traveling through to Glasgow at that point because I'd met Stuart and at this point he was running competitively and very well, so I started coming through during the week and running with Victoria Park, em, I then joined Victoria Park, did a few races and found myself getting fitter because I was training more I got more involved into the scene, em, then I moved through here permanently and I was with Bill for maybe 7 or 8 months and Bill I think is the person that got me to international athletics first and foremost.

He got me fit and he got me training 4 – 5 times a week, em, got me looking at, you know, what I could be capable of doing and put a whole different perspective in athletics which in turn did make it harder because as I became aware of success. I also became aware of failure, em, although I would say my first international race was an indoor match at the Kelvin Hall and that was the start of running internationally which yeah, was great on one hand, but on the other hand it was definitely more difficult, em, because at times obviously you don't compete well. I then got injured just as I was beginning to run absolutely superbly and in my opinion, truly believing in myself 100%. Bill had always been of the opinion that I was an underachiever and could always do so much more and my training itself actually showed that, em, but I had run into a cross country season, was running tremendously well, very, very well and then I was down at an international match at Gateshead and it was actually during the warm-up of the race that I felt a niggle, but because it was such a big race I insisted on competing and not only competing, but finishing the race, albeit I was in agony during it, and really that was just one of the biggest mistakes and the start of recurrent injuries and that was 1995, so I've been plagued from 1995 until now with constant recurrent injuries, all lower leg injuries of some sort or another and that in itself has really kind of stopped any progression in my athletics. What I'm now looking to do is to get back to a level where I was at that time, because all I can really recall now is finally getting to a point where I was actually beginning to master it mentally and physically, my running, and suddenly it all stopped, so that's kind of where I am to date

J So have you managed to achieve much since 1995 since you've been plagued with those injuries?

J Em, it depends on what way you look on it to be honest. Sometimes I actually think I've achieved a lot in just staying in athletics and persevering through the training but no, constant injuries and at times illness has stopped me getting back to international athletics. I did reach a point over the winter last

year where I got up to a position where again I was running well, probably even better than I was during... 'cos if you remember, I kind of came to a halt in '95, '96, but everybody since then has progressed further, so I had kind of got myself back to a position where I had kind of thought, "right I can go back in here to athletics and into international athletics", but then you know, unfortunately that didn't happen again because I was injured over this current track season, but I'm stepping in the right direction certainly, em, it's difficult. I'm still there because athletics is so important to me. There's something that's actually stopping me from stopping it until I've achieved what I think I'm capable of achieving, em, so to answer your question I'd probably say yeah I have come far, but not in achieving the goals that would've been my goals first and foremost had I not been injured. At this moment in time it's just persevering with injury and trying to keep going in the right direction and try and get to a level of fitness

J I'd like to talk now a bit more about your early involvement in athletics, so first of all, was your decision to do athletics influenced by anyone other than yourself?

J No, not really. It was solely my decision I think, em both my parents certainly encouraged me to do something but no, the decision was mine, definitely mine alone

J And to what extent did your family support you?

J Oh, they certainly gave me the support, em, they paid for it first and foremost and got me linked up so that I could actually travel with someone because they couldn't actually take me there and back themselves, em, my father came along to watch my track sessions and my mother appeared at races every now and then to watch, so yeah they did give me support and obviously to this day my mother still does that, em, but the decision to join athletics was mine and mine alone

J And when you were younger, you mentioned a bit about the race when there was a girl in the race and you wanted to win once that girl had run

J Yeah I hated her! [laugh]

J So obviously you've indicated a little bit about what it was that was motivating you to participate in athletics, were there any other reasons?

J I think the reason that I wanted to do something was one that, you know, essentially you could say that I was bored. I wanted to do something, something that was going to give me a challenge. But equally I wanted the recognition. I wanted what she had coming off that race. She'd won and all these people were saying, "oh well done, you're brilliant", and I figured that I was better and that's what I wanted so definitely a challenge, I wanted to be able to prove to myself that I could do something and that I could be better than her

J And as you were growing up during this time, how important would you say athletics was to you?

J I think the more involved I got in athletics, the more important it became to me, em, probably initially it wasn't an important thing to me because as I say, I'd gone in it because I wanted what this other person had. I wanted the recognition and I did want a bit of challenge, but it wasn't that important to me initially, but the more you become involved in doing something, absolutely 100% it becomes more and more important to you, definitely

J And what about in relation to other things that you had going on in your life, where would you have rated your athletics?

J My athletics came to a point where that was the most important thing to me over and above everything else because 1 it's what I enjoyed doing the most, and 2, athletics is a way where you can't argue with the facts. If you're good at something it's there on paper therefore I was good at it and I wanted to be better at it and I wanted that recognition. I wanted the success of it and that's why it was the most important thing over and above, particularly at school age. At school age I wasn't interested in school, you know I wasn't at the top of the class and I wasn't going to be at the top of the class. I wasn't the perfectionist there, but I wanted it in athletics so that took priority over absolutely everything else, it definitely reached that stage

J And what other sorts of things did you spend your time doing then?

J I was probably different to most people because I had a father who was terminally ill, so over and above my running there really wasn't much else that I did do and that was the only thing that I would kind of leave the house for, over and above going to school or work, which was just a part-time job, em, other than that it was just really carrying on with my friends, but again there wasn't a lot of time doing anything else to be perfectly honest

J Can you tell me a bit more about the situation with your father?

J Em, my father was terminally ill. He had leukemia, em, he was diagnosed when I was 11, but he'd been ill for 2 years before that and through several doctor's misdiagnosis's it took 2 years for them to find the cancer, by which time obviously they couldn't do anything, you know, to help him because it was right through his system. But he hated hospitals and refused point blank to stay in a hospital, and when he initially underwent his chemotherapy it didn't work, so they sent him home in kind of week 3 of a 6 week course and basically said, "there's nothing we can do for you", em, but my father was a very, very strong and determined individual and essentially what happened over the next 10 years was that he was nursed at home. And it was kind of round the clock, my mother was a nurse, so she obviously you know, looked after him the most and because myself and my twin sister were the youngest of the family, initially we didn't have a lot to do in terms of looking after him, but that changed throughout the years, em, but always when you were in the house the priority was my father because of his illness, and that was just in

terms of maybe making sure he had something to eat, bathing him, rubbing him down, changing his dressings, em, giving him a bed bath, em, administering his medication, helping him walk to the toilet or something like that you know, so that was the circumstance we had at home, eh, and it always took priority and depending on...one day could be better than the other, some days were a nightmare, we wouldn't go out, some days we wouldn't even get to school because my mother would need us to maybe change the bed and that meant lifting my father etc. and it obviously took more than one person to do that, so yeah, the athletics was on top of everything that was at home. But the athletics was good in a way for that as well because it got you away from the situation in the house.

J And looking back on your life then, how balanced would you say your lifestyle was?

J Em, I think athletics actually brings routine into your life and gives you that balance in terms of what you're going to do on a daily basis. I mean I knew I was going to be running, gradually 2 days a week, 3 days, 4 days, 5 days...a week, so I knew what I was doing and that in itself gives me a balance. So I would say my lifestyle during my athletics was balance and before hand, no, there probably wasn't any kind of real direction there at all, it was a bit of everything, em, and my athletics then gradually became a kind of one track route, a single minded approach. And I think even now and looking back from the moment that my athletics became important to me my life has been very balanced

J So you don't feel that you missed out on anything at all?

J Absolutely not, but then again I'm slightly different to other people because of my background at home, em, but no, I never ever felt that I should've been doing something that I was missing out on and that it was down to my athletics, no. If I wanted to do something I would've gone right ahead and done it, but that's not to say that my athletics wouldn't have suffered as a result of it so no, not at all

J So as you got older and you got round to the stage where you might've started thinking about a future career, what sorts of plans did you make for employment?

J When I was younger I always wanted to be a police officer, that was my dream. And this was from the age of about 8 or 9 and I think it followed when this police officer came to the house and I thought, "oh, I want to do that", em, and at that point there was cadets etc. and you could join at 16, but 16 is when I started my running and when I turned 16 they dropped the cadets so I thought, "Ok, I can't go into the police force until I'm about 21, so I've got my running until then", em, and then eventually the kind of novelty of joining the police force wore off because my athletics became more important to me and I then got to thinking, "well if I join the police force it means I've got to do shifts which means I can't do my training etc. etc., so I figured I'd take an office job which was 9 'till 5 and yeah, to a certain extent you could say I

chose my career as a result of my athletics because what I considered was, “can I do my training?”, em, yes I do have a full-time job now, but it certainly was considered round about my athletics career, em, and what I wanted out of my athletics and my athletics certainly at that time was the most important thing to me. So I wanted a job that wasn’t going to interfere with it in any shape or form, and an office job was certainly perceived at that point as being one of the best jobs you could do in terms of an easy job so that it wouldn’t interfere in my athletics

J And has that turned out to be the case?

J Eh, not now, no because through my injury etc. at this moment in time probably my work has got a wee kind of head start over my athletics because there’s a lot of...well I don’t work a normal 35 or 37 hour week. I work probably on average about 50 – 60 hours a week, and trying to do athletics on top of that is incredibly difficult, em, but it’s just a motivation thing just now. And that doesn’t mean to say that my work has taken over my athletics because otherwise I would’ve chucked it by now and I haven’t done that. I still think that I haven’t reached my potential and once I get myself fit enough again, my work will take a back seat and I will go back to basic hours etc., em, so no, it hasn’t kind of worked out. In saying that, you know, it doesn’t interfere with my training in terms of training with the squad, but in terms of tiredness ad working too long hours then yeah, it can do and will do, but, you know, the plans I made for my future career did certainly go round what I was looking for out of athletics

J So it sounds as if during your experiences of injury what you’ve perhaps done is decreased the importance that you’ve attached to the athletic part of your life and perhaps placed priority more on other parts of your life, like your job. Would you agree with that?

J Yeah, actually I probably would. In fact most definitely that’s exactly what’s happened and really that’s just because I got to a point in my athletics where I was running at international level and for me in my opinion I could go further. I had got to Scottish international level and I figured I could go to British international, em, and it was the success I was chasing at that point. I then got injured and illnesses and obviously that didn’t materialise and although I have persevered and I’m still involved in my athletics and still attempting to get back to where I was, yes what I’ve done is kind of moved the goal posts and those goal posts have moved to my work because I am doing well in my work just now, em, the responsibility’s there and the results again come down to facts. The facts are there that what I do is good and I’m good at what I do and I put in 110% at it. Again it comes down to a success factor. At this moment in time I cannot get the success out of my running because of my injury or my lack of fitness. At the end of the day that’s what it is, but I cannot get the success there therefore yeah, I’m channeling it across into my work to get the success there in order to keep the mental attitude high and to be perceived as someone who is still a successful individual, and then obviously the plan is that once my running does come up and my level of fitness rises and comes to a level where I believe that yeah, I can put myself back on the line here and I

can sit down and give myself real goals to aim for, then that's when the work will take a back step and the running will come back to the fore, and I'll just replace work with running. But the aim for success is exactly the same whether it's work based or athletics, so yeah I probably would agree that's exactly what I've done.

J The following questions are designed to help me understand how important athletics is to you. So first of all, what parts of your life would you say are the most important to you?

J Em, well my athletics is important to me and still remains one of the most important things to me, but obviously because of my injuries etc., my work at this moment in time is also important, I wouldn't say equally important or of any greater importance, but yeah I'd say my work and my athletics, but I think my athletics will always remain an important part of my life, whether or not I'm a granny and no longer running or whatever, you know, athletics is going to play an important role, but yeah the 2 of them

J And how much time are you prepared to give to each of these would you say?

J I give an endless amount of time. At the end of the day it's whatever amount of time it takes and that's exactly what I'm prepared to give for my running and my work at this moment in time, yeah whatever time it takes

J And how balanced would you say that your lifestyle is just now?

J I think it's very balanced. Running gives you a routine, em, particularly if you're training more than once a day so whether I'm doing my work or my running I would say that my life at this moment in time is very balanced, yes

J And I guess you've already answered this question but are you able to give me any more examples that illustrate how important athletics is to you?

J Em, yeah I think I have already answered that and that's the fact that I'm still persevering with trying to get back to not just a club level of athletics, but an international level of athletics. The fact that I'm still here persevering to get that, to achieve that goal shows exactly how important athletics is to me. Until I achieve the capabilities that I believe as a person I'm capable of achieving, I have no desire to give up on athletics, therefore it is a very, very important goal to me and what I do in athletics is the most important single factor at this moment in time, so yeah I think I've already answered that

J And what do you think your reasons now are for taking part in athletics?

J Em, obviously they'll have changed from when I first started, 'cos if I remember I said initially it was for a challenge and recognition, em, but now again it's all factual, the success at my running allows me to see myself as being a top class international athlete and you know, I can see myself as the person I want to be and that's my reason for taking part on athletics, the facts are there for themselves

- J Ok, and what would you say you gain from doing athletics?
- J More or less the same thing, it allows me to see myself as the person that I want to be, em, and that's what I gain from it and, you know, until I achieve what it is I want then I'll always be plugging away, persevering, trying to get there
- J And what would you say the major goals are that you would have liked to achieve by the end of your athletic career?
- J The goal was at the beginning that once I'd reached a decent international standard, where I was winning medals, you know, when I was representing Scotland, em, from then on obviously you set yourself bigger goals and bigger goals and I always wanted a British vest as opposed to just a Scottish vest and that was always my major goal. I wanted a British vest, didn't care whether it came in country or track 'cos I figured once I got one the confidence I'd build from that, I'd automatically get the other, and to a certain extent my goals remain the same, you know, I still believe that I can be a top class international athlete and until I give that my best shot...I may not achieve it, you know, reality comes out at the end of the day, but my major goals have got to be that I want to do the best of my ability and until I firmly believe that I have done my best, eh, then you know, I won't have achieved them and so essentially that is the goal, to do the best that I possibly can and in my opinion the best that I possibly can is an international level of athletics
- J Ok, it does sound like you're obviously a very determined person and you're very interested in being successful. How important is it to you that you're successful in athletics in comparison to being successful in your job?
- J Athletics is by far the most important. It's more important to me to see myself as an athlete, em, and to be a successful athlete so you know, to a certain extent the mental attitude and the goals that you set yourself and the perseverance and the determination etc. that you set in athletics automatically has a knock on effect to everything else and I know that those traits will follow exactly the same route whether I'm doing work or anything else, but it's more important for me that it's in my athletics because that is where the major goal lies, em, so very, very important
- J And how do you feel about yourself as a person when you don't achieve your goals in athletics?
- J Terrible, absolutely miserable. What is does is it shatters your self-belief in the idea of who I am and who I want to see myself as, em, so no, when you fail to achieve something it is disappointing but the reason it's disappointing is because suddenly that belief that you are this wonderful successful athlete is suddenly gone from that moment in time and that has a knock on effect to absolutely everything because that does take something to build yourself back up from because it just shatters your self-esteem, totally.

- J What about your motivation, what does it do to that?
- J Kills it, absolutely kills it. To pick yourself back up from something where you 100% believed that you were able to achieve and for some reason or another, and there's various reasons why you have a bad race and it could be something stupid, you know, that you got boxed in and you were unable to get through and you always re-run a race in your head after a race and naturally it's, "I should've done this, I should've done that", em, but it's a killer, it's an absolute and utter killer to pick yourself back up and to re-motivate yourself is a very difficult thing to do. They always say you should take a positive out of a bad race, but when it's difficult to take a positive out of a bad race it's difficult to pick your motivation back up. Essentially yes, we all do it but generally I would probably say that I find it from going back out and doing it in a training session and I re-motivate myself that way, em, it's very difficult to take it out of a bad race.
- J And how has the importance that you place on athletics changed from when you were younger?
- J Oh considerably, absolutely, em, as I say when you join athletics for the first time, particularly if you're at a younger race, I'm slightly different because I was a little bit older, you know, so I wasn't in athletics long when the importance itself changed, em, but when you're young and you start your athletics and you're watching athletics on the TV with your mum and dad and there's Linford Echristie going and winning and you think, "Oh wow, that was brilliant, I want to do that!" At that point it's a dream and you think, "yeah, it's dead easy to get up there, you just need to be the best", but the higher up you go in the level of athletics, the harder it becomes mentally and physically, em, so I would say that the importance has changed, and obviously the older you get as well, your fear kind of widens from that of when you're a child, em, and the importance changes 100%, em, and there's a big difference from when you were younger as to now. Really it's the be all and end all and the older you get it becomes exactly that
- J Why do you think your fears widen as you get older?
- J Em, more because you're more familiar with how...you've set yourself your goals and what it is you want to achieve and for you not to achieve those goals, that's where the fear comes in because you do not want to see yourself, as well as everybody else seeing you, as someone who's been unable to achieve them. And your fears, they just grow and grow and grow
- J And how has the amount of effort that you're prepared to put into athletics changed from when you were younger?
- J Oh, it's far greater now. Again it's the same with importance, when you're younger it's not necessarily the be all and end all but as you get older it does become the be all and end all therefore you're prepared to give whatever it takes essentially in order to be the perfect athlete, so yeah the effort changes twofold

- J I guess I've got a good idea already, but I'd like to get a bit more of an idea of how you see yourself, so if I was to say to you, "who are you?", what do you think would be the most important things that you'd tell me about yourself?
- J I'd probably tell you first and foremost that I'm an athlete, you know, I'd say "I'm an athlete, but I'm also an HR officer", em, and at the end of the day my athletics would come back into it and more than likely I'd start off on a wee spiel about how wonderful I am and how my training goes and, "I'm an international athlete and I do this and I do that and I've run for Scotland", em, that would always be the beginning of a conversation if someone asked me who I am and what I did and then secondary would be what my full-time job is
- J Would you tell them any other things about yourself?
- J More than likely I'd tell them that you know, I'm married. I live in Milngavie and give them my family background, how many sisters I've got but you know, that's not the most important thing that I would want them to know because the real me is an athlete and everything else follows after that
- J And how big a part of who you are would you say that being an athlete makes up?
- J A huge amount of who I am. I am an athlete. I see myself as an athlete and I'd expect other people to see me as an athlete and everything else you know, I'm JB the athlete. I'm the wife after that. I'm the HR officer following that, so the biggest part of me is about being an athlete
- J And you've probably already answered this question, but how important is it to you that other people see you as an athlete would you say?
- J I'd say it is important, em, but it's actually more important that I myself see myself as an athlete, but yeah it is important that other people see me as I want them to see me, but it's more important that I see myself as that person
- J Who would you say the people are that you spend most of your time with?
- J My training partners are who I spend most of my time with 'cos I'm constantly training. I probably spend more time with my husband but that's really just to fall into bed at night and say "hello how are you doing?" as he constantly tells me [laughs].
- J Ok, this next section aims to find out how the importance you place on athletics influences your experiences of stress and the way that you cope in athletics, so what I'd like you to do is think of a situation that you found particularly stressful and can remember well and in particular that situation should relate to a time where you hadn't performed as well as you wanted to, so it could be a one-off race, training session or it could've occurred over a longer period of time. So first of all I'd like to get a picture in my head of the situation, so would you be able to describe it for me?

J Em, yeah there was one instance actually which was just horrendous, em, it was a selection race down at the Bedford Games and the selection went off the District Championships and the criteria was that you had to win and you had to win in a specific time, eh, now I'd met the criteria and the team was announced and I wasn't on the team. What they'd done was taken 2 individuals from the East instead of 1 from the East and 1 from the West, so what happened before I actually went down there was that my coach Bill had kind of kicked up a fuss because I hadn't been selected initially, the end result being that they took 3 athletes instead of 2. I was selected because the place was mine, it shouldn't have gone to the other athletes, however, I was selected, em, and it was a 3 day event. It was heats, semi's and finals so it was down over the kind of bank holiday weekend. So we went down, em, I was running in the 8 and I ran like an absolute donkey in the 800. The situation before during and after...the entire weekend was just a nightmare. I totally underperformed and it was stressful as hell. It was a horror, one I'd like to forget actually.

J And when was it that this actually took place?

J It took place, it was towards the beginning of the track season because the Districts had been my first race and this was going to be my second race of the season and it was 1994

J And had you ever experienced anything like this before?

J Not under those circumstances, no, em, yeah I'd kind of had stressful races, you know, before the race, em, but generally the race itself...I may not have actually won the race, but it may still have been a good race nonetheless, em, that was really the first one where it was an underperformance that actually had probably a long term effect on me. Subsequently, you know, following all of that...it's one that I can remember certainly. In fact it's the only one in all honesty where I felt that I was under a lot of stress before, during and after the race

J And did you have any sort of feeling that this might happen?

J Yeah, em, I did actually because I felt that had the SAF done what you know, stuck to the selection criteria I should've been selected automatically therefore I would've been going there as an athlete that was full of confidence because I was picked by rights, whereas I actually felt that my coach had to get me the race in the first place, em, so you know, even before I went down there I kind of felt that there was added...whether or not I was putting it on myself or not, the chances are I was, but I just felt that you know, they hadn't been playing fair effectively and I did kind of think, "Oh this is added pressure I don't need and am I going to actually perform well here?" before I even got to Bedford. On the bus journey on the way down, that was what was going through my head, "Ok, I need to do this, I need to do this and I *must* do that", and that's why you know, that one does stick out. But again it was just the circumstances at the time

- J And what was it that you were hoping to achieve in the race itself?
- J Well basically I was looking to obviously have a good race. I was certainly looking to make the final and to run a good race, you know, it was a championship. It was the Bedford Games, it's quite a big meeting and that itself, I'd have just grown in confidence from that in the remainder of the season. And first and foremost I was looking to justify my selection for being there. They should've picked me automatically, I shouldn't have been there to justify my selection, but I felt I had to do that before the race started
- J So is that what you felt that other people expected of you?
- J Absolutely, yeah. I was there to do one thing and that was to justify my selection as opposed to going down there and running the race and doing the best that I could. The goal posts had moved for me essentially for that race
- J So on a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being not stressful and 10 being extremely stressful, how stressful was the situation for you?
- J I found it extremely stressful. If that situation hadn't happened to me, I'd actually struggle to find a race to talk about that I found extremely stressful, yes I find races stressful, but that one I would say was very much at it's limit. It's got to be coming in there at the 9, 10 mark. It was very, very stressful
- J So what exactly was it about your underperformance that made it stressful for you do you think?
- J Well I'd failed to achieve my justification which was the most important thing for me. That became the most important thing before I did the race because of the way the selection had gone and you know, by going out and running like a donkey, I'd failed to do even that part of it, and that was what I just found, "oh, there you go, J, you've proved them right in the first place. This is why they shouldn't have picked you." I mean that situation was a bus full of approximately 30 – 35 athletes, all successful athletes in their own right, em, and certainly all international athletes and I was right there in with them and so again this is where it comes back to the fact that I should've been selected by right. I should've been selected from the results of the race automatically therefore I'd have felt quite at home sitting on the bus going down there thinking, "well you know, I got picked because I won the race and I met the criteria and I have a right to be here", but essentially their failure to automatically select me was because they didn't see me as a successful athlete. They didn't think that I merited the race in the first place, so yeah that was why I then felt that I had to justify my selection and in justifying my selection that meant that I am a successful athlete and therefore I should've been there, so yeah, you know, it's like a circle, you know goes round and round and that certainly did cause part of the stress
- J And what sorts of emotions did you experience when you were faced with the underperformance?

- J Eh, well over and above being totally gutted, em, angry and frustrated. I mean it's the same kind of thing again. I'd finished the race and my part in the race was that the first part was far too slow for everyone, but I was boxed in and at the back. But because we were all round about the same caliber I couldn't get out, I couldn't get through, em, the race was far too slow for me, but you're always told never drop back to the very last place to come through which you know, I have done on occasions. Sometimes it's worked for me, but on that occasion I felt that I couldn't do that because I was in a really even paced race field and em, afterwards I was really, really angry that I hadn't done it right in the first place, but equally frustrated that yet again I kind of mucked up on a race that in my opinion I should've won it hands down. I should've walked the heat to make the final, em, so there were a whole range of emotions, but probably the most important ones as I say over and above just being totally gutted about it all, was being frustrated, em, and really angry at the way I'd performed
- J And would you say that at the time you viewed the situation as one that you found negative and threatening or one that you found positive and challenging, obviously it doesn't sound like it was very positive
- J It wasn't positive, em, negative and threatening, very threatening, em, I actually failed and still fail to be able to pick anything out of the race that was in actual fact positive. There's nothing that was positive that came from that race. It was all wrong from the word go
- J And what do you think was threatening about it?
- J Em... [difficulty with question]
- J Was there anything at stake for you?
- J Oh, well, yeah. What was at stake was me being seen as that international athlete or that successful athlete, so you know again it's coming back to the self-perception, for me myself, not just the other people you know, the selectors and the fellow athletes as they saw me, but most importantly it was my self-perception, em, you know the justification wasn't there therefore maybe they were right not to select me automatically in the first place regardless of the fact that I'd met the criteria, em, I'd gone out and I'd run like a donkey. I hadn't made the final and at the end of the day you know, what was at stake was one simple thing which was the self-perception, but to me it was absolutely everything
- J Ok, so basically the idea I'm getting here is that the reason the event was so stressful for you was obviously because you were under a lot of pressure to justify your inclusion in the event, em, but once you actually underperformed, you felt that you had failed to justify your place in that race so obviously it was stressful from that point of view, but in addition to that it was this idea of it having shattered your self-perception of being an athlete that was capable of being a member of that team and being successful in that race

- J Yeah, yeah, that's a better way of putting it
- J So how did you feel about yourself in general after the underperformance?
- J Absolutely miserably, really, really low you know, because of all of those things it was just, "I don't deserve to be here", eh, and I just felt absolutely really disappointed, but disappointed in myself first and foremost, disappointed that I was put in that position and disappointed that I couldn't handle that position, em, so very, very low. I did struggle with it.
- J And how sort of long did those feelings last for?
- J Well unfortunately for me it was a 3-day event. I then had to go back on the Sunday and watch everybody else making the final in their respective events, and then again on the Monday so really that kind of mood stayed with me for the duration of that whole weekend, for the bus journey and all the way home. And it wasn't until I'd actually sat down with my coach and we discussed...he attempted to find something positive from it, as I say I couldn't find anything positive from it and eventually I had to put it behind me and kind of move on, but certainly the entire weekend...I raced on day 1 and on day 3 I still felt as bad. I still felt the same way as when I had just finished the race and still had the spikes on my feet. I still felt the same way on the Monday traveling back up with the team.
- J And you've obviously talked about how it affected the way you saw yourself. At the time did you think it affected the way others saw you at all?
- J Oh, absolutely. Whether it did or not I couldn't tell you, but I felt as if most definitely, there were other people on that bus thinking you know, "she didn't even make the final, what was she doing here? How did she get her selection, she obviously knows someone." But yeah I definitely felt as if other people then kind of looked at me and thought, "you've not got it to be in this and therefore you shouldn't be here."
- J So obviously now that you've completed the questionnaire I do have an idea of how important athletics was to you at that time, but if we just go through these questions anyway. How important would you say that athletics was to you when you experienced this stress source?
- J Very important. At that time that was me training absolutely tremendously. I'd come off a winter season where I was running absolutely superbly, eh, and I mean essentially what you could say is that that was me at the peak of my athletics at that time, em, my athletics was at that particular time the most important thing to me so very, yes.
- J And how important was it to you at the time that others saw you as an athlete?
- J Equally important that other people saw me as an athlete, em, and not just as an athlete but as a successful athlete

- J And what other parts of your life were important to you at the time?
- J To be honest not much else at that particular moment in time. My athletics was my main focus. I was very heavily into my athletics, training really, really hard, em, in order to get the results that I wanted. And that probably was the most important thing to me at that time. My work certainly wasn't as important to me, you know, like the way it is now em, but no my athletics was the most important thing at that time.
- J So thinking back to that specific weekend when you were faced with the underperformance, to what extent did you see it as being something that you could change or do something about?
- J Em, it's not something that I think I could've changed. It was a situation that I found myself in and in my opinion, because of the way the selection went about, you know, before I even left to go down I was doubtful of myself as to how well I was going to perform. Yeah it's really easy now to sit and say, "Oh I should've done this, I should've done that, I should've been focused on what was more important, and that was running the race", but that's exactly what I didn't do, em, due to the circumstances. And yeah, it's easy to say I should've changed it, I could've changed it, but the point is I didn't change it because what really took over from that was doubt before I'd even run, and I was thinking about it for far too long before the race even started, you know, I was doubtful a couple of days before the race because obviously I knew at that point that I was then going down and I'd been included in the team and really, I should've just actually turned round and said, "no, I'm not going to go", because I was that doubtful before I headed, but I didn't, em, because I felt that I could go and justify my selection, I would go and justify the selection, but yeah it could've been done differently and by doing it differently that could've just been focusing on the job that was on hand and that was to go down there and run a race to the best of my abilities, to be single minded, to think only of the positive things; "yeah I am a good athlete and I deserve to be here and yeah I deserve to win this race." That's what I could've done and should've done, but it's not what I did do obviously.
- J So who or what did you blame for your underperformance?
- J Well personally it's far easier for me to blame the Scottish Athletics Federation, em, but at the end of the day it's partial blame, you know, an athlete should be strong enough in the mind to deal with these kinds of situations and to be able to focus on what's to be done rather than all these contributing factors but yeah, I felt as if the SAF put me in that situation in the first place by not sticking to what they said they would do on team selection, em, so ultimately I do think that they put me in that situation in the first place.
- J And when you were first faced with the underperformance, did you think you'd be able to cope with it?

J I did initially because obviously I'd spoken about it to my coach and he'd said, you know, "you were meant to be there in the first place so this is you, you've got your rightful selection, just go down there and do your best." So initially I was just then pleased that I'd been added to the team and it wasn't until maybe a bit later on that I was thinking, "Oh God, I really need to make sure I run well here in order to justify this selection", em, so yeah I would say at the beginning I did think, "it's no big deal, I can go down there and I'll run and I should've been there in the first place", em, and I did think that obviously I would handle it and there wouldn't be any added pressure, but obviously that wasn't quite the case.

J So when the underperformance actually happened, did you then think that you'd be able to cope with it?

J Em, for the duration of that weekend, to be honest I wasn't interested. I was so scunnered with it all and I thought, "I am never going to put myself in this situation, or allow myself to be put in this situation again", em, it was kind of mixed emotions, one minute I was like, "right, it's fine, I'll put this behind me. I'll bounce back. I'll go back and I'll show them, I've still got the whole season in front of me and this will never ever happen again", and then the self-doubt kind of crept in and I was like, "Oh my God, were they right in the first place and so far on paper they've shown that they were right, I couldn't handle the importance of the meeting or the selection", etc. therefore you know, "what am I going to do and am I going to be able to get myself out of this?", because whether you have a bad race and it's on an important selection or not, you've still got that certain element where you need to kind of pick yourself back up again and re-motivate yourself in order to run well, and I really had that and I felt I had a point to prove, so it was kind of mixed. One minute I felt, "yeah I can do it, I'm strong enough to do this and of course I can do it because I'm good enough to do it", and then on the other hand it was like, well you know, "can I or will I?"

J And at that time did you feel that you had any skills or resources to help you deal with it?

J Em, probably not. I did speak to Bill obviously, my coach and you know, he knew my fears before I went down and there was an element there of positive thinking, "Oh no, you need to stay focused and you know, you're capable of doing it and this is your chance", and when I was with Bill talking to him on the phone before I left then yeah I was positive and I thought, "Ok, yeah he's right." But the problem was that Bill didn't travel with me so he wasn't there when I needed him. I could've done with that pep talk during my warm-up to refocus me on what I needed to be kind of looking at, em, in terms of skills, it was quite obvious the fact that you know, I didn't have the skills in order to deal with it and I certainly didn't feel as if I could approach anyone within the SAF because in my opinion each and every one of them had put me in that position, because everyone who was down there was on the selection committee and didn't initially pick me, therefore I was not about to discuss it with them

- J And what exactly did you do to deal with the situation then?
- J Well as I say, I kind of felt really bad for the whole duration of the trip because I was traveling back up with all the athletes, but once I'd kind of spoken to Bill, he did make an attempt to try and dig something positive from it, but you know, I failed in every aspect to find anything positive from it. So eventually what we agreed to do was to essentially forget about it and move on. We couldn't change it, it had happened and the easiest thing to do was to say, "well, scrub that one off, ignore it, it's in the past and let's move on." So that's really what we did in order to deal with the situation. I pretended it didn't happen [laughs]
- J And did you find that that helped?
- J Em, initially yeah. I mean obviously it did happen and I couldn't change that, but when I found myself thinking about it I then made a bigger effort not to think about it, so yeah I suppose you could say it did happen and ultimately, you know, eventually you do forget about it and it becomes, "Ok, that was a bad race, it's no big deal", em, but it did take some time for that to kind of happen.
- J And did it change the way that you viewed the situation?
- J Em, yes and no, in fact probably no, probably no, em, I mean even now I'm still of the opinion that I should've never been put in that position, em, so no. I mean at the end of the day it was a horrible weekend. It was a bad performance and it was a performance that 1 I didn't help myself in, but 2 nor did those who were supposed to be supporting me and helping me, em, so no, not really. I still believe it was a bad race and I could've done better like most others, em, but as I say, what I tended to do was as I say, whenever I found myself thinking about it then I would chose something else to consider instead so that I didn't have to dwell on it because there wasn't anything positive that I could see from it, so you know, if I was to think about it then I would've viewed the situation differently, em, but if not then you know, don't think about it, then I can't come to a conclusion about whether or not I view it the same
- J And on a scale of 1 – 10, how well would you say that you coped with the situation?
- J Em, I mean my coach took the positive from it and said, "yeah, you've dealt well with it by accepting the fact that it was a bad race and you couldn't do anything about it and moving on", and essentially that is what happened, em, but I certainly wouldn't say that I'd done it brilliantly. I was probably forced into doing that, so 4 or 5. I didn't think it was particularly great.
- J And if athletics had been less important to you, how do you think that might have influenced ho easy you found dealing with the situation?

- J Oh, it would've been ten times easier. If athletics wasn't that important to me then it was going to be no big deal whether I made the final or didn't make the final and I would've been down there thinking, "excellent, it's a social weekend this one", you know, whereas I wasn't, I was down there for a purpose and the most important thing was making the final and winning the race, em, so yeah, it would've been no big deal afterwards. It would've been a simple case of, "yep, well no big deal, here we go. Let's go out tonight, where's the first pub?" em, it definitely wouldn't have been on the same level had it not been important to me.
- J The next questions still relate to the time during which you were experiencing the stressful situation. Would you say that your involvement with athletics changed in any way as the situation unfolded?
- J Em, probably it just...well yeah it probably did in that initially I became more focused on athletics, more determined in order for that never to happen again, yeah because I certainly didn't want to be in that situation again, em, my involvement didn't change 'cos you know, everything was still the same, I remained training 5 days a week etc., so it depends on how you look on that, you know, em, yes and no, but the involvement itself remained the same.
- J And were you still prepared to put in as much effort to athletics?
- J Oh yeah, in a way I was actually more determined to put in more of an effort because as I said, I wanted to kind of reverse the situation that I found myself in, never to allow it to happen again. If there was going to be a selection criteria next time, then I would give them no doubt whether or not they were going to select me and that was the kind of attitude that I took after it. I did not ever want to be in that situation again.
- J And how committed did you remain to the athletic part of your life in relation to the other parts of your life?
- J I essentially became more committed in order to make sure that that didn't happen again, so yeah. I mean that's the positive I suppose that the coach would take from it, you know I did have this kind of reinvestment of energy into it in order to make sure that that was the case, so yeah I was definitely more committed to it.
- J And did the importance that you placed on your athletic involvement change in any way?
- J Yeah, again it became more important to me for exactly the same reasons, I wanted to reverse that situation, em, so yeah, definitely more important to me
- J And looking back on the situation, how do you view how you reacted?
- J Em, I think actually anybody else would've done exactly the same thing in my shoes, em, because as I say, the initial support that should've been there from those that selected me, i.e. the SAF, quite clearly wasn't, em, so much to say

that I think if I was placed in that situation again I'd probably initially act exactly the same way, em, how I reacted I think at that particular moment in time was the only way that I could've reacted and that was all that self-doubt kicking in, em, we've already discussed the easiest way to have done it and the positive thinking, but no, as far as I was concerned the support that I should've had first and foremost quite clearly wasn't there, therefore I think that I reacted in a way that I think would've come automatically to a lot of people in that situation.

J And how do you think you'd react to the situation if you were faced with it now?

J If it was right now, under my current circumstances, chances are maybe slightly differently in terms of it wouldn't be as such a big deal, em, the self-doubt would still be there you know, of the situation in terms of I'd won the race, met the criteria and then wasn't automatically selected, yeah there would be all that self-doubt there, but whether or not I'd allow it on this occasion to have the same effect...it hopefully would be different. Whether or not that would prove to be the case I don't know, em, but as I say I think that that's an automatic reaction based on those circumstances and chances are it may kick in initially again, it's just whether or not it's then handled with in a better way. It comes down to the handling of it as opposed to your automatic reactions to the circumstances I think.

J And why do you think if it was to happen now it wouldn't be as big a deal as it was then?

J Well because at this moment in time there's more than one thing important to me, you know athletics isn't the most important thing at this time, but that's not to say that I don't expect athletics to become the most important thing to me again, but just now, my work is equally important to me and that's why it wouldn't be such a big deal, em, because I would just move into my working life and do what I'm looking to achieve there. And it's because of those circumstances, because of the injuries that you know, I'm not level with where I want to be and haven't achieved what I wanted to achieve, but no it definitely wouldn't be such a big deal at this time. It would still be a deal and certainly not a circumstance I would wish to ever be put in again, em, because of the lack of support, or perceived lack of support, em, but no, it wouldn't be as big a deal and that's because of my work.

J Well I think that's just about all I have to ask you. Before we finish, do you think there's anything we failed to discuss in relation to your experiences of underperforming?

J No, I don't think there's anything else that we could've discussed as to why I felt like that, so no.

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

J I thought it was very good actually. Well done Jne!

J Thank you very much.

STUDY 2

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – TOM

- J Before we start talking about athletics I'd like to get some background information on you. So to begin with could you tell me a bit about yourself, like your age and where it is you live just now?
- N I'm living in the parental home in Wishaw in Lanarkshire. I'm 22 years old and a graduate. Eurrently I'm a full-time athlete
- J And what's your degree in?
- N Social sciences
- J And do you have any brothers or sisters?
- N Yeah I have an older brother and an older sister. My brother's 25 and my sister's 27
- J And are they involved in sport or were they ever involved in sport?
- N My sister used to be a gymnast when she was younger and my brother did judo for a little while when he was really young but not any more, no. My brother's still in the army so I suppose he keeps himself fit from that
- J And what about your parents?
- N My Dad wasn't involved in sport at all but my mum was a swimmer, yeah. She got to quite a high level
- J And what event is it that you specialise in?
- N Em, 800's. I do the occasional 400, but 800 is my event.
- J And how often do you train?
- N Just now eight times a week – Monday to Thursday. I get a Friday off and twice on a Saturday and twice on a Sunday
- J And what sort of age were you when you first got involved?
- N Em, really since I was 11
- J And can you tell me a bit about how you got involved?
- N Em, it was basically just an advertising leaflet posted around our school for a come and try day at the athletics club. I just decided to go along
- J Could you talk me through your progression since then?
- N Up until 11 until about 14 I didn't really compete seriously, maybe within the club on week nights we'd have races and stuff, but I didn't really compete until I was 14. I started off doing 800's at a pretty high level, like straight in

to Scottish level. I think I ended up being ranked 4th in Scotland for the under 15 age group at 8's, then I moved onto other events, played about with long jump now and again and hurdles and became quite successful in hurdles at Scottish level. I came 3rd at the Scottish Schools. I then moved to the 400 flat and was successful at that as well. I was 2nd in Scotland in the under 20's and then I finally moved onto 800's.

J And what have you achieved since then?

N Em, 2nd in the Scottish Championships then being ranked number 1 in Scotland, em 2nd ranked in Britain for the under 23 age group, 8th at the British Championships twice and represented Great Britain

J Ok so looking back to when you first became involved in athletics, was your decision to become involved influenced by anyone outside of yourself?

N Yeah, I think first of all I was coaxed into it by friends. I wasn't really interested. I think I was swimming at the time and doing karate and I did gymnastics before that as well so I wasn't really bothered about running, but some friends bugged me for a little while and I decided just to give it a go.

J And once you were involved in it was there anyone else influencing you?

N After just like a couple of weeks really my friends stopped going and from then on it's just been my decision really

J And at that time what would you say that it was that was motivating you to take part in athletics?

N Em, I think basically I just enjoyed it and although I was young I did enjoy competing even although I was young. And I liked winning.

J And when you say that you enjoyed it, could you describe what it was about it that you enjoyed?

N Em, I think maybe the pleasure of when you won, that's always good, that's always pleasing

J How does that feel?

N Good!

J Any other reasons at that time do you think?

N Em, maybe this is subconscious but I think maybe I did quite like the fact that I knew there wasn't many people doing it and it gave you something better to talk about, something positive to do and something different

J And as you were growing up how important would you say athletics was to you?

- N Even just in my early to mid teens I think I started making a lot of sacrifices so that athletics could play a big part in my life. So when most people were out doing what normal teenagers do I wasn't really wanting to be doing that. I wanted to be involved in athletics. So I think the older I got, maybe up until my late teens it just got more and more important as I got older
- J And going back into your teenage years what sort of time were you spending on your athletics?
- N Em, I think maybe it just became sort of mid teens, about 14, 15 I think it was about 4 or 5 times a week I was training. Not all of that was intense, a lot of it was recovery and it wasn't as consistent week in week out. As I got older obviously I trained more and it became more consistent
- J What sort of age were you when that happened?
- N Em, I think maybe about 17, 18 there was a real conscious decision that it was going to be all or nothing
- J And can you tell me a bit more about that time when you made that decision?
- N I can just remember realising that as I get older and started to specialise in whatever event I chose at that time, then you only get out what you put in and when you get a little taste of success then you want more. But at that age I realised that in order to get more then there had to be more work involved and I was quite willing to do that
- J So it's always played a big role in your life?
- N Oh yeah, it's always been really big yeah
- J And going back again to your early years in athletics, what other things did you spend your time doing?
- N Out with athletics?
- J Yeah
- N Em, basically just school really and spending time with some friends and maybe around about 13 or 14 I was still involved in karate but that soon faded away and then it just became that athletics was the only sport and really spending time at school and being with friends. That was basically it
- J And how would you say that that was divided up, like your social, school and athletics?
- N Obviously more hours of the day were spent at school, that just has to be done but it wasn't really where I wanted to be. Most of my attention was on my athletics, that's where I would rather have been. Em, basically friends were at

weekends, obviously I saw them at school but during the week was usually training time

J So it was as if although your time might have been spent doing other things, your heart was in your athletics?

N Yeah, yeah. Real time may have been focused on school but quality time was on athletics

J Ok, and looking back to that time how balanced would you say that your lifestyle was?

N Em, well I think the fact that I had to be at school made it a bit more balanced but as I said physically I had to be at school, I didn't have a choice but maybe mentally it wasn't balanced. Most of my attention was on just finishing school and getting to training

J As you got older what plans, if any, did you make for a future career?

N Em, I think I'd always wanted to get into counseling or something, maybe that's why I chose the degree that I did but that was basically just a back up. From my late teens I knew what I wanted in athletics and my visions were greater than just having a hobby. I wanted that to be my career and my job

J Right, so would you say that your athletic career has influenced your lifetime career?

N Oh yeah, yeah. Other things have been put on hold so that this can be given all of my attention and classed as my career, as my job.

J This next section is designed to help me understand how big a role athletics plays in your life now. So at the moment what parts of your life would you say are the most important to you?

N Athletics, definitely my athletics, my training, no question about it. Everything out with athletics, hours I don't spend training are geared towards training

J And are there any other life areas that you place importance on?

N Em, friendships are important and I've just started to incorporate a personal relationship but it's in its early days and ultimately my heart's still in my athletics. Maybe I'll regret that when I'm older but right now I think this is where I am

J So I'm getting the sense that athletics really is your number one and the other parts of your life certainly don't take priority, it's always going to be your athletics?

N Yeah, it's always athletics, yeah

J Ok, and how much of your time would you say you're prepared to give to these different areas of your life?

N Em, well I think as I said first and foremost is my athletics and any other time that I don't have involved in athletics or preparing for training or meets, then that's spare time and that has to be divided between friends and my relationship, so as much as I would need to be successful really and if I had to make sacrifices in those other two sections for my athletics then I would

J So you're basically prepared to give it whatever it takes?

N Yeah

J And would you say that your lifestyle is balanced just now?

N I think right now it's probably more balanced than it has been. There's still much more importance placed on athletics but I'm giving other things time whereas before I wouldn't. It's not affecting my athletics so it's not downgrading my attention to it, but I'm realising that other things can be given time, not much but some

J And what is it that you've allowed to come into your life?

N I've entered a relationship which I hadn't done before. It's in very early stages but I've realised that maybe I can still have the relationship and still place more importance on my athletics career. Before I haven't done that, it's just been completely blocked out.

J And what do you think it was that allowed you to make that realisation?

N I think sometimes more dedication means being able to switch off when you're away from the track and when I take that step away from the track, although I can still be thinking about it, I can rest from it. And that seems to have improved my athletics for whatever reason and I've realised that I do have some spare time to devote to spending with someone else

J Ok. Obviously you said that your lifestyle has become more balanced. In general terms how balanced would you describe it as being?

N In general terms athletics still takes more precedence. It still has more attention. If my life was balanced in the true sense of the word then everything I have in my life would be given equal attention and equal importance, but it doesn't. I could balance maybe friendship and my relationship but athletics is still more important

J And do you feel that you miss out on any things then as a result of that?

N Yeah, maybe I do. I miss spending more time with friends, maybe friendships could be developed further. Maybe my relationship could be developed

further and be more important or better or whatever the word is, but I don't know. This is where it is right now and this is what's important, so you just deal with whatever situation you're in

J So you feel that it's a necessary and worthwhile sacrifice?

N Yeah, yeah

J And you don't have any regrets about that?

N Not just now, no. I don't live with regret

J Do you happen to have any other examples that illustrate just how important athletics is to you?

N Em, well there are lots that obviously don't spring to mind but I've missed lots of friend's birthdays or parties that have been held. I've missed anniversary parties. I even didn't visit my Gran in hospital a few times when she was dying just so that I could train, which was pretty bad, but I justify that by saying that we knew she was dying, so...that sounds terrible

J Obviously we've talked about what your reasons were in the past for taking part in athletics, what would you say your reasons are now?

N Maybe they've not changed that much. I still love competing. I still love the buzz of competing. I love winning more than anything, em, I do love the fact that there's not many people in this world that would be able to put the commitment and dedication in that I have and have the talent that I have and to develop that, em, and I do want to be seen as an athlete and seen as something different and maybe better than someone who's not an athlete

J So I get the idea that part of it's almost to make you different

N Yeah, a bit of an ego boost

J So I guess it's like you want to have an identity that's a bit more unique from Joe Bloggs?

N Yeah, different from everyone else and maybe what I'd think is better or superior [laughs]. A lot of people, I was going to say worship me for it [laughs], have great respect for me

J So obviously you enjoy the buzz that you get from competition and the fact that it gives you this sort of unique identity. Are there any other reasons?

N Em, I like the fact that it keeps you fit. I like the way it makes my body look...these are all so shallow!

J What do you feel you gain from your athletic participation?

- N Em, as I say the excitement from competing, it just gives me an amazing buzz, an amazing feeling when I'm competing and training and a massive sense of satisfaction knowing what I'm capable of doing physiologically and mentally and knowing that as I said before that there's not that many people out there that can do that, and I can and that makes me stand out
- J And what would you say that your major goals are that you would like to have achieved by the end of your athletic career?
- N Em, I want a medal at a major championship – the Olympics or Worlds
- J Ok, and how important is it to you that you achieve that would you say?
- N Well that's why I'm doing this. That's what I want. That's what I'm dedicating everything towards
- J And how do you tend to feel as a person when you don't achieve your goals in athletics?
- N I get really pissed off. I don't like it one bit at all. It's like a...I hate to say a sense of failure but that's what it feels like, em, that I've been stupid. I've made a mistake, that I just didn't achieve what I could've achieved, em, anger as well. I get really pissed off when I don't achieve what I want
- J And what sort of level would you say that you set your goals at?
- N Em, I know. Ideally you should maybe set them smaller because it makes them easier to attain and then you build from there but I like to set my goals pretty high I think. It's more of a challenge and then it's more satisfying when you make them as well.
- J And obviously you talked about getting angry with yourself when you make mistakes. Is that something that's specific to your athletic life or is it something that's a general thing about you would you say?
- N Em, it's definitely more specific to athletics but in my general life I do feel that as well. I seem to live by that rule. That just seems to be the person that I am but it seems that athletics multiplies that feeling and enlarges it in some way
- J And is that something that you would say has developed throughout your athletic career or is it something that's been there from the start?
- N It's definitely been there from the start but I think yeah it probably has got stronger, yeah. The demands that I place on myself have got more and more
- J And how has the importance that you place on athletics changed since you were younger?

- N Yeah, as I said before it seems to be becoming more and more important. I don't know whether that's because as you get older you realise that time isn't on anybody's side and I'm not going to have this career for much longer. So you're going to have to make more and more sacrifices I think as you get older and either closer to that goal or realise that it's going to be harder to attain
- J I guess I've got a bit of an idea about this, but I'd like to get a stronger idea of how it is that you see yourself as a person, so if I was to say to you, "who are you", what would be the important things that you'd tell me about yourself?
- N Well I'd tell you my name and my age and where I come from but as soon as someone asked me what I do then I tell them that I'm an athlete and that's first and foremost. That's who I am, that's what I am and that's what I do. I'm an athlete, fine and simple
- J And as that something that you see yourself as being when you're away from an athletic setting?
- N Yeah that's all the time, wherever I am I'm an athlete first and foremost. Even although someone might introduce me and say "this is my friend", I'm not going to say, "I'm such and such a friend." If someone asks me what I do I'll say I'm an athlete. And we all have different labels in life where I'm a son, I'm a brother, I'm a friend, but I'm an athlete and that's my master status really
- J Do you ever describe yourself in terms of those other roles?
- N Because athletics is so important in my life there's not many situations that I'm in where I am the brother because I don't have much time to spend with my family. And my friends as I said, that's just spare time that that's with and I can't really identify with that very often because it's not as huge a part of my life as athletics
- J And how big a part of who you are does being an athlete make up would you say?
- N In percentage wise it's massive, it's huge. Obviously now and again other things creep into your consciousness but that's what I spend most of my time thinking about and preparing my life for and devoting my life to and yeah it's a massive part to me. And maybe it's not everything because it can't be everything as I said because there's time that I'm spending with my friends or my partner, but obviously I think about it almost all of my waking time
- J And how important is it to you that other people see you as an athlete?
- N Oh really important. I'd hate someone to class me as someone who keeps fit or is a jogger, that would piss me off big style. Although I say it is really important, at the end of the day whether or not they realised how important it is to me I think I'm so stubborn that I'd probably get over it, but I still want them to realise who I am and not just a keep fitter

- J So it's a sort of global thing, it's not just about how you see yourself but it's about how other people see you as well
- N Yeah, you could say that but it's more importantly about how I see myself – more important to me but I like other people to realise as well
- J And how important is it to you that you see yourself as a successful athlete?
- N Well as I said ultimately that's why I'm in it, for me. I want to walk away from this career knowing that I've been successful by winning a major medal or just really knowing that I haven't wasted any time and that all the hard work has paid off and that I've just been successful, by my standards nobody else's
- J Do you think your standards are different from other people's?
- N Em, yeah. I think they are, em, I think they might be a bit tougher but it doesn't bother me. I think a lot of people...all they can be positive about is where they are still, deep down they don't think they're going to get there but I do
- J Obviously you're very achievement orientated. Is it important to you that you achieve in other areas of your life or is it again something that's quite specific to athletics?
- N It's more specific to athletics but everything that I do in life I want to do well. I got it into my head when I was younger that I wanted a degree in social sciences and I knew that I could get it and I wanted it so I think when I want something I find it hard not to work hard to get it
- J And who would you say that the people are that you spend most of your time with?
- N Other athletes. I can't remember the last time I saw my sister or my brother actually to be honest with you which is terrible, just at Christmas [approximately one month before time of interview] I think it was actually the last time I saw my sister and she only lives like ten minutes away in the car
- J It's just like everything's tied up with your athletics
- N Yeah, yeah. This just makes you realise how bad it can be and how devoted you are and just how selfish you have to be, but that's life
- J And how do you think that these people that you spend your time with would describe you?
- N Probably stupid, yeah maybe selfish, maybe ignorant. But other athletes wouldn't describe me as that, family and friends would. Other athletes –

they're there with me - I mean they're the same as me most of them, well some of them [laughs]

J And how does it make you feel that your family and whoever else might describe you like that?

N It doesn't really bother me. It's important to me and at the end of the day when I'm more successful I'll know who'll have the last laugh. But I mean they seem to support me but maybe sometimes when they want me to do something and I just can't, it pisses them off a bit. But I think they've come to realise that this is where I am and they don't expect too much of me now

J Explanation of next section...I'd like to get a picture in my mind of the situation, so would you be able to describe it for me?

N Em, last season was really crazy. I had a slump. My first race of the season was good, the second fastest time I've run in my career, em, the race after that at Loughborough I went in on a high. I was the fastest in the field in the race I was in and I performed crap in the most blunt of terms. There were people in the race who were slower than me and not as good as me and not as talented as me who beat me and I made a major mistake and I can just remember crossing the line and just thinking, "what happened here?" I felt total disbelief and shock that I had performed so badly and I was walking off the track feeling absolutely distraught and disgusted and thinking, "My God, what happened there? What have I just done?" The same thing happened in the race after that. It was the trials for the Eommonwealth Games and in the heats and semi's I ran fantastically and got into the final and exactly the same thing happened and it was a horrible and pathetic performance and I came of the track just thinking, "I've just failed at something I should've succeeded in."

J Ok so was it a series of two races or...?

N Well Loughborough was just a one-off race. There wasn't heats or semi's but the Eommonwealth trials were three races, heats semi's and final

J Ok and what had been your goals at these meetings?

N To win. I wanted to win the Loughborough race and I should've won that because I was faster than anyone else in the field and the same for the trials, I should've won. And not only did I want to win, but I had to win in order to get to the Games

J So that was another goal?

N Yeah

J Ok, so if we refer to it as a performance slump, how long did it last?

N Em, maybe about 5 or 6 weeks. I think it was about that, yeah maybe a bit less

- J And at the time what did you attribute your slump to?
- N Em, at the time probably just it was my fault that I'd got myself into bad situations in the races and when you get yourself into those races and perform badly then being the way I am it's hard to kind of move away from that and get over that. It's really easy to just go down the slippery slope and keep going, but I think it was just maybe my own stupidity getting into a bad situation in the race and being too relaxed and maybe over confident if that's possible and just thinking, "this is going to happen because I'm so much better than them."
- J So I get the sense that there were a combination of factors, like partly because you described it like a kind of downward spiral, being over confident and also tactical issues as well?
- N Yeah, yeah, tactical issues that I didn't think through properly.
- J Ok. On a scale of 1 – 10, how stressful would you say the situation was for you?
- N 10
- J Ok, so it was obviously really stressful. Had you ever experienced anything like this in the past?
- N I don't think so. That's the only underperformance that I can recall
- J And so did you have any sort of expectations that this was going to happen?
- N No because the way I'd been running after my second race, I mean that was the second fastest time I've ever ran in my life and so early on. Things were going fantastically as far as I was concerned until it happened
- J Hence your feelings of shock
- N Yeah
- J And how important was it to you that you reached your goal of making the Games?
- N That's all I'd been thinking about for the last year and it just seemed to consume me that that was all that I wanted and if I'd been told that I could go to the Games and be successful but I'd be dead when I come back then I think I would've taken the Games, yeah
- J And why do you think it was just so important to you that you achieved that?
- N Who knows. I want success. The hard work would've paid off then in my mind. People would've realised that all the hard work was worth it and it would have maybe been some confirmation for them that I am an athlete and

not just a jogger, but more importantly for me I would've known that the work would've paid off and I was on my way to making it

J And when you said confirmation for them, who's them?

N Em, friends, family, all the training partners. But although it was important that they saw that, it was more important for me. I think it would've been confirmation for me really

J Right, so it's almost like you've invested all this into it and...

N I wanted something back

J And did you feel that any other people expected anything of you?

N Yeah, maybe. I think people had realised that the way it was going and the way the previous season had been and they expected me to be successful that season

J And did that influence your stress at all?

N Yeah I think it probably did, yeah. I was putting pressure on myself and maybe I could've been more focused and maybe if I'd been totally focused then they wouldn't have mattered, but they did and that's what happened and you can't change that now. That's just the way it is

J So would you say your perceptions of other people's expectations also influenced your performance?

N Probably, which is wrong

J Thinking back very specifically to the time when you had underperformed, what exactly was it about it do you think that made it stressful for you?

N Em, in my mind I had failed. I'd put all this work in and I hadn't got pay back and as I said I'd only ever identified myself as being an athlete and that's how I'd hoped other people would view me, as an athlete that was successful and that didn't happen, so it sort of affected how I viewed myself. I thought maybe I'm not the athlete anymore

J What other related thoughts did you have?

N Maybe I thought, "why I am I doing this? I'm putting all this work in and I've got nothing out." But those thoughts were only for a short time, they didn't last long.

J Ok, so it obviously affected your motivation, how did it affect your mood?

N Well I was really depressed all through that time. I don't think anybody would've wanted to be near me. I got really irritable and really down

- J When you say down do you think it affected your self-esteem?
- N Yeah, yeah, that was bashed definitely. As I said I looked upon myself differently, but at that time I didn't look upon myself as being the athlete that I'd always looked upon myself as being
- J So would you say that you placed a lot of self-worth in your athletic accomplishments?
- N Yeah, yeah definitely
- J And my next question was what emotions did you experience when you were first faced with the situation. You've already talked about disbelief, shock, you felt distraught, anything else?
- N I felt a lot of anger at myself and disappointment in myself
- J Ok and you said that these sort of feelings didn't last for long. How long did they last for?
- N Well although the whole slump was over a five or six week period after the first race, maybe a week or two and then they'd gone again and I picked myself up again for the trials and then it happened again at the trials and maybe it lasted a bit longer, about two or three weeks again after that, so all in all throughout the six weeks slump then those feelings may have been there, 'cause just as I got to pick myself up again after the first disappointment it happened again. So it was maybe about a week or two weeks after each race, so within that six weeks slump period there may have been two weeks in between that I felt ok and positive
- J And initially would you say that you viewed the situation as one that you found negative and threatening or positive and challenging?
- N Straight after it was negative, yeah. It was negative and definitely threatening. I questioned everything, every belief that I had about myself
- J What was it about it that made it threatening do you think?
- N Em, it was threatening to how I viewed myself and my success and the way I thought other people perceived me. It was threatening just to me and my identity really, certainly threatening to me as an athlete
- J Ok, and my next question was, was there anything at stake for you, so obviously there's your image...
- N Yeah, my image and my reputation and my feeling of importance and worth maybe

- J So you said that you saw the situation as being quite threatening, did you experience any feelings of loss?
- N Yeah. I'd lost the, as I said when you win you get a buzz and I felt that I'd lost that and I had expectations of that race and being successful so maybe...it sounds quite contradictory but I'd lost the expectation that I'd had and I knew I was going to get a buzz after it and that wasn't there so...
- J So what expectation was it that you felt you'd lost?
- N The expectation to win and I expected to feel a buzz after it which didn't happen
- J So how much of your time was spent thinking about the situation would you say?
- N Em, over the six week period? All of it really. I didn't have another job and because I was on my own a lot during the day, that's all I could think about and being depressed and thinking about the next training session and whether that was going to go well or not. It just seemed to consume me for the six weeks
- J And did you feel that it affected the way others saw you?
- N Yeah, I think they probably started to look upon me as being quite negative. I definitely looked upon myself as being weak and unable to handle that situation. I don't know whether they did or not
- J Ok so going back to the time that you experienced the performance slump, how important was athletics to you at that time?
- N Em, just as important as it is now I think. It was everything I had in my life and the only thing I cared about. Obviously during the slump it may have been a bit different but as a whole in that season it was the most important thing to me, yeah
- J So pretty much what you've described in relation to now?
- N Yeah, oh yeah
- J And again it was important to you that other people saw you as an athlete?
- N Yeah, I wanted people to realise that's who I am
- J And what other areas of your life did you have that were important to you?
- N[laugh], don't expect a big answer! Just as I said before. At that time it was only really friends and family. I wasn't in a relationship

- J So thinking back to the specific time when you were first faced with your underperformance, to what extent did you see the situation as being something that you could change or do something about?
- N During that period I thought, "I'm not going to get out of what's just happened." I'd never been faced with that before so I had to develop coping strategies and they took a while to kick into place
- J Ok, so you obviously felt a little bit out of control
- N Oh yeah I felt that I didn't know how to react because I'd never been faced with it before, so what could I do to get back to feeling the way I did before the slump?
- J What did you think was responsible? Well you've already said that you blamed yourself, you thought that it was your own fault. Did you think you'd be able to cope with it?
- N Well I did feel a lack of control. Deep down I did know I'd get over it because I'm strong enough but right after the underperformance I didn't. I just thought, "Oh my God, this is terrible, this is the worst thing that could happen." But I knew deep down inside that I'd come back from it, I'm strong enough, so...
- J And thinking back to that specific time again before you'd started to employ any coping strategies, did you feel that you had anything available to you to help you deal with the situation in terms of personal skills and resources such as support from others?
- N Yeah, I think I knew that I just wanted to be on my own. I just wanted time to think. I didn't really want to be speaking to people or going over it constantly because I knew that that would just allow me to hold onto the feelings that I had so I just wanted to be away from people really and think about it on my own and just start to think rationally, but straight away I just wanted to distance myself from people and I knew that would help because when you start to bring other people's opinions into it I think that would've just made it harder to cope with really
- J So I guess even although you felt the situation difficult to deal with, deep down you must've felt that you had some personal skills because you knew...
- N Yeah, I knew what I'd have to do eventually. I knew I'd have to talk to other people about it but immediately after I wasn't wanting to, that was my way of coping with it immediately after it. But as time went on I realised that I'd have to bring other people in to help me move on
- J This next section goes over the coping strategies that you actually employed, so obviously you've already said that you distanced yourself from it. Could you maybe tell me a bit more about that?

- N Well immediately after the race I just wanted to find the most isolated spot I could and just stay there, just not be able to look at anyone or have anyone look at me or speak to me. I just wanted to be as far away as I possibly could
- J And how long did those sort of feelings last for?
- N About ten minutes because I realised that it wasn't possible. The track that I was at was so busy, there were so many people there so it lasted for about ten minutes and then I realised that it wasn't going to be possible. I was still more isolated from people than if the incident hadn't happened, but not as isolated as I wanted it to be so maybe I was avoiding people for about an hour or so, but after about ten minutes I came into contact with people
- J So obviously one of the first things you did was distanced yourself from others, what did you do from there?
- N Em, I just started to bring people back into my own space and talk about it and just tried to tell myself, "It'll be fine, it'll be fine, it'll be fine." I didn't believe it but...and at that time as well I was going over it and thinking, "Right, what went wrong?"
- J Ok, so you distanced yourself, you then started to talk about it and use positive self-talk, and you started to think of ways to resolve it. Would that be right?
- N Yeah
- J Can you talk me on from there?
- N Em, after that basically, well days after it happened I just started to maybe go out with friends more and try and think about athletics less
- J Ok that's interesting, tell me a bit more about that
- N Em, it sounds weird but although at that time the underperformance had threatened the identity I had as an athlete, there was part of me that wanted to move away from that identity and not think about it really [tape ends]...Yeah all I did was take myself away from my identity as an athlete and start maybe living up to my label more as a friend rather than just focusing on my training or my slump. I just focused on maybe going out to a club or staying at a friend's house or talking about things other than training, even useless things like TV you know, just anything to get away from my identity as an athlete
- J And what effect did that have on the emotions that you had been experiencing?
- N It diluted them a lot. It helped get rid of some of them because if I wasn't placing attention on athletics then I couldn't think about the disappointment in relation to athletics. And then when you start to distance yourself from it, it makes you realise how much you love it and then you can be more positive after that

- J So where did you go from there then?
- N Em, well during distancing myself as I said you realise how important it is and just how much you want to get back into training and how much you actually love the sport and the life you've been leading and when you do that then if it's meant for you then you naturally start being positive and you naturally put things into place that make you dedicated again and make it the most important thing to you
- J So you found yourself back where you'd been originally
- N Yeah, yeah before the slump, yeah
- J We've probably already covered most of the next questions...when you said that you started to spend more time with friends and increased your social life, was it athletes you were spending time with or non-athletes?
- N No it was non-athletes. I was obviously still doing training at that time but when I was away from training it was non-athletes that I was socialising with
- J And was that deliberate?
- N Yeah that was deliberate, yeah. They were non-athletes so they wouldn't be obsessive about it. The most they could probably say was, "How's training going?" And I could've given them any answer and they wouldn't have known any better
- J So again it was distancing yourself...
- N Yeah, athletics isn't important to them so whatever they want to talk about is non-athletic related
- J And would you say that the importance that you placed on athletics while you were coping with the slump changed?
- N Yeah I think it changed. I don't think I was placing as much importance on it. You only have a certain amount of time in your life and if I was increasing the importance of friends then obviously something had to suffer and it was athletics
- J And obviously as you got back to where you were originally, the amount of importance you placed on athletics, as is reflected in your questionnaire responses, went right back up
- N Yeah, yeah
- J So you found yourself back in the same position
- N Yeah, back to where I was before

- J And looking back on the situation, how do you view how you reacted?
- N Em, I think I did pretty good 'cause I got over it pretty quickly I think and came back and had a good performance after it, yeah so I think I did pretty good especially as it was my first time being faced with that situation. But now I have strategies in place and I'd probably just implement the same things but the process of getting back to where I was may be quicker
- J And do you think anything's changed in your life since then that might influence the way you would react to the situation if it were to happen now?
- N If it were to happen again I think I would be more positive after it because I realise I've been through it before and I can get through it again and I'm stronger as a person and I know how to deal with the situation
- J Well that's just about all I have to ask you, thank you very much. Before we finish is there anything else at all that you think we should've discussed in relation to your experiences of underperforming?
- N No, I think I'm all talked out about it now
- J Brilliant, thank you very much.

STUDY 2

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – ANNA

- J Before we start talking about athletics I'd like to get some background information from you, so to begin with could you maybe tell me a bit about yourself like your age and where it is you live just now?
- S I'm 25 and I live in East Kilbride
- J And who is it that you live with just now?
- S My fiancée
- J And is he involved in athletics at all or any other sports?
- S Em, he used to be involved in sport. He was in the Scottish Gymnastics Team and the Scottish Diving Team as well, but he hasn't done any serious sport for about 10 years so you know, he really understands my athletics and so on because of his background
- J And what's your occupation?
- S I'm a cardiac technician in the Victoria Infirmary
- J And what sorts of hours are you working?
- S Well I've just gone part-time so...well, it was 37 hours a week, it's now 22 hours a week, all day Monday, Wednesday and Friday
- J And what were your reasons for going part time?
- S I went part-time because of my athletics. I want to obviously improve on my athletics and reach my goals so I feel that by going part-time it'll give me a better chance to recover from training sessions and maybe add in a few runs in the mornings and things
- J So do you receive any support to enable you to do that?
- S Yeah, the reason I can afford to go part-time is because I got help from UK Sport, em, the Lottery Fund and it's given me some living costs to go part-time
- J And do you have any brothers or sisters?
- S Yeah I do, I've got 2 brothers
- J And are they involved in sport at all, or were they ever involved in sport?
- S My brother was a really good footballer. He had trials for Dundee United and things, em yeah he was excellent. My younger brother, he's not really into sport. He enjoys watching it and he is quite involved with my athletics but

em, no he's more the kind of intelligent type that likes to study rather than take part in sports

J And what about your parents, were they ever involved in sport?

S Em, well my mum was a swimmer em, my dad took up athletics with me when I did. He just like does a bit of running em, so my dad still does some training – he comes out running with me

J And was he ever involved in competitive athletics, or was it more recreational?

S More recreational, although he does do the odd 10K road race, but not seriously you know, em, I wouldn't say that either of my parents were involved in sport seriously, but they did enjoy it

J So you obviously come from quite a sporty family

S I do yeah. My cousin used to play for Rangers Football Elub so yeah, he was a goalie, em, he still kind of plays but obviously at not as high a level

J And what event do you specialise in?

S Em, it's really 800 and the 1500

J And could you describe for me your training set-up, like your coach and your training group?

S Em, well we've got quite a good group. They're all pretty professional and like to just get on with it. Tommy's an excellent coach and I trust him 100% which is very important and he's really brought me on since I started with him

J When did you start with him?

S I started with him in August 2000, yeah 2 years ago

J And how many people do you train with?

S Em, there's a group of about half a dozen of us all training together

J And how often do you train?

S I train about ten times a week, eh twice a day Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday

J And what sort of age were you when you started athletics?

S I was 9 when I went along to Dam Park in Ayr and I trained with Ayr Seaforth Athletic Elub up until the age of 13

- J How exactly did you get involved?
- S Em, the reason I got involved was because at primary school we used to do a wee kind of race round the playing fields and a couple of the girls in the class used to beat me because they were swimmers, you know really good swimmers so for me to beat them I wanted to start getting involved in athletics, so my mum took me along to Dam Park. I also used to watch my brother win lots of medals and trophies because he was a footballer and I wanted a medal basically, so that's the reason I went along
- J So would you say that from quite a young age you've been perhaps quite achievement orientated?
- S I have I think yeah, definitely. It's always been that kind of competitive thing in me, em, as I said I used to get so jealous of Barry [brother] when he used to bring home all these medals and things and right from the start when I joined Ayr Seaforth it was competitive you know, em, the first thing I did was like a wee trial to get in the cross country team, which I did and it just went from there
- J So you started in cross country, is that right?
- S Yeah, it was cross country
- J Could you talk me through your progression from there then?
- S Yeah, em, well from the age of 9 I used to train like twice a week on a Tuesday and Thursday and em, yeah it was mostly cross country I was involved in and I won my first Scottish title when I was 11, em, and then I won it again when I was 13 em, on the track I had run for the Scottish Schools team. I'd run in the Keltic Games and I ran in the British Indoor Ehamppionships at under 16 em, and I just progressed from there really, yeah
- J And where have you progressed to since then?
- S Well since then I went through a bad patch when I was kind of 17, 18, em, got back into my training with John and I used to watch Sheila and Lisa get GB vests and things and that kind of motivated me to start training well and, you know I wanted to run for the Great Britain Team and start winning Ehamppionships again so I think after that bad patch I just started getting into my training again and became more motivated and we had a really good group, you know? I think the progression has been obviously training harder and being more motivated
- J What have you managed to achieve since you got over the bad patch?
- S Well obviously I've started running faster, em, I've run for the GB Team at under 23 level. I ran for the GB Under 23 team for a couple of years at both 800 and 1500, em, I went to the European under 23 Ehamppionships and ran in the 1500, em, I ran absolutely terribly. I ran something like 4:21 and came last

in my heat but I absolutely enjoyed the...you know all the kind of things involved with being in a Great Britain Team. It was great and I thought, you know, "I really want more of this." And that was when I started thinking about moving from John. I thought you know, "I'm not really progressing." I stayed at the kind of 2:07 mark and 4:20 mark and I thought, you know, "I really want to bring this on. If I'm going to put so much time into it I might as well do it properly." And running is such a short term career I just thought, you know...well I discussed it with my dad and it took me about a year to get the guts to go to Tommy, but em I'd spoken to Yvonne Murray initially and she'd put me in contact with Tommy's secretary and I just took it from there. But I thought you know, I just had to bight the bullet because I wasn't really improving and John wasn't really open to any, you know kind of suggestions from like the GB Team Managers or whatever. He just kind of you know kind of laughed it off that I should be doing more speed work and so on, so I just started to click. I thought you know, "I'm doing all these long reps and then I'm coming onto the track and expecting to run a good 800", and it just wasn't happening you know, em, so I thought you know, "just move on." It was hard to move on though because as I said we had such a good training group and I was friendly with Sheila but you know, I had to go for it really

J And since moving to Tommy what have you managed to achieve?

S Em, well I ran in the Eommonwealth Games and got a Scottish Record, em, my 1500 time improved from about 4:16 to 4:09 and my 800 time improved from about 2:07 to 1:59

J And how does it make you feel when you look back on what you've achieved over the past few years?

S Em, I feel as if I've still to achieve a lot more, you know? I think I've broken through a wee bit but I want more basically. I really want more so that's why I'm doing all this, em, you know fair enough I was 4th at the Games and I got a Scottish record but you know, my aim was to get a medal and em, I just want to be well known. I want to be like what Kelly Holmes has been over the past 6 years or so. I want to be the best middle distance runner in Britain and take over from her. And I think there is a gap there to do so

J This section looks at your early involvement in athletics, so would you say that your decision to do athletics was influenced by anyone other than yourself?

S No, I don't think so. It was down to me, em, the thing that helped me obviously was the fact that my parents were quite happy for me to go to an athletics club and my mum, you know when I said, "I want to do athletics", em, she took me down to the local running club and supported me, em, she was very good with me and well, my dad was more involved with my brother, and she would take me down and make sure I got to the training every Tuesday and Thursday night and make sure I got to my races and make sure I had enough equipment and so on, em, you know to do well in my athletics really, and em, we moved up to East Kilbride when I was 11, but because I

liked my coach so much down at Ayr Seaforth, my mum would take me from East Kilbride to Ayr every Tuesday and Thursday night, em, in all sorts of weather conditions to make sure that I got to my training

J And when you were younger, what would you say it was that motivated you to participate in athletics? I know you've already touched on that, but I don't know if there's anything else you want to discuss

S Yeah, as I said you know what motivated me was to win trophies, to win my races and obviously you've always got people round about you that you want to beat [laugh], and that was my big aim, to beat my rivals. I also enjoyed it because I made friends as well which was good

J And as you were growing up and you were travelling down to Ayr to train, how important would you say that athletics was to you at that time?

S It was very important to me because at that time I'd just won my Scottish Championships and so on at cross country and then I was getting into you know cross country teams and things, so yeah of course it was very important to me

J And how much of your time would you say was spent doing athletics?

S Em, I suppose I did spend a lot of time at that kind of age you know travelling and things to my training and also my weekends would be taken up with racing, as I would race most weekends, em, so I mean I had time to do other things like go out with my friends and go shopping on a Saturday and things so it wouldn't take up too much of my time, but em, it did take up quite a lot of time

J So looking back how balanced would you say that your lifestyle was?

S Looking back em, I think it probably was quite balanced. I wasn't em, obviously training as much at that age so yeah, I still had time to do other things, to do my homework and so on

J So you don't feel that you missed out on anything at that age?

S Not at that age, no. I feel as if I'm missing out now, but not at that age

J We'll come back to that later then. And as you got older and more sort of into your teenage years, what sorts of plans if any did you make for future employment?

S Em, I was very aware you know, that I wanted a career. It was my mum that was instrumental in that actually. Because of her illness she wanted things to be sorted out because I didn't know at the time, but she knew she didn't really have much time left with us so em, I'd always wanted to be a physiotherapist but I knew that was really hard to get into do at university, so my mum had set up a...well she'd shown me the prospectus for a college in Glasgow to do

sports therapy and it was just like a new course which I thought was treating sports injuries. It didn't turn out like that, but at that time my running was still important to me but I never looked upon my athletics as a career at that point

J Right, so your decision to go into that kind of employment wasn't influenced by athletics, is that right?

S No, it didn't no because at that point I thought, you know I'd always wanted the dream of going to the Olympic Games and being an excellent athlete, but you've also got to come back and think, "hold on a minute, I've got to have a career first to fall back on"

J And you mentioned there about your mum's illness. Would you be able to tell me a bit more about that?

S Em, yeah sure. My mum had cancer for five years and she passed away when I was 15, so obviously...it didn't really affect my running at that time you know, but I think it was the years after that it affected it because obviously things changed in the house and my dad changed for a few years after it happened and eh, things were a bit more stressful at home

J Does it have any impact now on your athletics at all?

S Yeah it does, em, it really motivates me actually because one of the last things my mum said to me was that she wanted me to go to the Olympic Games and this isn't the reason I'm doing it, you know I'm doing it for myself as well, but that's in the back of my mind and you know, she put so much effort into it when I was younger that I feel as if I have to keep going to reach that goal and not just for myself and my dad who's also put in a lot of effort, em, but obviously for myself and for my mum's wish, you know?

J And obviously your plans to go into that form of employment didn't really influence your athletics at that time. Is that right?

S Em, no it didn't, no it didn't influence it

J The next questions are designed to help me understand how big a role athletics plays in your life. So at the moment what parts of your life would you say are the most important to you?

S Em, at the moment probably my family are important to me then my athletics and then it would be my work

J Ok, and how much time are you prepared to give to these different areas of your life?

S Em, actually most of my time is my athletics, eh, I'd like to spend more time with my family but obviously with my training commitments and so on it's hard to get any time with them, em, my work, I'm quite happy just working three days a week at the moment, em, it is important as well because obviously

it pays for the mortgage at the end of the day. I think the amount of time I give my athletics just now is probably just about right, but as for my family I would like to spend more time with them but I can't

J So how balanced would you say your lifestyle is just now?

S Em, for the past couple of years since I joined Tommy's group it's probably been more athletics orientated. I mean my family mean a lot to me, but if I had to chose over my athletics and my family I hope I'd chose my family

J So obviously you'd like to be able to spend more time with your family. Are there any other things that you feel you miss out on?

S Yeah, well obviously I miss out on going out and enjoying myself, socialising. Yeah, I don't drink very much alcohol so yeah I would like to go out more often and I mean I do miss out on that but as I said, you know, athletics is a short term career so I've just got to think, "this is only going to be for another five or six years"

J So do you find it difficult that you miss out on these things or...?

S Not so much now because I see things starting to happen with my running so em, I'm quite happy to make that commitment to it for just now

J So obviously you see that it's a worthwhile sacrifice?

S Yeah, it's definitely worthwhile

J Do you happen to have an example that illustrates how important athletics is to you?

S Em, I don't think I have an example really. You know I've done things like missing out on family weddings for my running, things like that where I know that other people may not have understood up until the Eommonwealth Games. I think that they thought that my running was just something I did, I don't think they realised how serious I was about it and it was actually Scott, my fiancée's family's weddings I missed out on and I don't think his parents were too happy with me but after the Eommonwealth Games they realised, you know this is what I do so I'm not prepared to give up much for my running

J And what would you say that your reasons are now for taking part in athletics?

S Now, em, as I said I can see things happening. My goals are becoming more achievable. My ultimate aim is the Olympic Games and that's what I'm focusing on

J And what would you say that you gain from doing athletics?

- S I think I get a lot of satisfaction out of it, you know a lot of things have started to happen like getting a lot more attention from the media, em, you can start making a lot more money from it as well, you know there's so much you can get out of athletics if you make it to the top
- J And you mentioned earlier Kelly Holmes and you mentioned that it's nice to be well known and also there when you mentioned the media attention, do you think that that's an important aspect for you, like the sort of recognition part of it?
- S Yeah, I think it is important to me. Although I am quite quiet and sometimes I'd just rather get on with things, em I would like to be well known. I would like to be like Yvonne Murray and Liz McEolgan and, you know get that kind of respect from people, yeah
- J And you've talked about what your major goals are. How important would you say that it is to you that you achieve these?
- S It is actually very important to me. I've put so much time and effort into this and so many things have gone on hold for my athletics so I want to finish my athletics career thinking that I've achieved my goals and I'm quite happy
- J And when you don't achieve your goals in athletics, how would you say that tends to make you feel as a person?
- S Yeah, I think I do obviously get a bit upset and things but I think it just motivates me even further. I just think, "Right you've got to go out there and do it next time." I think the thought of failing you know in any kind of competition, you know it's nicer to win than fail you know, and the feeling you get from winning something obviously outweighs losing so I just think you've just got to go out there and do your best and if you do your best then you can only be happy afterwards.
- J And when you say that you get upset, how does it tend to affect your mood would you say?
- S Em, I probably do get a bit down afterwards if I haven't competed very well. I kind of analyse my race and I talk to my coach and my dad and just try and put things into perspective really and make sure it doesn't happen again I think, em, just learn from every experience, especially now that I've started competing at a higher level, every race is an experience and it's really exciting
- J And you said that it tends to make you feel quite low, would you say that it affects your self-esteem in any way?
- S Em...I suppose it does affect my self-esteem for my next race but you know, as I said I just analyse it and just make sure it doesn't happen again, em, each race is a challenge and I really just try not to think about it to be honest, you know what's done is done and you just learn from it

- J And my next question was, how does it tend to affect your motivation? You've already kind of answered that as it sounds like it tends to increase your motivation, you become more determined to kind of reverse the situation
- S Exactly, yeah definitely I do
- J And how has the importance that you place on athletics changed from when you were younger?
- S Em, I think it's just because now I'm wanting to make more of a career out of it, whereas when I was younger it was just like something I did, you know? Although I was very competitive when I was younger, obviously at that age you don't think, "Oh I'm going to go to the Olympic Games this year" or whatever, em, when I was younger it was different, more things like winning the Scottish Championships. It was still very important to me, I'm not sure that's really changed that much to be honest. It's just that your goals change and em, in the way that you have to train harder as you get older because the competition's harder
- J Sure. And how has the amount of effort that you're prepared to put into athletics changed from when you were younger?
- S Em, as I've said now it's more of a career so yeah, I've put a lot of effort into it now compared to when I was younger. When I was younger it was just like, em, something that I enjoyed
- J And I'd like to get an idea of how you sort of see yourself, so if I was to ask you "who are you" what would you say that most important things that you'd tell me about yourself would be?
- S Em, I think I'm quite a quiet person and I do have a quiet side to me but on the other hand as Scott would probably tell you, I'm quite a motivated person and you know, I do get wound up like anybody else and you know I just want the best out of life really, em, I want to push myself as hard as I can to achieve my goals and I will. Em...
- J What do you see your roles in life as being?
- S My roles in life? Em, my role in life at the moment is...I think I do look upon myself as being more of an athlete now em, in the last week when I've gone part-time at work, I always used to think to myself you know, "my work is my job and I have to earn that money to pay off the mortgage", but now since the summer I think my role is as an athlete. At work I wouldn't think of myself as an athlete, I was just a normal person working in a hospital and it would be really hard for me like you know if I got a phone call at lunch time from Tommy or whatever, to switch back to being an athlete, you know em, or if I was speaking to the Institute or whatever, well I do, I find it really hard to go from being in a hospital environment and working to think, "Oh goodness, I need to start thinking about athletics."

- J So do you not find yourself at work sort of telling people about the athletic part of you?
- S I try and keep it really quiet at work. Everybody was really surprised that I was at the Eommonwealth Games and things. I mean all these nurses and doctors were like, “you never told us you ran” you know, but yeah that’s the kind of quiet side of me I think, em, it’s just at work you know I’m just like, “This is my job and this is what I have to do.” When I come home it’s like, “Right this is my training, this is what I have to do.” But now that I’ve gone part-time I do look upon myself more as an athlete and as I said I know that I’m starting to get somewhere and that I can start earning money from it and eh, I see that it is achievable, you can get it so you know, all these other athletes like Kelly Holmes, they’re just human like everybody else so I think during the summer when I had time off work for a month I was like, “This is great, I feel really fit” you know, “I’m an athlete.” But that all changed when I had to go back to work full-time. You know it was weird, it was really strange, em, as if it never happened but yeah, I think I look upon myself now as more of an athlete because I can start getting somewhere with it
- J It’s almost as if as you go into the different areas of your life, you switch off and on how you sort of see yourself?
- S Yeah, that’s right. I do yeah, it’s really strange. I do see myself as an athlete at home because obviously I’m thinking about it because I’m thinking about my diet and what training session’s coming up next and you know Scott, he treats me like an athlete as well, so that’s good but at work I don’t think of myself as an athlete. I’m just like a normal person
- J And in general, how big a part of who you are does being an athlete make up would you say?
- S Em, I think it actually makes up a lot of me yeah. I don’t know what I’d do without my athletics to be honest with you, yeah it makes up a huge part of me I would say, em maybe more than what it should but that’s just the way that things are
- J And how important is it to you that other people see you to be an athlete would you say?
- S Em, it’s not too important to me. As long as people round about me and close to me know how serious I am about it em, as for my work colleagues it doesn’t really bother me in the slightest, I just go out there and do the business at the end of the day you know, em, but yeah for people close to me it is important. For people that aren’t close to me I don’t really care
- J And how important is it to you that you see yourself as being a successful athlete?
- S Oh very important, yeah very important [immediate response]

J And who would you say the people are that you spend most of your time with?

S My training partners, em, my work colleagues and my fiancée

J How do you think they would describe you?

S My work colleagues I think would think that I'm mad sometimes, em, some of them do respect the fact that I am an athlete, but others just kid me on you know with diet and things and they say, "Oh look you're dead skinny, how are you so skinny?" And I'm like, "Eh because I train everyday" kind of thing em, some of them just don't take it seriously, they just kind of wind me up and sometimes I could really raise the bait, but I just try and ignore it, you know?

J This next section aims to find out how the importance that you place on athletics influences your experiences of stress and the way that you cope. So what I'd like you to do is to think of a particular situation that you found stressful and can also remember well and it should relate to a time when you hadn't performed as well as you had wanted to, so this could occur over a longer period of time or it could just be a one-off sort of competition or training session or whatever. So I'd like to get a picture in my mind of the situation so that I can imagine it, do you think you'd be able to describe it for me?

S Yeah, em, it was a period when I was younger from the age of about 17 to 18 that I wasn't as serious about my athletics, em, I wasn't motivated to train and em, obviously my fitness level decreased, em, and I found it quite upsetting because I'd always been winning competitions and you know had always been at peak fitness, you know?

J Ok, how long did this period last for?

S It lasted for about I'd say 2 years

J And you mentioned that you had a sort of loss of motivation. Did you find out what was at the root of that?

S I'm not sure. What happened was I'd left one training group to go to another and I don't know if it was that, but I couldn't drag myself to go out a run or anything em, I was still training a wee bit but I wasn't race fit or anything and I did try to race and it was just you know, ridiculous 'cause I wasn't fit enough to race so it was really upsetting. You know, people that I used to be miles in front of were now beating me and I got quite down about it

J So how often were you managing to train during this period?

S It was probably only about 3 times a week at that age, you know it wasn't enough

J And what had you been doing before that?

- S Before that I'd probably been training maybe about 4 or 5 times a week
- J And basically your head just wasn't in it?
- S Yeah my head wasn't in it at all, em, what happened was because I wasn't as fit and I wasn't racing, well I did do the odd race but obviously I wasn't very good and I didn't want to because I wasn't winning em, and also my dad was losing interest in me as well because I wasn't training as well and I wasn't going out for my runs when I should, so my dad just left me to it and that was tough
- J How did you feel about your dad losing interest?
- S I was disappointed in him to be honest 'cause I thought, "it's ok when I'm winning races and stuff, you're quite happy but now that I've reached the lowest point in my athletics career you're just kind of leaving me to it." He would say things to me to slag me off and I think it was his way of trying to motivate me but it just did the complete opposite, you know I didn't need that. And I ended up when I was about 18, 19 em, I joined another group and for me to train I had to get on a bus into the worst area of Glasgow, Bridgeton, and go to training there with John, and I did that for months. I got the bus in and the bus back, em, and then when I started running better my dad started getting more involved, so...
- J And had you ever experienced this sort of loss of motivation in the past?
- S No I hadn't. It was the first time and to be honest I didn't know what was going on, em nobody seemed bothered with me – no phone calls from Scottish Athletics or anything, I was just kind of left to it
- J And at that time, how important was it to you that you were performing well?
- S Em, it was important to me you know, em, I don't know, it was a horrible feeling to go out and to know you're not race fit and to get beaten by people who you were more talented than, so I just thought you know, "I'm not having this anymore. I want to improve", so that's why I made a change again of group because I didn't like being in that situation at all
- J And did you feel that other people expected anything of you during this sort of slump?
- S Oh definitely yeah, em, I think they must've wondered what was going on you know, but obviously if you've been at a good level before, you know people will wonder what's going on, but as I said nobody seemed to bother it was like, "Oh well, S's not running very well."
- J And obviously you've said that you were underperforming and people were beating you that shouldn't have been beating you and you said that you felt quite low. Could you maybe elaborate on that – what other sorts of emotions you felt?

- S Em, I don't know. It's hard to think you know, it was on my mind quite a lot. I used to think, "God S, you used to be at this good level and now look at you, you're unfit." I wouldn't say I was depressed you know, I had other things going on in my life at that time as well, but I was annoyed at myself, really annoyed at myself. How could I let myself get to this point that I was so unfit I couldn't get round an 800m, you know?
- J And on a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being not stressful and 10 being extremely stressful, how sort of stressful would you say the whole situation was?
- S Probably about 9. It was stressful
- J And what exactly was it about the fact that you were underperforming that made it stressful for you do you think?
- S Just the fact that I could see other people doing well, as I said people that I knew I was better than getting Great Britain vests and you know, running for Scotland and getting the new kit and stuff. I remember thinking that. I used to think, "Oh I really like that Scotland kit, I would like that", but obviously I wasn't fit enough to get picked for any teams, em so I think it was that and just the fact as I said that I couldn't complete a run. It was ridiculous, I couldn't go out for a 30 minute run and complete it
- J From a motivation point of view?
- S Yeah
- J And you mentioned earlier that it is extremely important to you that you see yourself as being a successful athlete. Do you think that could have influenced why you found the situation stressful in any way?
- S Yeah I think it definitely did influence it, you know I'm the type of person that wants to be the best all the time and not being the best is really kind of stressful. It really got me down. I lost the respect of like my dad and you know my P.E. teachers at school. My teachers I knew weren't as interested in me anymore because they knew that I was just kind of slacking off
- J Ok so you mentioned that there was a loss of respect from teachers etc. How did that make you feel?
- S Em, again you know I was aware of it so I don't know, I kind of felt guilty in a way. It was strange. I just felt kind of ashamed of myself. I think they were probably thinking you know, "She's daft. She's got so much more potential and she's not concentrating on her athletics and training as much, em so it makes me feel good now that I'm starting to get recognised and I kind of laugh at them now. I think, "Ha ha. I'm trying to make it. I bet you didn't expect that."

- J So it's perhaps the idea of other people having an image of you as being like a successful athlete, but perhaps during that period other people didn't see you as being a successful athlete and perhaps that was contributing a bit to the stress?
- S It was, yeah
- J Ok, well that's about how other people obviously perceive you. What about during that time did your own sort of self-image come into it would you say?
- S Em, as I said I felt a bit guilty and I was just down I think. I remember feeling down and I was just angry with myself because I knew what I was capable of but I just couldn't turn things round at that point
- J You sound like you could be a bit of a perfectionist. A typical definition of a perfectionist would be someone who tends to set themselves goals at a very high level and someone who tends to be very critical of themselves when they fail to achieve their goals, and not just in athletics, this would be something that would happen in every area of their life
- S Yeah that's very true actually, yeah
- J Would you describe yourself as that?
- S I think I am, even at work I am yeah
- J Do you tend to pitch your goals at quite a high level?
- S Yeah I do definitely, but I suppose you've got to haven't you?
- J And if you don't meet your goals in whatever it is, how do you tend to react?
- S Em, to be honest up until now I've been really fortunate because any goal I've made myself at the moment you know, I've achieved. Maybe in a few years that'll change. But I remember when I got back into my training and as I said it annoyed me because other people were getting places with their athletics – running for the Great Britain Team and so on. I remember I went down to the British Championships and I was aware that there was a team going, an under 20 team for some international in France and I did the 1500 and you know, I really wanted to make that team a lot and I think I was 3rd, so I missed out on a place. You know that was a goal I hadn't achieved and I felt again just really annoyed with myself em, that I wasn't fit enough to have run better because one of my training partners, well in fact two of my training partners got to that GB match, em, and I think it was more kind of motivational for me because I spoke to my coach about it and he said you know, "You will run for Great Britain, you can do it." And I just went for it. I thought, "Yeah I can do it." I kind of turned it around. I didn't go all kind of depressed and think, "Oh well that's me, I'm chucking my running. I thought, "No, if they can do it I can do it."

- J So you turned it into a sort of challenge?
- S I did definitely. I turned even my low point when I was 17, 18 em, seeing people get places and getting all this nice kit and stuff which I really liked and winning things and being in the papers and everything. I thought, “No, if they can do it I can do it.” So as I said I got on the bus and travelled into the worst place in Glasgow you could possibly go to train
- J Just to sum up then, going back to the slump that you experienced when you were 17, 18, part of the reason that that was stressful for you would be because you are quite an achievement orientated person and when you fail to achieve at the level you feel you should be achieving obviously that’s quite stressful for you. Also there appear to be some kind of image issues going on, whereas before you saw yourself as being a successful athlete and other people also saw you as being a successful athlete, so obviously there was that coming into it as well, is that right?
- S Yeah, that’s right yeah
- J Ok, obviously you’ve described how you were able to turn the situation into something quite positive and it became a challenge for you. When you were first sort of getting your head around what was happening, how would you have described it then – would you say that you viewed it as a situation that was negative and threatening or at that initial time was it positive and challenging?
- S Em, initially I think it was a negative thing, but em, I think I kind of isolated myself a bit from my athletics even although I was still training twice a week at Erownpoint I still, you know I definitely isolated myself from it and then I think I must’ve been more aware of what everybody was doing you know a year later or whatever and I started turning it round to a kind of positive thing ‘cause I thought, “Well I can do that if I put in a bit more training and spend a bit more time on it”
- J And obviously the reason that it was initially negative was because of what we’ve already covered, but you turned it into a positive thing. Going back to this idea that you isolated yourself from the training, do you think that that could possibly have been a way of coping with the whole situation?
- S Yeah I think it was, definitely yeah it was
- J How did you feel as a person during the situation would you say?
- S Em, I think I felt like a bit of a slob to be honest. I wasn’t feeling that great about myself because since the age of 9 my running had always been my kind of main thing you know, em, not at that age obviously but it was important to me. I remember at school I used to think about my athletics all the time, so much so that I started worrying in case I had some mental disorder or something [laughs], ‘cause I used to think about my running constantly sitting in class thinking about my running when I was younger

- J And obviously you've talked about in the past how you used to think about it all the time, what about during the period of the underperforming? How much were you thinking about the situation?
- S It was on my mind quite a lot. I used to think, "Right, you need to turn this around. You need to get out training" and the biggest thing I did was changed group
- J So that was another sort of coping strategy?
- S It was yeah. If I hadn't changed group then I'd probably still have been stuck in that rut
- J And my next question was, did it affect the way you saw yourself? I guess you've already answered that
- S Yeah it did, yeah
- J Could you elaborate on that any more or...?
- S Em, I don't know. I just felt a bit disappointed. I don't know, I think beforehand when I was doing well at my running I felt kind of special in a way, but then nobody seemed to be bothered with me, so yeah it got me a bit down
- J So now I need to get an idea of how important athletics was to you at that time. Obviously I've got an idea because you've done the questionnaire, but if I could just ask you how important would you say that athletics was to you when you were 17, 18?
- S Em, it wasn't as important to me, em obviously compared to now
- J And what about being successful in athletics?
- S Well I think you know I still wanted to be successful but I just lacked the motivation to go out and train, so being successful probably wasn't as big an issue as it is now
- J And at that time, what other sorts of areas of your life were important to you would you say?
- S Em, at that time because I wasn't training I had more time to socialise and things and go out at night, em, so socially things were a lot better...going to the Metro on a Saturday night! [laughs]
- J Ok, so obviously you started to spend more time on the social aspects of your life. Were there any other things or did the social really take over, or...?

- S It was mostly the social thing that took over and all the people that I socialised with were not athletes, whereas before they would've been athletes like I used to stay at my friends' houses who were athletes, but that totally changed. I went from being friends with athletes and being totally dedicated to my running to going away with other people
- J So if athletics had been more important to you at that time do you think that would've changed how you viewed the situation in terms of how stressful you found it?
- S Yeah I think it would've changed yeah, em I think I probably would've been happier if I'd stayed in my athletics although would that have changed things now? Maybe I needed that kind of time out, you just don't know. Because I'd been training since I'd been so young maybe I just needed the time out. It might've benefited me, you just don't know
- J So thinking back to when you were first faced with the stressful situation again, to what extent did you feel that you were in control of it?
- S Em, I think I was pretty much in control. It was my choice not to train you know, although I don't think it helped with the training group I was in to be honest, em, I think you know, I made the right decision to change because you know everybody in the other group was so much more into their athletics compared to the one I was in when I wasn't so motivated to train
- J And you mentioned earlier that you didn't really understand what was happening, so do you think that, although you've described that you felt in control, do you think that you may have felt a bit of a loss of control as well?
- S Em, yeah because I suppose...I don't know it's hard to say. It was like, yeah I suppose because it was like such an uphill struggle to get back to the top you know, em, I suppose I could've been more in control of it as in starting to train again but I don't know, it's quite a hard one
- J I suppose a lot of these things are subconscious so it's difficult to know. What do you think you blamed for the whole situation?
- S I blamed myself. It was all me, although I was annoyed at my dad for not supporting me as much through a bad point
- J And when it all first started to happen did you feel as if you were going to get through it and did you feel like you'd be able to cope with it at that point, or...?
- S Em, yeah I think I did. I think I knew in the back of my mind that you know one day I'd get into my athletics again given the right situation
- J And maybe you just needed a bit of time out

- S I think yeah maybe I did, but you know it's not time out that I enjoyed. I was still thinking about my running and thinking, "hurry up and go out and train", but you know I didn't so it was a vicious circle really
- J What sorts of things did you feel at that time that you had available to you to help you cope with it?
- S Nothing, nothing at all [immediate response]. I went from winning Scottish Championships, em, being part of City of Glasgow and nobody bothered with me to be honest. I don't think that happens now really with Scottish Athletics with the set-up but no, for me to get back into my running it was all down to me. It was me that decided, "Right I'm going to get on that bus and get to training."
- J And what sorts of personal things did you feel at the time that you had available to you to help you deal with it?
- S Em...well what I did was I started training again. I started getting more involved and that was all down to me. Nobody else could've done it all for me. It was me that decided, "Right go and do it." And as things started getting better obviously, it's the same old story in athletics, people start getting more interested
- J And did you have anyone you felt you could talk to about it? Obviously you felt that your dad was a bit...
- S Em, I think my dad was going through a funny patch because of what happened with my mum and things as well, I need to remember that, he was very stressed. But I can't remember discussing it with anyone else to be honest, it was just a decision that I made
- J Ok so we're now going to talk about the coping strategies that you employed and obviously you've already talked in quite a bit of detail about this. Obviously first of all you isolated yourself from the whole training thing and you described how that was like a coping strategy in itself
- S Yeah that's right, it was yeah. As I say I'd never have socialized with any other athletes or anything like that
- J So do you think you deliberately pulled yourself away from other athletes?
- S I think I did because I didn't really want to know what was going on because I'd have been even more annoyed with myself
- J So you were annoyed with the situation so to cope with it, rather than investing all your time in athletics you started investing it in a different area
- S Exactly yeah I did. I know a lot of athletes when they reach a low point they go and watch races and stuff. I didn't, I just kept myself totally away from it all

- J And did you feel that helped?
- S I think it did help me yeah, but for me to start getting involved in it again, em I started to read papers and be more aware of what other people were achieving and I think that kind of motivated me
- J So obviously you had a long period where those coping strategies were employed - you isolated yourself from your training, put more into your social life, then decided "I want this back again", so where did you go from there?
- S Em, I don't know, in terms of coping I'm not sure. Echanging group was the main thing and then my goals changed. I wanted to run for Great Britain, I wanted to start winning races again because I kind of feel looking back I missed out on so many things in the under 20 age group and I get annoyed with myself
- J So what sort of action did you take then to go about changing your goals?
- S I don't know, I was more kind of switched on. I just did all the training I got told to do instead of just missing out training sessions and the group we had was excellent, we were all motivated and we were all very competitive with each other even in training, so I think I just wanted to make something out of it again you know?
- J So over the sort of two year period although initially you sort of avoided the whole situation, you then did the opposite, you approached it and said, "Right I'm going to deal with this now"
- S I did yeah, I just went for it
- J And did that change the way that you viewed the whole situation?
- S Em...yeah I suppose it did change yeah, em, I don't know I was a lot happier to be back you know, em, and to have some routine in my training and things like that, em my coach was interested, my dad started coming back in and getting more involved yeah, so it was a happier, less stressful situation
- J So you felt as if you started to regain the things that you'd lost, like the recognition and your fitness and so on
- S I did yeah, em, as I said I went down to the British Ehamppionships and I think it was 3rd I came in the 1500 and then I started getting picked for Scottish teams again and then I got GB vests when I was like 21 I think, I started getting GB vests
- J So you turned it around quite quickly then
- S Yeah and em, I think I was just as motivated as much then as I am now but my goals became more...at a better level

- J Ok, so on a scale of 1 – 10, how well would you say you coped with that whole period?
- S Not very well, probably about 4 maybe, yeah. I didn't cope with it greatly to be honest
- J The next questions still relate to this period of underperforming, em, you've already answered quite a lot of them....I'm just trying to find a question that you haven't already answered! How did the stressful situation influence your image of yourself as an athlete would you say?
- S Em, I knew I was crap [laughs]. I knew I wasn't a very good athlete at the time and I didn't like that. As I said, I like to be the best and when you're not the best it's not very nice. To be honest, I didn't really think to myself that I was an athlete, you know? I was just like somebody that went out on a Saturday night, although I had all these trophies and things in the cabinet to remind myself that you know, I did run
- J And obviously once you had dealt with the whole situation, the importance that you placed on athletics went right back up
- S It did, definitely yeah
- J Has anything changed in your life since then that would change the way that you viewed the situation?
- S Em, my performance level has increased a lot since then, yeah I don't know, I think I'm more professional and that I look after myself more as well now, more like an athlete should but you know, I think as you do get better and you know you do get more recognition that you do have to change things, you know you have to look upon yourself as an athlete and I think basically just looking after yourself, nutrition and so on
- J Well that's just about all I have to ask you. Before we finish though do you think there are any important factors that we failed to discuss in relation to your experiences of underperforming?
- S No I don't think so, I think we've covered everything
- J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?
- S No, I'm quite happy. I think everything was covered and I'm quite happy with it
- J Well thank you very much, it's been very helpful.

STUDY 2

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – HAZEL

- J Before we start discussing athletics I'd like to get some background information from you, so to begin with could you maybe tell me a bit about yourself, like your age and where it is you live just now?
- E Yeah, I'm 21 years old and I live in Glasgow, in the West end I travel home fairly often to Ayr
- J And who is it that you live with?
- E Three girls who are all students and we're all really good friends
- J And what's your occupation just now?
- E I'm working in Elydesdale bank
- J And what sorts of hours are you working?
- E Just Monday 'till Friday, 9 'till 5ish. I've just started, I've only been there for 3 weeks
- J And how's it going?
- E I'm not enjoying it one little bit [laughs]
- J And why's that?
- E It's just extremely boring and not what I expected. It's not what I was told the job would be. It's just probably because they're really busy and I suppose they don't really have much time for me, time to show me things so, I suppose it might get better but I don't know how much longer I'll be there for
- J And what were you doing before that job?
- E Well I was a student for the last 3 years and then in the summer I had part-time jobs
- J And how does your job fit in with your training?
- E Eh it hasn't interfered too much, it's quite lucky. Because it's 9 to 5 I can still get back in time for training. Obviously I've been more tired and stuff but it has been fitting in quite well, so I'm quite surprised actually
- J And do you have any brothers or sisters?
- E Yeah I've got one older brother. He lives back in Ayr. We don't have a particularly close relationship [laughs]

- J And is he involved in sport at all?
- E Not seriously, no. He enjoys going to the gym and stuff but...
- J And what about your parents, were they involved in sport?
- E Yeah my dad has always ran. Now he just keeps fit but he did marathons and stuff when he was younger, em, so he's really active so I take after him
- J And was it competitive marathons that he used to do or...?
- E Not I mean, not really, just for fun I suppose
- J And what event is it that you specialise in?
- E 200m
- J Ok, and do you do any other events?
- E Yes 100m, but I'm thinking about also doing 400m as my second event, maybe...we'll see how my training goes
- J And what's your training set-up like, like your coach and your training group?
- E I've got 2 coaches, they've put a lot of work into my training, em, BP is my main coach if you like in the running side of things, em HW looks after my weights and my plyometrics so normally our training would be Monday night's a plyometrics session and some running as well, em, Tuesday night would be a track session with Bob, one week would be a longer session and the second week is more of a faster session, em, Wednesday is a weights session and a longer run, Thursday is, it's changed. It used to be kind of resistance stuff on the track, now it's more kind of explosive stuff. Fridays at the moment are rest days for me, but as we get closer to competitions it would be starting sessions. Saturday morning is an endurance session and tyre pulling and a Sunday is a track session and a longer run
- J So you're training 6, 7 times a week?
- E Yeah. There's two groups, well, normally it would be 3 of us that train together but on a Tuesday and Saturday we move up to 8 of us that train together. The group's quite motivational most of the time
- J And what sort of age were you when you first started athletics?
- E I was 12. It was primary 7 at school
- J And how was it that you got involved?

E Em, I was picked to run in a school relay, em, and someone from the local athletics club came along to take us through relay practices and he suggested that I come along to the athletics club to try it so I did

J And could you talk me through your progression since primary 7?

E Em, the first couple of years were just for fun, just a hobby, em, I did well in the under 13, under 15 age groups, em, and it was really just a kind of social thing. There was a big group of us that went along. It was nothing too serious, and then getting into 4th, 5th year I did Scottish Schools' competitions and it became more important as I began to see that I did have a talent and I was doing quite well, em, in 4th year at school I won my first medal at the Scottish Schools and I got picked for the Scottish Schools' team, em, then it just got better. Fifth year at school was probably my best year, em, I won the Scottish Schools' over 100 and 200 and got picked for the teams and I did well in the Scottish Championships as well. And then I went to America for a year instead of doing 6th year and the school was very sporty but unfortunately athletics wasn't a big part of it, it wasn't one of their main sports and basically they didn't really have any club things at all in the school so when I went there at first they had different seasons and it wasn't the athletics season so I played hockey which I'd played at school, em, which kept me fit but it wasn't really doing much for my athletics. And then in the Spring when I did do athletics it was nothing like what I'd been doing. It wasn't serious. The trainers weren't quite as educated if you like, so that kind of put me quite a bit back. But I came back and did some competitions that year but nothing much. Then I came up to Glasgow and started University and I found it really difficult just training with one other girl and we were getting sessions sent up from my coach at home so we had no one there to kind of push us and encourage us if you like, and obviously there were a lot of distractions. So to be honest by the end of that year I was probably ready to give up just having nothing really to help me, just plodding along not really doing the same training as I'd done in the years before and then I met Bob who suggested that I came along and trained with him. And since then it's got better, em, after one year of winter training with him I was back getting my times right down again. And then after my second winter I got third in the Scottish, so I was quite glad that I didn't give up

J And what sorts of achievements have you had in the last couple of years, third in the Scottish obviously, anything else?

E Yeah, British Uni's I did pretty well in. I got third two years ago in the 200 indoors and second this year. I ran faster indoors than I did outdoors which is a bit annoying, em, third in the Scottish...

J And have you represented any teams?

E Yeah I was picked for the International down South and then I was selected to go to Belgium, but I couldn't go because I was on holiday

J Was that for Scotland as well?

- E Yeah, it was the under 23 team
- J And how did you feel about not being able to go to Belgium?
- E I was really disappointed 'cos obviously at the start of the season you're looking to get to internationals and get recognition I guess from Scottish Athletics and I couldn't go, but my holiday had been planned so...
- J So do you get any support in terms of like the Institute?
- E No apart from Eity of Glasgow Eouncil
- J In this next section we'll discuss your early involvement in athletics. So first of all, was your decision to do athletics influenced by anyone other than yourself?
- E Yeah I'd say at school the teacher that got me involved and the coach that came down and asked me to come along. I probably wouldn't have thought about going at that point, maybe in a year or so but at that point I probably wouldn't have thought about going to training or whatever, so yeah
- J And once you actually started doing your training would you say you were doing it for yourself or were there other people sort of influencing?
- E Probably for myself at that point, just because it wasn't serious and I did enjoy it. It was only twice a week and I enjoyed going down and my best friend went with me
- J At what about, you said that your dad had been involved in athletics, was he involved in your athletics as well?
- E Yeah he's played quite a big part. When I was younger he came down quite a lot to sessions and took me there and to competitions, just the usual but he was very...he didn't push me too much but he just gave me enough support, just what I needed. As long as I was happy he was
- J So have your family in general supported you?
- E Yeah, yeah, they're very supportive
- J And when you were younger, obviously you've already said that you enjoyed the social aspects of athletics, was there anything else that was motivating you to participate would you say?
- E Yeah, I guess em, even at primary school wanting to do well maybe at sports day and getting that extra little bit of training done to impress the teachers and things like that, em, and I do like to do well in things
- J So was it a bit about achievement then?

- E Yeah probably at that age. I did want to do well and I wanted other people to recognise it
- J And from the age of twelve as you were growing up, how important was athletics to you would you say?
- E Em, it's always been a big part of my life. When I started athletics I also ice skated, em, and I'd been doing that since I was 5, so it was quite serious and I trained a lot for it, like 5, 6 times a week when I was that age so I was trying to fit both in
- J So was that like competitive ice-skating?
- E Yeah, I ice skated for Scotland and stuff, so for the first couple of months I was going skating straight after school from 4 'till 7 and then straight to the track from 7 'till 9 and it was really hectic. I wanted to fit them both in and obviously it came to the point where I couldn't get my school work in so I had to choose and I chose athletics, so I guess yeah, from quite an early age it has been important. Even if I haven't been doing it seriously it's still been important enough for me to do it
- J So what made you decide to go from skating to athletics?
- E Em, I think because I'd been doing skating for quite a while, I kind of realised...well I was still progressing in it and I had been doing quite well but I think I realised that I probably had more potential in running, em, so...and I didn't have to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning for morning training!
- J So again it was a bit about achievement and you realised that you could achieve more in athletics
- E Yeah
- J And when you were younger, how much time were you spending doing athletics?
- E Em, at first it was just 2 nights a week, just the club nights, going down and then it probably changed to maybe 3 times a week and then 1 day at the weekend, so not an awful lot of time at all
- J And when was it that it started to take up more of your time would you say?
- E Em, while I was at school I didn't really notice it taking up too much of my time. Even, like when I was doing well in 4th and 5th year, I was still only training 3 or 4 times a week, em, so probably not until maybe two and a half years ago, that's when it really started changing how much time I had and limiting what other things I could do
- J And what do you think your reasons were for deciding to put more into it?

E Em, well because I got my new coach and he seemed really enthusiastic and he motivated me I guess just to kind of get back into it and take it more seriously again and I did have the time. My course wasn't too demanding at university, so I put more into it and I enjoyed it. Instead of it just being me and the other girl I was back in a group so again it was a social thing as well. And I didn't mind going down and putting more time in, it was always a good laugh at training, so...and I suppose I realised that again I could work my way back up and do quite well you know, my coach kind of believed in me if you like that I had the potential, so...

J So that gave you the confidence and motivation

E Yeah

J And looking back again to your school years, how balanced would you say that your lifestyle was?

E Em, I think it was pretty well balanced. I didn't really...because it was only 2 or 3 times a week when I was younger it didn't interfere with school work or didn't really interfere with going out with my friends because it wasn't...It was just a hobby at that age, so my friends were maybe in the swimming club or something so it was just kind of normal if you like

J Would you describe it as a hobby now?

E No [laugh], definitely not!

J What would you describe it as now?

E I don't know....a career, I'd like it to be

J And as you got older and more into your training, what sort of plans if any, did you make for your future employment?

E Well, now as well I've no idea what I want to do and even choosing like a course at university, I found it really hard because I didn't even have the slightest idea of what I wanted to do. And that's one of the reasons that I went to America, just to kind of broaden my horizons, to kind of give me some ideas but it didn't [laughs], so I came back and just kind of picked my course because it was quite general

J What was it?

E Just an Arts degree, so I did psychology and business management, em, but looking back I don't think that was the right thing to do because now I've finished uni I still don't know what I want to do, yeah my degree's not helping me get a job so I haven't really made any plans

J So do you think that athletics has played any role in your lack of plans?

- E Em well if I'm being honest, through university probably because if I wasn't doing athletics I probably maybe would have put more into university and maybe wanted to be more specific if you like and yeah, I'd have had more time to kind of enjoy it more, but I don't regret it. I mean I wouldn't go back and change it I don't think
- J The next questions are designed to help me understand how big a role athletics plays in your life. What parts of your life would you say are the most important to you?
- E Well obviously my family is very important, and friends, but after that athletics would be the most important. The job I'm in at the moment isn't particularly important and I'm doing it so that I can support myself and live in Glasgow and so that I can still train up here
- J And how much time would you say you're prepared to give to these different areas of your life?
- E Em, well I'd give my family as much time as they needed, but obviously I see them when I can if you like. Athletics I give as much time as possible. I put in as much time as I can, as much energy as I can, em, at the moment's it's probably not quite as much as I'd like because I'm having to work, but it still takes up most of my time I'd say outside of work. And I spend a lot more time doing athletics than seeing my friends if you like, like socializing, although my friends are really important. But still I put more into my athletics
- J And how balanced would you say that your lifestyle is just now?
- E For me I'd say it's pretty balanced but I think if someone else saw it they'd think, "she's a bit crazy!" I mean I go to work, I go straight to training, come home, have my dinner and go to bed basically, that's my life during the week, so most people think I don't have a life, but I don't mind doing it, em, it's very hard sometimes but I would say it's balanced for me, as much as it can be at the moment 'cos I have to work
- J And what about in comparison to when you were younger, how balanced would you say it was in comparison to that?
- E Em, well it's less balanced. I've got less time for myself if you like, em, yeah it's probably much less balanced because I spend much more time doing athletics compared to my 3 nights a week when I was younger. I don't do as much socially, which is bad, em...
- J And how do you feel about the fact that you perhaps miss out on some social things?
- E Em, sometimes it's hard, like if all my flat mates are going out and I'll either say, "Well I'll come along and not drink", or "I'll go home early." It's really hard when they're all falling about the place and other times you just have to

say, “No, I’m not coming out tonight.” It can be really, really hard when you’re sitting in and watching a video on a Saturday night for the third weekend in a row. It’s like, “What am I doing?” But I kind of, in my first year at university my athletics wasn’t my priority and I enjoyed myself then and I think since then I just...my priorities have obviously changed, so although I miss out on the socializing I get a lot back in return for what I do and I prefer it, so...

J So you feel that the sacrifices that you make are definitely worthwhile?

E Yeah

J And obviously it does sound like athletics is extremely important to you. Have you got an example that could illustrate that?

E Em, probably just the job thing, that I am only doing it so that I can live up here. I mean I could go home and live off my parents, but I want to stay up here so that I’m here for training and...but last Saturday we had the National Evaluation Day and I also had my dad’s 50th birthday the night before and I knew I was going to be tired so I took the day off work [laughs], so...

J What was the National Evaluation Day?

E It was, em, I think it was like kind of the top sprinters and hurdlers and we had to go and get different testings. We got our weight and stuff done and then we had to...we did like a 30m sprint, we did kind of vertical jumps, horizontal jumps, ball throws so I took the day off work so that I could prepare myself

J And what would you say that your reasons are now for taking part in athletics?

E Em, I think I am a really hard worker and I’m really motivated and I like to achieve things and do well in things, em, and I kind of set quite high goals for myself really and I want to meet them and...

J ...Athletics gives you a way to feed that part of you?

E Yeah

J So again it’s sort of about achievement?

E Yeah, I just couldn’t imagine not doing it

J What sorts of things do you think you gain from it?

E Em, satisfaction in a way. Like even just now when there’s no competition’s, to go out and do a hard training session makes you feel...it gives you a buzz. It makes you feel really good, maybe not straight after, but you know you get the buzz when you’ve done a really good session. Also just, like not wasting your time. Although you might miss going out on a few nights with your friends, you’re not just going out drinking and wasting your time, you’re doing

something kind of worthwhile and something that I'm going to look back on and be glad that I did

J And you described that feeling that you get if you do like a good training session. What about if you have a bad training session or say you compete badly how do you feel then?

E Frustrated, very frustrated, em, if it's a training session you'll be kind of a bit disappointed or annoyed at yourself. I probably wouldn't think too much in to it, but, if it was a competition then as well as being frustrated there would be anger and lots of different emotions I guess involved because you put so much work into doing well and then you let yourself down

J And what would you say your major goals are, em, like what you would like to achieve by the end of your athletic career?

E Well obviously I'd like to go to a major championship, whether that's realistic or not I don't know, but at the moment I'd like to think that it is

J And how important is it to you that you achieve that would you say?

E Em at the moment because I'm putting so much time and effort into it, it is very important, but as long as I know that I've tried my hardest and do as well as I can then that's I think the main thing. I'm not going to be devastated if I don't actually make it, but as long as I've done the best that I can and have put as much as I can into it then I think I'll be happy

J And going back again to this business of if you don't achieve your goals in terms of a training session or if you have a bad competition, you explained the frustration that you feel. Are there any other sort of emotions? Could you describe in a wee bit more detail perhaps how you would feel after something like that?

E After a training session it probably would mainly just be frustration and maybe disappointment in myself – I could've tried harder, pushed myself that wee bit further, em, after a competition if I've performed badly I'd feel a lot worse, probably quite down, just generally in a really bad mood, em, and it would probably take me quite a while to get over it

J What about your self-esteem, how would you say that changes, if it does?

E I think it would be a lot lower after performing badly if my expectations had been high then I would have really low self-esteem, but I think after performing badly it does make me feel more determined as well and want to get back to the track and get training harder and just trying to correct whatever I'd done wrong

J And how has the importance that you place on athletics changed from when you were younger?

- E It's changed quite a bit because obviously at first with it just being a hobby, something for fun, and although it is still fun in some ways [laughs] em, I guess as you get better and as people recognise you there's more expected of you so you have to live up to other people's expectations as well as your own
- J Does that kind of make it more important in a way?
- E Yeah, yeah, 'cos really when I was in first year uni and I was thinking maybe, "This is me and I've finished, there's no point in going on," there's still that bit of you that thinks, "people still know me and I can still come back"
- J Do you feel as if you almost have to perhaps fulfill other people's expectations of you?
- E Yeah, and prove something, yeah
- J What do you think that is?
- E What do I think that is? I don't know, em...[difficulty with question]
- J And how has the amount of effort that you're prepared to put into athletics changed from when you were younger?
- E Em, the amount of effort? I think when I was younger I didn't pay attention to my training, I just went down and my coach gave me a session and I got on with it and I didn't think of doing too much extra by myself. But now obviously I know what I do and why I do it in a lot more detail and I know, em, like my coaches educate me I guess as well as just telling me what the session is and why I'm doing it so I know how important different aspects of my training are and so I'm willing to put more into it. And I guess my expectations have risen as I've got older so to achieve my goals I have to put more effort in and I know that so...
- J So as you've got older basically the recognition thing has got more, but also you've increased your goals so obviously you've got to put more effort in
- E Yeah
- J I'd like to get an idea now of how you sort of see yourself. So if I was to say to you, "who are you?", what do you think the most important things that you'd tell me about yourself would be?
- EPersonality wise I'd say I was a very committed person, all the usual, friendly attributes etc., but if I was describing myself to someone else one of the first things I'd say was that I was an athlete, em, as it's one of the most important things in my life so I want other people to know that about me, so...
- J So obviously it sounds like it's important to you that other people see you as an athlete. What about how you see yourself?

- E I think well, I'm trying to think if I wasn't an athlete what I'd see myself as and I can't really. I mean if you asked the question to someone who wasn't an athlete I don't know what kind of answer they'd give, em.....sorry [difficulty with question]
- J It's a difficult kind of concept
- E Yeah, well it is important to me that I see myself as an athlete...
- J Would you say that that's the most important thing?
- E I can't think of anything else that I see myself as, so yeah
- J And how important is it that you see yourself as a successful athlete?
- E Well it's probably just as important. I don't really want to be an athlete if I'm not successful, well not totally but you know
- J Yeah. And who are the people that you spend most of your time with?
- E Probably just my flat mates
- J And are they athletes?
- E No
- J And do you think they would describe you as an athlete or...?
- E Definitely. I think they'd also describe me as a committed person and someone who's quite determined, 'cos they're always really impressed at how like if they're going out, how I can't be influenced or they can't influence me into going out, so...
- J This section aims to find out how the importance that you place on athletics influences your experiences of stress and how you cope, so what I'd like you to do here is to think of a situation that you found stressful and can remember well and in particular the stressful situation should relate to a time where you had not performed as well as you had wanted to, so it could involve a one-off competition or it could be like a performance slump that lasted for a longer period of time. So what I'd like to do is get a picture in my mind of the situation so that I can imagine it, so if you could describe it for me when you're ready please
- E Ok it was just last season through the summer. My training had been going really, really well leading up to the first competitions and the first competitions went not too bad but not quite as quick as I wanted them. I think it was the British Universities and I came 3rd but my times weren't really what I'd wanted them to be and I think I was maybe even at that point putting too much kind of importance on the times which isn't what it comes down to, it's more your placings and stuff. So I only had about 2 competitions and then it

was the West Districts and I had a really bad race for 200 and was very disappointed, em, it had been windy so the times were obviously bad, but the wind was kind of an excuse. I just felt that I'd run really badly and maybe kind of put it towards maybe the training, maybe my legs weren't fresh enough and I hadn't kind of laid off the training enough to recover in time for the competition, em, but a week and a half later I had an open graded meeting. It was one of the ones where you were invited to run so I decided to do the 100m beforehand, just use it as a warm-up and I did it and it was just a disaster, an absolute disaster. It was just an unbelievably slow time, like compared to my training times and stuff. It was just really, really bad, em, I couldn't even do the 200 after it. I was just really upset, really frustrated, really angry and I couldn't face running the 200 to be disappointed again, em, I was supposed to have a competition on the Sunday, a Womens' League and I didn't run it, and then a week later I had the Nationals and luckily I came back on form for that if you like, so it was just maybe over a period of 2 – 3 weeks, but my training was going really well and I just wasn't performing to the level that I should've been, em, and I just found this really stressful

J Ok, so you said that you were running badly in competition in comparison to your training. Did you have any idea of why that was?

E At the time not really, apart from maybe just ideas like I wasn't fresh enough and maybe I'd been doing too much leading up to the competition, em, but looking back I probably was putting too much pressure on myself and going for times that were unrealistic when I wasn't kind of at my peak if you like, em, at the time I just put it down to training and doing too much. I wasn't really wanting to do my best at those competitions, but I was obviously aiming to peak for the Nationals and stuff or just aiming to do well at the Nationals, em, but looking back I think it was just myself putting too much pressure on the times, on things that maybe weren't quite as important as just going out there and running and competing

J And could you describe how you felt before these races, like in the warm-up?

E Really, really nervous, like just stupidly nervous, especially at an open graded when there's no need, you're just going out there and running for yourself, em, just working myself up into a nervous wreck really. I know some nerves are good but then they go beyond a point and they just work the opposite way for you, em, I guess I kind of doubted myself even before I ran. I didn't have the confidence in myself. My confidence had gone right down and I just, I don't know

J What do you think was at the route of those nerves?

E Em, probably just my expectations of wanting to do well so badly was just making me...and knowing that I'd performed badly in the last couple of races and just knowing that this was one of the last competitions before the Nationals and I had to get a good time, I had to do it, just putting too much pressure on myself and just wanting to do too much maybe

- J And why do you think that it was so important to you that you did well?
- E Because of all the hard work I'd put in and because my training had been going so well, em, this is what I'd spent however many months preparing for and it wasn't coming together like it should be, so I was just disappointed in myself over and over again and finding it really hard to take
- J And was this something that you'd ever experienced before?
- E Well I always get nervous before competitions, but I'd never been quite as nervous as I was getting. And even my coach was getting frustrated at me because I couldn't keep calm and I couldn't control my nerves
- J What about your slump, was that something that you'd experienced before?
- E Yeah, I had experienced it the winter before but that was because of my training. I'd started doing weights with a guy up at the gym at university and he was giving me all sorts of things to do and it was just taking everything out of my legs, so although I was still running well in training, by the time it got to the weekend when I was competing my legs were just like lead, so luckily my second coach came along and fixed that before it was too late and by the time the British Uni's came it was sorted luckily
- J And before the slump started, did you have any expectation that it might happen?
- E It was a shock because although in my first race I had done quite well and just maybe not got the times that I'd wanted, I hadn't really thought much about it, just thinking that it was just maybe my first race and training was still in my legs and stuff so I hadn't expected it at all, no
- J And what did you feel that other people expected of you at the time?
- E Well one of my coaches had set me up, had told me what to expect in my times, or maybe what to expect towards the end of the season so I think they were expecting quite a lot of me. And maybe rightly so from the way my training had gone, em, so they were obviously disappointed as well, but obviously like me they just wanted to get through the problem, find out why I wasn't competing well because my training was going well, em, but apart from that like from my family's point of view, they didn't expect anything from me. They realised I was disappointed but they weren't disappointed in me and they didn't expect too much of me
- J So really it was all down to your own expectations rather than anyone else's
- E Yeah, yeah
- J And on a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being not at all stressful and 10 being extremely stressful, how stressful would you say the situation was for you?

- E I'd say 8 ½ or 9. It had a fairly big impact on the rest of my life, my moods and stuff, just not wanting...yeah I'd say probably 9
- J So thinking back to the time of your performance slump, what exactly was it about your underperformance that made it stressful for you do you think?
- E I think as well as the pressure that I'd put on myself to perform well, I think it was the thought that I was letting other people down as well, like my coaches had expectations obviously, they'd put a lot of work in with me and were expecting me to do really well and then I didn't. I guess that made it pretty hard, em, and even harder that I wasn't just letting myself down, I was letting other people down. And also just I guess your reputation, people are watching out for you, just anyone really like not your coaches or whatever, and then you come out and perform badly, you look bad
- J Ok, so that's the idea of looking bad in front of other people and I guess in a way that sort of diminishes how you want other people to see you
- E Yeah well I think obviously I want to see myself performing well and being successful and then when you don't perform well it's going to have an effect on you
- J So do you think in that particular situation, like in that performance slump, you mentioned earlier that it is important to you that you see yourself as a successful athlete. Do you think that that in particular may have caused some of your stress on that occasion?
- E Yeah, definitely. I think the more pressure you put on yourself, the more disappointed you're going to be in yourself. It's going to be a lot harder for you and more stressful to deal with
- J I think we've probably already covered this, I'll just ask the question again anyway. When you were faced with these series of underperformances, what sorts of emotions did you experience?
- E At first it was mainly frustration – why was I performing so badly when I was training so well? It didn't make sense, em, anger, I was just really angry with myself and with the situation, em, and on the last competition I just lost it. I was just really, really upset. I couldn't even do the next race, I couldn't do the 200. I was just so upset. I cried and cried [laughs]
- J And what about your self-esteem, did it affect it?
- E Oh definitely. It went right down. I mean they were practically on the starting line and I hadn't told them that I wasn't running so I had to go over and tell the little guy that I wasn't running and my face was red, I was trembling and G etc. were standing there and I had to say I wasn't running. And I mean they all knew why. They all knew it was because I'd ran so badly in the 100

- J And how long did those sorts of emotions last for?
- E I wouldn't say I was upset for very long. Obviously on the night I was upset, but after that I just wanted to try and deal with it. I didn't have much time. I only had about a week and a half until the Nationals so I wanted to make sure I got focused again. I think it kind of worked in my favour. I used the anger and just kind of got it out, but it didn't last too long I wouldn't say
- J And obviously it sounds as if your performance in athletics has quite a strong impact on your mood in general. Would you say then that you place quite a lot of your self-worth on your performance?
- E Yeah, probably, well definitely because it's such a big thing in my life if I'm not doing well in it then I feel bad about myself, em...
- J So would you say that you viewed the situation as one that you found negative and threatening or was it more one that you found positive and challenging?
- E I would say it was definitely negative, but again I can look at it as being challenging because I guess I challenged myself out of the slump and to get back to form in time for the next competition
- J So it sounds more as if at the specific time it was negative but that it became more positive as time passed. Would that be right?
- E Yeah
- J Ok, and what do you think you found threatening about it?
- E I think at the time I saw myself as being capable of being more than what I was achieving so when I was performing badly it threatened kind of how I saw myself so obviously I was worried about how other people were perceiving me as well
- J So it was like a sort of image thing? And is that what you would say was at stake?
- E Yeah, definitely, just my own self-image and I guess my reputation
- J And you mentioned earlier that athletics makes up a large part of who you are. Do you think that could've influenced how you viewed the situation?
- E Yeah, definitely. If it wasn't such a big part of my life then it wouldn't have been such a big deal. I wouldn't have been quite as upset, em, but as it's such a big part of my life I put more pressure on myself so I'm more disappointed
- [Questionnaire completion]
- J So I'd just like to understand how important athletics was to you going back to that performance slump

- E Em, it was just as important as it is now. I'd done just as much training leading up to the competitions, like in between the indoors and outdoors I think was probably the heaviest, the most I'd probably put into it, the most effort I'd put into my training and the most time I'd put into my athletics if you like, em, so it was just as important really as it is now. It was the biggest thing in my life. It was very important
- J And how important was it to you at that time that other people saw you as an athlete?
- E It was very important as well. I wanted to perform well for myself obviously but I also wanted to...not look good, but I wanted to....I don't know
- J Not look bad?
- E Yeah
- J And what other parts of your life were important to you at that time?
- E Em, well I'd just finished uni so I didn't really have any work or anything. I had a part-time job but it wasn't particularly important and just the usual
- J So there weren't any major changes from now?
- E No
- J And if athletics had been less important to you at the time, how stressful do you think you'd have found the situation?
- E I don't think it would've been quite as stressful, em, if I had other factors in my life that were more important then it wouldn't have been nearly as stressful I guess because I wouldn't have been putting as much time and effort into it and I wouldn't have placed as much importance on it
- J Ok so thinking back again to the specific time when you were faced with those couple of weeks of underperforming, to what extent did you see the stress source as being something that you could change or do something about?
- E Well at first I thought I could. I thought it was just my training, I thought I needed to kind of have more rest before competitions so that my legs could recover, so they were fresher, em, and again I thought it was just sharpening myself up like I'd done all my winter training and whatever and it was just a case of sharpening up and getting quicker with each competition. But, em, after the next competition I kind of realised it was something that....I've forgotten the question, sorry [laughs]
- J Did you see it as being something that you change or do something about?

- E Ok, then after a couple of competitions I think I realised that it wasn't really the training that was the problem. It was going well and we were doing everything right really, getting enough recovery, em so I think I guess after that I kind of thought it was more in my head and that's what I had to change em, and my coach tried to kind of talk me through like why I got so nervous and stuff and maybe calm me down and stuff before races, but...
- J And did you feel that you were in control of that?
- E Of the nerves? Not really, especially as it went on and as I kept performing badly it got worse, yeah
- J Ok, so were you blaming yourself basically for the situation?
- E Yeah
- J And did you think you'd be able to cope with it at the time?
- E At first, yeah, em, at first I thought it would be ok and it was manageable and I guess I thought my coach would have the answers I suppose. And then at the last one at the open graded I think I just realised that I couldn't cope and that I wasn't coping, em, but I guess I did in the end because I came through it and got back on track
- J And what sorts of resources did you feel you had available to you at the time to help you deal with the situation?
- E Em, the main one was probably my coach. He helped me. He tried to, like I said, he tried to talk me through what I was doing before I race and why I was thinking certain things and he also just tried to build up my confidence
- J Did you talk to anyone else other than your coach about it?
- E Em, yep I probably talked to quite a few people, my dad etc., but they didn't really know what to say or what to do. I guess they just felt a bit sorry for me because I'd put so much work in and I wasn't getting the returns that I wanted, but they didn't really know what to do I guess, but again it was just getting it off my chest I suppose
- J Ok and my next question, what did you do to deal with the situation, obviously you talked to other people like you say to get it off your chest, that was one of the things you did, you cried as well so that's another form of coping, were there any other things that you did?
- E I guess I maybe tried even harder at training, maybe concentrating more at training, maybe like if we were doing technique stuff, em, I don't really know what else
- J So would you say that you became even more determined?

E Yeah

J And did you find that that helped?

E Uhuh, definitely. I think on the night when I actually broke down if you like, like I could easily just have gone totally the other way, just like forgotten about the whole season but I didn't, I just tried to be positive I guess and tried to get my motivation back

J And you managed to do that didn't you because in the next race you did a good one

E Yeah

J Did the way that you coped help you change the way that you viewed the situation in any way?

E Em.....[difficulty with question]

J Did you still see it as such a big deal, or...?

E The athletics in general or...?

J The underperformance

E Yeah, I think it was always a big deal. I think, em.....

J And on a scale of 1 – 10, how well would you say that you coped with the situation

E 5, or 6 I suppose

J Right these next questions still relate to the stressful situation. Would you say that your involvement with athletics changed in any way as the situation went on You said already that you did try harder and you became more determined

E Em, I think that just because I'm so committed to it I think I didn't really think of quitting or not putting as much in I guess. Like you said I was determined and I guess I wanted to prove that I could do it

J Were you still prepared to put in as much effort?

E Yeah, or more I suppose once it happened

J So in a way what you did was you became even more committed and even more determined, so in a way your sort of athletic involvement did change

E Yeah, yeah

- J While you were dealing with the stressful situation, did the importance you placed on your athletic involvement change in any way?
- E Yeah, it probably became more important
- J And how committed did you remain to the athletic part of your life in comparison to other areas of your life?
- E I stayed just as committed. Over the summer I found it quite hard because a lot of my friends went away for the summer and I chose to stay here so I could've just easily left it and just gone away and not competed anymore, just kind of given up if you like for the season, just thinking it was a waste of time, but I did stay just as committed, if not more so
- J My next question was, how did the stressful situation influence your image of yourself as an athlete. You mentioned before that part of the reason that the situation was stressful for you was because it did influence how you saw yourself. Can you expand on that anymore or have you said pretty much everything?
- E I think before when we were talking about self-esteem and stuff, it lowered that and my self-image. I had a bad self-image I guess. It wasn't how I wanted to be, so as the situation got more stressful my image kind of got a lot worse and I felt worse about myself, em, which probably didn't help things
- J And looking back on the situation how do you view how you reacted to it?
- E Em, I think I could've reacted a lot worse. I think I kept fairly calm maybe about the whole thing. I could've been a lot more upset earlier, but it just kind of built up over a period of time
- J Do you think you would react any differently if you were faced with it now?
- E I think I'd be just as disappointed, if not more so because I probably have put in more work this winter, em, and I'm assuming that I'm not going to do it again, well I'm *not* going to do it again! [laughs]
- J So would I be right to say that if it was to happen again it would be worse this time because you've put more into it and therefore there's more pressure on you?
- E Yeah, definitely
- J But that won't happen
- E No.
- J Well that's just about all I have to ask you. Before we finish do you think there are any important factors that we failed to discuss in relation to underperforming

E I don't think so

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview?

E No

J Thank you very much

STUDY 2

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – JAMIE

- J Before we start discussing athletics it would be useful for me to get some background information from you, so to begin with could you tell me a bit about yourself, like your age and where it is you live just now?
- G Right, eh, I live in Glasgow and I'm 27 years old, just turned in October
- J And what's your occupation?
- G I work for Scotrail Railways
- J And what does that involve?
- G It involves all aspects of health and safety, customer service, customer relations and staff training
- J And do you have any brothers or sisters?
- G I do yeah, I've two elder brothers
- J And are they involved in sport just now, or...?
- G Well not just now but they have been in the past. My eldest brother was an 800 and a 1500m track athlete and also competed in cross country races. My other brother was just involved in rugby and cross-country a little but not a lot. It was definitely my eldest brother Ross, he's the one who was keen on athletics.
- J Ok, and what about your parents?
- G No, not to my knowledge. I don't think they really dedicated much of their time to sport at all really
- J And can you tell me a bit about the event that you specialise in?
- G Eh, well I specialise in 100m and sometimes 200m, eh, really it depends how fit I am at the time but more or less I'd just work on 100's and in the indoor season I'd work on 60's, but I've never really done any 200's indoors
- J Ok, and what's your training set-up like, em, like your coach and your training group?
- G Well, eh, currently I train with two different groups, one is a sprint group and I do a lot of my track running with the lad who's a sprinter, eh, he's pretty good as well so it brings both of us on, eh, and I also train with another group which is eh sort of an endurance group and I do circuits with them and I also do, well have done in the past, some sort of circuit training and sort of longer runs with them
- J And how often is it that you train?

- G Em, just now about 5, sometimes 6 times a week
- J And what about a coach, do you have a coach?
- G Yeah, well my training partner, his coach helps me out on sort of technical aspects and eh, there's just generally other coaches giving me advice. The coach of the other endurance group gives me advice on my general nutrition and general conditioning
- J Ok, and what age were you when you first started athletics?
- G Eh, well about 14. I was still at school at the time and I got involved in, I think it was about 3rd year, 4th year at school
- J And how was it that you got involved? Did your brother play a role in that?
- G Yeah he did, yeah, Ross my eldest brother, he eh sort of sparked an interest, took me along to an open graded meeting somewhere and got me to take part in a long jump competition and got me doing a little bit of running, eh, training on the track, I was quite keen on it and eh, it's all really blossomed from there really
- J Can you talk me through your progression from there?
- G Yeah, eh, once I found out that I had a bit of a talent for eh, running quite quickly I then represented my school at a regional level and then from there after winning sort of regional championships I then moved onto Scottish Championships and then from there onto sort of British and European Schools. Once I left school I then represented Scotland at sort of under 20, under 23 level, getting to travel really all over the UK at least, competing in some internationals and representative matches, eh, and then at senior level I've also run the qualifying times for Eommonwealth Games and eh, but my whole career, well whole sort of 13, 14 years of running that I've had, it's been sort of up and down along the way. I've not always had a continual...it's not been consistent all the time due to factors such as work, eh, other concerns going on in my life at that moment in time where I've not been able to spend as much time in training or even having the time to go and compete, so from time to time I've perhaps not done as well as what I should have in certain years
- J So it sounds like the amount of training you do fluctuates quite a lot. Just to give me an idea of sort of the time scale of the fluctuations, could you give me a typical year?
- G Well really eh, some years, some winter's I've been known to be so busy that I've not had a winter in at all. Last year I managed to get part of a winter in. I actually ran the indoor championships. I won the District Indoor Championships, but just after that work commitments just got horrendous and then I couldn't train from then all the way basically to the end of the summer this year, so that's an example of just how up and down it is

- J And obviously when you first started to take up athletics your brother played some role in that. Was there anyone else who influenced your decision to take part?
- G As someone to push me along the way, eh, basically teachers at school, eh, a lot of teachers at school. They obviously saw how talented I was without any training at the time and they were definitely keen to get me into athletics clubs and get me training at the time so there were a few people pretty enthusiastic to sort of push me along the way, yeah
- J So to what extent would you say that the decision to do athletics was yours?
- G Totally mine, totally mine yeah
- J To what extent did your family support what you were doing?
- G They've always gone along with the idea that, eh, if I'm happy doing something, supportive and I've had a great amount of enjoyment out of athletics. I wouldn't change anything. I've had a, ok, it's not been the most eh, successful but I've only got myself to blame for not putting in the time and effort [snigger], but I wouldn't change a thing 'cos I've had some brilliant times through athletics. I've really enjoyed it
- J And was that what was motivating you to take part then when you were younger?
- G Yeah, basically when I was about 15 I joined a club in the north of England and from that club they took us down to athletics meetings all over the UK and it was a piss up for most of those occasions!
- J So it was mainly for like the social...
- G Definitely yeah. It was also good to go and compete and meet really good athletes as well, yeah it was good to race against people that were really good, and beat them!
- J And as you were growing up, how important would you say that athletics was to you?
- G Eh, it was always something that was in the background all the time. It was there, ok I wasn't dedicating so much of my time to it, well, not all the time, every now and then I'd devote more time to it but it was always something that was, as I said, in the background – I might've been studying for something at the time or I might've been working or whatever at the time, I had other interests. But then if I wanted to train, I'd train, if I didn't want to train I wouldn't train, so it was just something that as I said....
- J So it really just depended on what was happening at the time?
- G Yeah, circumstances in my life, yeah that's right

- J So how much of your time would you say was spent doing athletics as a youngster?
- G Eh, that varied as well. It was a seasonal thing, for summer I'd spend the whole summer season just dying to find races and events to go to for the experience. During the winter time, I don't know many 15, 16 year olds who want to slave their guts out in the winter time, you know? Not to a crazy extent, but every now and then I did a few sessions during the winter time but nothing that involved any major sacrifice or devotion, you know?
- J So when you say that you had other things that you were out doing, there were different circumstances and you would train depending on what those circumstances were, what sort of other things were you spending your time doing if you weren't training?
- G Spending a lot of time, eh, in younger days, spending a lot of time going out, socializing, spending it with friends, em, sometimes other sports as well, sometimes football, sometimes rugby, eh shooting, anything, I just really got into a lot of different things, eh, when I was younger
- J So looking back how balanced would you say your lifestyle was?
- G Pretty good, eh, pretty good. I think what's helped me is because I wasn't so focused on it as much, a lot of the lads I used to race against when we were 14, 15 are no longer into sport and haven't been for some length of time, so I've always been sort of in the top few in my age group all along. I've not really stood out massively in the junior age groups, but I've come on quite well into the seniors and there's very few juniors or junior boys that make it through to senior level
- J So what is it that you attribute that to?
- G I think that's because I didn't put all my eggs in one basket and train so hard and try and be a great 15 or a 16 year old, but I think I could've perhaps could've done at that age, but there was no point. I think I've held it back for a few years and I've improved more or less at the right time in my early twenties....it was unintentional though [laughs].
- J So as you got older, em, what sort of plans did you make for a future career in terms of employment?
- G As in to fit athletics around?
- J Well, really the question is based on trying to find out whether your intentions for a career were based on fitting athletics around or whether it was...
- G Basically athletics didn't bear any mark on any of my decisions for what my job was. If I was interested and if I enjoyed my job at the time I would sacrifice...I'd put athletics on the back-burner for a bit and just basically

concentrate on my job at that time, eh, the only time that I would say that I didn't particularly do that would be probably training for the Eommonwealth Games in 1998 whereas I was devoting a lot more time than usual to that, that was just for the goal of trying to make it to the Eommonwealth Games, you know?

J And did your work take a set-back then, or...?

G Eh, well work was quite flexible then so I managed to fit in work round it and it wasn't particularly difficult at the time, so I managed to train in the morning and train at night and that was all I was doing, just working and training. I had very few nights out, well, there were some, obviously, eh, but I think I had a spell of 3 months where I didn't go out at all, that was a record! [laughs].

J The following questions are designed to help me understand how big a role athletics is playing in your life just now, so obviously we've talked about the past so if we could talk about the present just now. What parts of your life would you say are the most important to you?

G If it's now, eh, at present you've caught me at a time when I'm investing a little bit more of myself into athletics just now, eh.....certainly athletics is not the most important thing just now, not at all really there's other things that are far more important to me, eh, the two major things are obviously like, eh, my work which is quite important to me just now and also my relationship with my girlfriend, eh which I also like to invest a lot of time into

J How much time would you say that you're prepared to give to each of these?

G Eh, how much time? I think well, if I can balance them all around, athletics is still important, it's eh, obviously I have working hours that are set working hours, I've got to do them, and then athletics, I've got set times when I have to train so I think everything's balanced out, and then the rest of the time I've got, whatever time I have is precious really to spend as much of that with my girlfriend, so I think that it's all quite fairly well balanced out actually.

J So in comparison to a phase where you're not investing as much time into your athletics, at the moment how would you say that that compares?

G Well in the past I would've just said "Oh, athletics doesn't matter" I wouldn't bother going training and the time that I would've had for training I would've ended up doing something else, probably either working more or spending even greater time with my girlfriend

J And what other sorts of things do you do with your time?

G Eh, really working takes up...it is really such a big deal, there's a lot of things I now have to know about my job as well that even out with working hours I've got to read up on certain issues, know things, so....

J You mentioned that, em, you do try to balance things out. How balanced would you say your lifestyle is?

G Just now, eh, at this moment in time I'm having to spend because I've just changed jobs as well, I've stayed with the same company but I've changed job recently, I'm having to devote quite a lot of time to that just now, which is eh, probably a wee bit more than what I'd like to. I'd like to have a little bit more time off and probably divide that sort of time equally between my girlfriend and athletics, but I would say that once things settle down with my job, things will become a little bit more balanced out. I don't like to just throw all my, as I said, throw all my eggs in one basket, I don't like to invest everything into work or everything into athletics or everything into my girlfriend, you know? I don't think that's particularly healthy.

J Ok, and what would you say your reasons are now for taking part in athletics?

G Eh...my reasons now are probably due to a little kick up the arse [laugh], eh, I got a little bit embarrassed during the summer when I had a spell off, I didn't realize that by the time you get to 27 years old natural talent isn't enough

J So what would you say you're getting out of athletics just now then?

G Eh, a lot of enjoyment, eh I'm enjoying it again, eh, the desire to, I suppose just stay fit, feel fit again instead of feeling like a complete lazy lay-about. Also I feel as if I'm working towards something next year, eh, working towards certain personal goals that I have for next year, but basically it's the enjoyment factor. I'm enjoying going out training again.

J What would you say it is that you're enjoying about it?

G That's a good question! [laughs]. I would have to probably say getting to mix with other athletes and speak to people who in the past I'd have spoken to a lot more and getting to sort of rekindle friendships and stuff like that with them, so it's definitely social reasons more than anything, but as I say, I've got some goals for next year that I want to chase and we'll see how it goes.

J And what are those goals?

G Eh, to beat a few individuals that beat me this year, I don't care about anything else, I just want to beat them! [laughs]

J So what would you say the major goals are that you would like to have achieved by the end of your athletic career?

G I don't have any like major goals, like I want to make the Olympic Games or anything that's completely just silly and unrealistic. I know my desire, my desire is nowhere near as great as what it needs to be to be like an Olympic Champion and I know I'm not ever going to be that, so I just want to basically do as well as what I can, beat these couple of lads next year, then I'll see about retiring [laughs].

- J And how important would you say that it is to you that you achieve these goals?
- G Eh, it would be nice. It's nice to achieve any goal but at the end of the day if I don't do it I'm not going to lose sleep over it, life goes on, who cares, it's only running up a straight isn't it...silly sport! [laughs]
- J So how would you say that you feel about yourself as a person when you don't achieve your goals in athletics?
- G Eh, it depends how much I've really had to train or trained to achieve that certain goal. Obviously if I've had a specific goal and I know I've been lazy and haven't put the time in and then if I haven't done it then I've got no-one else to blame. I don't really bother. But if I've put a lot more time and effort into it then you obviously feel that you've wasted a bit of your time that could've been spent on other things
- J Can you give me an example of when you've felt like that?
- G Well, as I said, the main one was eh, probably away back in 1988 when I trained for the Eommonwealth Games and I was training very well that winter and I achieved the national qualifying mark that year and I believed that I was in the running for selection, but unfortunately due to injuries it wasn't to be
- J How did you feel about that?
- G Eh, quite gutted actually, a bit disappointed that I wasn't getting the opportunity to go considering that I was so much faster than everyone else that was allowed to go to the Games that year and I would've liked the opportunity to prove my fitness after the National Ehampionships and well, it's all in the past, there's nothing I can do now.
- J So basically what I'm hearing is that if you don't meet your goals, the way you feel about it will depend on how much you've invested into it at the time
- G Yeah that's right
- J I'd like to get an idea now of how you sort of see yourself as a person and if I was to say to you, "who are you?" what would be the most important things that you would tell me about yourself?
- G Well, first thing I'd probably tell you is what I do for a living, undoubtedly and then I'd probably give you additional information such as I enjoy participating in most sports, especially in athletics and which I've represented bla, bla, bla, schools, National level, whatever
- J And how important is it to you that you put across to other people that you're an athlete?

- G I don't really make a conscious effort to put it across to other people, it's more something that comes about in a conversation. A lot of people, especially at work, I'll speak to people and they'll say they play football or rugby or bowls or something and I'll say, "well I run, I'm an athlete" or "I do athletics" and obviously it comes up in conversation quite frequently, especially with the amount of people I meet in my job. It's nice that they perceive you to be an athlete, I think because there's umpteen footballers and there's umpteen people play bowls, but you don't come across many people that do athletics in the country, so I think that tends to stick with them a bit, and I'm quite proud of the sport and what I do. I'm quite proud because it's a sport where you're not depending on a team for your success, it's just yourself and I think it's good when people sort of acknowledge how hard athletics is in general, not just for me but for other athletes as well
- J So how important would you say that it is that you see yourself as being a successful athlete?
- G I see myself? eh, I don't really...success is nice, yeah, but if I didn't have success, if I wasn't a successful athlete I'd still be the same person. I don't think it would really cut me up too much.
- J So how big a part of who you are would you say that being an athlete makes up?
- G It's really hard to say. It's hard to say a specific figure, but I said before it's...because it varies...if you're talking about right now, it makes up a bigger part now than what it did maybe 12 months ago or such like, so it varies, but just now it would make up, I don't know, if you're looking at a percentage perhaps 25% of what I'd like to think that athletics was to me
- J Ok, and how do you think that the people that know you would describe you?
- G Well, eh, some of the guys at work sort of take the mickey a bit and any time they see me they describe me as "the egg and spoon champion" or "number one in the sack race" or something like that, you know? I think most people would describe me as what I do at my work, but also depending on who it is, if they've got a sort of sport background, if they're really interested in it then they might say that, "there's such and such and he does athletics or he's a runner", or whatever, but I don't think a lot of them really have much of an idea, they just know that you run. They don't know a great lot of detail about what you do, so they would just describe you as just I suppose, a runner
- J And what about other people that know you?
- G Eh, it depends, my training partner would describe me as a runner. I know he's got a lot of sort of probably respect for my talent, then I think my girlfriend would definitely not describe me as an athlete. I think she would describe me as, eh, goodness knows what actually....a nice, loving caring boyfriend!

J This section that we're going onto now is designed to find out how the importance that you attach to athletics influences your experiences of stress and the way that you cope. So what I'd like you to do is to think of a situation that you found stressful and can remember well and I'd like in particular the situation to relate to a time when you underperformed, so it could involve like a training situation or a competition situation and it might've occurred as a one-off or over a longer period of time. So when you're ready, I'd like to get a picture in my mind of the situation so that I can imagine it, so if you could describe that for me when you're ready

G Probably the most recent one I can think of would have to be the Scottish Ehampionships which would be this year, yeah 2002, eh, the Scottish Ehampionships this year were at Scotstoun, sort of late July, end of June, eh, normally I don't think I'd have been doing them but I'd got myself into a little hole through work. My area manager was allowing me a bit of time off of work to go to certain races and participate and also for a bit of training as well, eh, obviously he was keen to see how I was going to do at the National Ehampionships. Unfortunately at the time that he'd given me off, I was doing other things and abusing the system a little bit, eh, but on that day at Scotstoun he'd said to me that he was going to come along to Scotstoun and watch me at the Scottish Ehampionships. Obviously that was a bit of a kick in the teeth for me actually because having not trained for a good 5 or 6 months previous to that, I was then in the situation that I was having to go and run the Scottish Ehampionships, just the 100m and hopefully do quite well, at least make it to the final – either that or I was going to get made out to be a complete tube because he thought I was pretty good, so if I didn't make it to the Scottish Ehampionships final, I could kiss goodbye to my time off for next year if he was coming to watch me. It was quite a nice day actually and it was a good quality field. It was Eommonwealth Games year so there were a lot of young lads all running well, there was a good competition, there was a good group across from New Zealand, three sprinters that were fast, there were some lads up from England, there were a couple of Irish lads there. Actually there was a surprisingly very good field and basically there was a heat, a semi-final and a final. I had 3 races: to run the heat, the semi-final and hopefully get into the final, eh, later on in the afternoon. Unfortunately I didn't quite make it into the final. I got past my heat, which I felt quite good about. I thought I ran fairly well, but I had a very disappointing semi-final, eh, I think the fitness, or lack of fitness certainly told at the end of the day.

J So how much training had you done in the lead up to this event?

G Eh, I'd run one race and trained for...I think I'd done about 5 sessions in the two weeks leading up to the Ehampionships, which, looking back now I think had probably taken the freshness out of my legs and perhaps inhibited the way I was running that day

J So before those two weeks had you been....

G Flying! Well, running on fresh legs and if I'd run on fresh legs I think I could've run that wee bit better

- J So were you not training before?
- G No I'd had a good lay-off actually, eh, basically from about Jnuary right through, so I'd had a good 5 or 6 months of complete nothing at all, no racing, no training, that was just due to the amount of work I had on at the time. I just didn't have the time to train
- J And did you have any feeling that this might happen, that you might not make your goals?
- G Eh, well it's a sort of tall order expecting to make a Scottish Ehampionship final without having done anything, when all the rest of the guys you're running against have knocked their pan in all winter long and have been racing all summer and are sharp, so what you're asking for is....you've got to be quite talented to get to the final, you know, eh, but in the past it would've been no problem if I'd had that background or even a few weeks more racing and training I think I could've qualified for the final
- J So did you see it as being something that you were capable of or not?
- G Definitely, yeah
- J So was that your goal, to make the final?
- G Yeah, yeah to make the final, do my best
- J And how important would you say that it was to you that you achieved that?
- G Well, more for the sake of I didn't want to turn round to my area manager and say, eh, "you think I'm really good and you've given me all this time-off and I can't even make it into the Scottish Ehampionships final", so it was more important in that sort of sense, rather than because I'd been working really hard or was really determined to get to the final and do well
- J And did you feel that any other people other than your area manager expected anything of you?
- G No, I don't think so...most other people, well, some. In fact, perhaps some athletes would've been thinking that I could've been running better than I actually was. In the Jnuary of that year I'd won the District Indoor Ehampionships because I'd been training for 2 or 3 months before hand and I was running well. I was running very well at the time, but obviously I was fitter, sharper and quicker, but unfortunately because, as I said, the 5 months lay-off that I had, I just hadn't run the length of myself in those 5 months so I couldn't expect to do great, but I think some of the athletes who I'd beaten indoors would've thought I'd have been running better outdoors so perhaps it was some of them who were looking for me to do a bit better

- J So thinking back to the time where you didn't get through to the final, on a scale of 1 – 10, how stressful would you say that the situation was for you?
- G Eh, well, it wasn't really, it was no big loss from a sort of personal perspective, on a scale of 1 – 10, I'd probably say about 5
- J And what exactly would you say it was about the situation that made it stressful for you?
- G Well, eh, in the race in the semi-final I'd eh, got myself really fired up a lot before hand and approached the race with a really positive attitude and believing even before hand that I could actually win the race. And then after I don't know, 40 metres, 50 metres I just knew that there was no strength or speed in the legs as of old, and then watching other people coming past that I've known in the past that I can destroy basically and at that point in time, probably about half way through the race I was just like, "this ain't happening again, no way. I'm training for this"
- J Even before you knew the outcome of the race?
- G Yeah, I just knew that I was tightening, tying up beyond all belief. I had no relaxation at that point in the latter part of the race and it was an effort, 100m felt far, it felt like a long distance. It was a horrible sensation just knowing that you're just going backwards and that's never really happened to me a great lot in the past, eh, well, certainly not against a field like that, eh, so from that perspective I was really, really frustrated, really frustrated, eh, but even before I think I'd crossed the line I'd made the conscious decision that, well I basically knew that I was going to start doing a lot more sessions and training harder and there would be a different outcome
- J What would you say the cause of that frustration was?
- G Well, the frustration is being beaten by what I perceive to be inferior athletes. These guys are good runners, you know, I'm not taking anything away from them but basically if I'm on form I'm a lot better athlete than these guys and I think I just needed the kick up the arse, eh, definitely that race really sort of rekindled the sort of fires in my belly, you know?
- J My next question was what emotions did you experience when you were faced the situation, you've said frustration, anything else?
- G Eh, the main overriding feeling was frustration, but also excitement as well, enthusiasm
- J Can you describe that sort of excitement?
- G It's hard to describe, it's more of a complete gut feeling, eh, you know that....ok, you're sickened a bit, it's like just a bit almost gutted for just momentarily and then you think, "hang on, just a second here, I can do loads better than this. I know just now that I can't expect better from myself than

this, but I know there's better in me and I'm looking forward to getting it out. I'm looking forward to training. I'm looking forward to putting the work in and getting better results in the future"

J So would you say that you viewed the situation as negative and threatening or was it more one that you found positive and challenging would you say?

G Eh, it's really hard to describe, thinking back to that specific time. All the sort of emotions in the race were all sort of happening at the one time. Ok, it was frustrating and exciting. It was all there. Ok, it was frustrating but it was excited frustration at that point. Obviously it wasn't threatening because I didn't really have anything to lose, eh I hadn't worked particularly hard to working towards doing well in the race or the whole Ehampionships, em, but it was definitely positive 'cos I had this new sort of lease of life almost, this new found motivation that previously that I thought I was losing a bit, and then because of this it just gave me a good kick up the backside, you know?

J So basically what I'm hearing is that it was as if you experienced positive and negative emotions at the same time. On the one hand it was negative because people had beaten you that you didn't want to have beaten you, but on the other hand it maybe gave you the motivation that you'd been lacking and that was a great source of excitement for you?

G Yeah, yes

J And how did you feel about yourself in general after the situation?

G Eh, obviously frustrated because I'd been beaten but actually quite good about myself, ok, the frustration was there but it felt good to have...this is really hard to explain, because I've had motivation before I've known what it's like to be motivated to do well and then to almost feel that you don't have that motivation any more, and then after that race because of that these old feelings were rekindled and it was almost like I felt young, youthful again [laughs]

J You mentioned earlier that athletics made up a reasonable part of who you are, perhaps not a huge part. How do you think that could have influenced how you viewed the situation?

G I'd just have to probably say that because there wasn't a lot at stake in the race for me, in the whole scope of things I didn't really have a great lot to lose. It's no big deal for me, everyone else in the race had a lot more to lose than I did. I think if I had a lot more to lose then that could have definitely influenced the way I viewed that situation

J Ok, and during the stressful period, how much of your time was spent thinking about it?

G Eh during it, it was all quite quick and after it I didn't really spend a lot of time thinking about the sort of negative part of it. It all became very sort of a positive outlook after that

- J And did it affect the way that you saw yourself in any way?
- G No, definitely not
- J What about the way that others saw you?
- G Well, perhaps. I mentioned earlier on about the indoors in Jnuary, eh because I'd done so well in the indoors a lot of my competitors, or a couple of the lads that had beaten me in the semi-final, perhaps at that point would've been thinking, "oh well, he isn't fit, he's getting past it", or something like that, you know, and they probably would've thought I was not as good then or whatever, you know? But that's good, I'll use that to my advantage, I'll show them
- J So you were conscious of the fact that other people may have lowered their opinion of your talent to a certain extent, but you viewed that to be a positive thing
- G Yeah definitely, yeah
- J My next questions are designed to find out how important athletics was to you at the time of that competition, how important it was to you that others saw you as an athlete and what others sorts of things were important to you at that time. I think you have already answered those questions so I'll just summarise. Basically you were going through a period when athletics wasn't particularly important to you and I don't think it was particularly important that others saw you as an athlete either
- G No, I was too busy with work and stuff
- J So I athletics had been more important to you how stressful do you think you'd have found the situation?
- G A great deal, a great deal, eh, certainly in the past I could think back to situations where I've trained harder or had sort of higher expectations of myself, basically because I've put in a lot more work and I've expected things and underperformed, and obviously that's definitely affected my motivation in the past. I've sort of thought, "well, why am I putting in the hard work to run shit", you know? And then it affects your confidence for racing as well, so in the past, yeah, if it's been more important to me at the time then it has, definitely it has had bigger consequences as such, you know?
- J So thinking back to the specific time again when you were faced with that stressful situation, to what extent did you see it as being something that you could change or do something about?
- G Well obviously I could've been fit, I could've trained for it. That's the only way I could've changed the outcome of that race was to be fitter, it's as simple as that. There's nothing else I could've done within my power that day to

make me run any better, so the only thing I could've done is obviously trained beforehand

J So did you feel that it was something that you were in control of?

G Well, yeah to a certain extent, yeah

J Basically by preparing?

G Yeah, yeah

J So who or what did you blame?

G I just had to blame myself, it was my decision not to train

J And when you were first faced with the situation sis you think you'd be able to cope with it?

G Yeah, I didn't see any reason why not

J And what sorts of personal skills or resources did you feel that you had available to you to help you deal with the situation?

G Eh, well skill wise, a lot of race experience, I'd built up a good sort of mental approach over the years towards my racing, eh, I still feel as if I've got that. Even though I'm not physically fit, I feel very mentally fit. I think I had that. Trying to think back to the situation, I am very relaxed before races, I don't tend to get myself in too much of a tizz, so I felt confident in my ability and talent to come through at that time

J Did you have anyone you could talk to about it?

G Yeah, I could've talked to quite a lot of people about it, yeah but I didn't really feel the need to go and cry on someone's shoulder or talk about it too much. It was more a sort of personal thing. In comparison to days gone by, as I said, in the past I've had situations where I've underperformed or I've had set-backs when athletics had been more important to me that I've definitely had to talk my disappointments and my trials and tribulations through with people. Probably the biggest one would've been the Eommonwealth Games after getting injured, after the Scottish Ehampionships and not getting to go. I had a sort of bee in my bonnet about that. I did feel the need to go and talk to people close to me and also people not so close to me as well

J So what did you do? Obviously you didn't speak to anybody about it, what was it that you actually did?

G Eh, the only thing I did then was set out my own sort of personal goals and targets and ambitions to start training and set-up sort of structured training programmes and not really telling anyone what I was planning. I wasn't wanting to put any sort of pressure on myself for people to think, "well G's

back training again, oh he's going to do this", or whatever so I kept my mouth shut and just focused all my energies into training. Even though this is only November just now, ever since then I've been training well, so as long as this continues and motivation stays high, hopefully I'll be able to reverse the situation

J How did your decision to start taking up athletics again more seriously affect how you viewed the situation?

G Eh, basically it got rid of the initial frustration and just helped me focus on future plans, future success

J Ok, and on a scale of 1 – 10, one not being well and 10 being extremely well, how well would you say that you coped with the situation?

G Eh, pretty well. I'd probably have to say about 10. I don't think I could've done anything any better to cope with the situation being negative. I think some people could've just jacked in saying, "enough's enough", and got really upset and really angry and pissed off with themselves, whereas I used the situation to my benefit

J And again if athletics had been that bit more important to you at the time, how do you think that would've influenced how you found dealing with the situation?

G Eh, well obviously well if it's more important to you, that goes back to as I've described about the past when athletics has been more important to me, how I've felt as I've said before about the Eommonwealth Games a few years ago when it was a lot more important to me and I didn't make the Eommonwealth Games, eh, I took that one pretty badly actually. I was quite upset at the time, very sort of disillusioned about the selection procedures and lost an awful lot of motivation and it took me a while to start training again after that

J What did you do to deal with that situation?

G I talked it through with people really, tried to get a bit of help from people, have a rest, have a lay-off and not train as hard. I sort of distanced myself from athletics a lot, spent a lot more time going out, eh, just trying to avoid athletics for a wee while, it was as simple as that. And then once I had a break away from it I got my motivation back a bit and then I decided I'd come back then for another little crack at it

J My next questions still relate to the time during which you were experiencing the stressful situation, you'll probably find that they're a little bit repetitive, bear with me! While you were dealing with the situation did the importance you placed on your athletic involvement change in any way? I know that obviously your training increased...

G Yeah, that's right. Basically my athletics started to mean a lot more to me. Definitely the amount of importance I placed on it increased, but not to a scale

that it was going to take over my life, not at all. But it's definitely increased and it's increased for the better for myself, well that's what I perceive, but I'm never going to let it take priority as such

J And how committed did you remain to the athletic part of your life in relation to the other parts of your life?

G Well, certainly I've made a few alterations in my life since then as far as work's concerned. Before when I was having to travel further distances from Glasgow all the way down to parts of Ayrshire, involving long distance traveling. I was absolutely knackered after traveling 80, 90 miles in a day plus, and then working on top of that. Now I've actually transferred in my job where I'm just working in the Glasgow area, eh, which obviously is a great benefit. It takes out a lot of the traveling, therefore I'm less tired so I've got more time to train. It's better shift patterns so I've got more time to recover, so I've definitely made a few adjustments so that I can train

J And how did the underperformance at Scotstoun influence your image of yourself as an athlete would you say?

G Well, I didn't really have a great image of myself as being an athlete as such, eh, I can only say that underperforming at Scotstoun left a bitter taste in my mouth

J And looking back on the situation, how do you view how you reacted?

G Em, I'd have to say in hindsight now, very well, pretty good, eh, the outcome of the whole situation has been very positive. To get me starting training in any shape way or form is a miracle, eh, and for me still to be going now 3, 4 months later and still going strong and still really motivated so obviously it's had a good outcome

J And how do you think you'd react to the situation if you were faced with it tomorrow?

G Eh, I'd still be confident [laughs] in the situation but if I was to get beaten in the situation from people that still I perceive to be better athletes, I'd definitely be questioning my motives for carrying on with athletics, eh, I'd lose a lot of confidence and definitely a lot of motivation 'cos there's obviously bigger things at stake now – I'm investing a lot more time into athletics so hopefully that won't happen

J Ok, well that's just about all I have to ask you. Do you have any comments or suggestions about the interview or anything that we failed to discuss, or...?

G No I think we've discussed everything that's relevant, yeah.

J Ok, thanks.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3 - BEN

- J First of all I'd like to get some background information from you so if you could tell me a bit about your occupation what age you are etc.
- B Em, I'm 22, I'm a full-time student and I started sport when I was 10 years old
- J And what are you studying at university?
- B Film and media
- J Could you give me a brief summary of what your athletic achievements have been so far?
- B I think most of them have come this year, winning the British Under 23 Championships by a clear distance of 5 metres, em, coming 3rd in the British Senior Championships again this year and qualifying for the under 23 European Championships which was this year as well, also winning the Scottish Senior Championships for shot putt and discus and winning the British Universities for shot putt and discus as well
- J That's impressive. Going back to when you were younger, you said you first got involved in sport at the age of 10, was that athletics?
- B Yeah, it was a lot of sports, I was a fairly hyper active child so my parents tried to tire me out by putting me in as many different sports as possible, they put me in the ones that my parents themselves used to do which was athletics and golf, but I also did football and swimming as well
- J And what stage was it that you started to focus on athletics specifically?
- B Em probably around about 11 or 12 because I started to have more success as a kid, I always liked winning ever since an early age and so I followed the sport that gave me the most amount of success, so I won things at golf and I won things at swimming so I was breaking records and being top in the country so I focused my attention on athletics
- J And thinking back to that sort of age, how did it make you feel when you were successful?
- B It made me feel special, like I had an advantage on other people and when I started to win things I saw how people started to treat me differently and it was quite nice...if I wanted something or I asked for something they were more inclined to help me or you know, especially teachers and stuff at school if I'd come off the back of a good performance, even at primary school age if I would ask for help in something they'd be more inclined to give me it
- J And at that stage how big a part of your life did athletics play in your life?
- B Quite a big part because it kind of identified who I was, em, from the age of 11 it was who I was, it was how people understood me you know, if you were talking in the playground, "Which Scott are you talking about?", "Oh the

athlete”, you know that was how I was identified so from an early age it was part of my identity, it established you know the kind of person that I was

J And at that sort of stage was it taking up much of your time?

B Well in younger years you know in primary school and early years of secondary school it took up maybe 3 nights of my week so I still had plenty of time to follow other interests but it was what I thought about the most, em, I would think more about my sport than going out to community centers and meeting up with friends like a lot of the other people my age did so I suppose in that regard yes because I thought about it a lot more, even though I wasn’t actually doing it all the time

J And did you feel that you missed out on anything because of that?

B I don’t think so no, I mean the people I grew up with were very different to me in a lot of respects, their motivations and what they wanted from life so I didn’t feel that I was missing out on anything because to be honest where I grew up I didn’t get on with many people anyway, so I was quite happy to be winning at sport so I don’t feel like I missed out on anything

J And as you got older and started to think about future employment, if you did start to think about that, did athletics play any role in your decision making?

B Absolutely, it was the only thing I wanted to do. I didn’t see myself as having any career outside of athletics which I suppose has changed a little bit now as I’ve matured but at that time when I was younger sport was the be all and end all, especially athletics and I thought, “Well if I can’t make it as an athlete I’ll be a commentator or in some kind of network involved in athletics”, but as I’ve grown up I’ve seen that there’s a bigger picture so it’s changed a little

J In what sort of sense has it changed

B Well I’ve found that I’ve started to get better at other things outside of sport, em, my film and media studies I’m quite keen on that and things that I tend to be interested in I do well in and eh, film and media is one of those things that I seem to have adapted to and got quite good at. It’s interested me and I’ve started to do well at that so it’s drawn my attention a little bit away from athletics and there are other possibilities out there for me if the athletics doesn’t go to plan

J So would I be right in saying that athletics was pretty much what identified you, whereas now there are maybe other things?

B Yeah, there’s more elements to me. When I was an athlete that was all I did. I didn’t go out drinking as an early teenager like most of my friends did, I would stay in, I would go to bed early, I would read books, I would read about other athletes. I was a complete athlete and I never really thought about anything else. There was no going out and meeting people, girlfriends and stuff like that, it was just all about sport, that’s all I cared about and em, yeah

certainly when I was younger that was all I was interested in but as I got older I saw that there were other things about me that were more important like family and some friends to an extent as well, so I grew up a little bit in that regard and you know things can happen in sport and you can't always follow your dreams so I had to realize that there were other things that I would need to concentrate on if athletics fell to pieces and education was another thing I started to focus on

J So did you start to develop that way of thinking as a result of becoming aware of any consequences of being so wrapped up in athletics?

B Yeah well I mean as I got to 16, 17 I realized that there were a lot of people getting injured and when I was younger you just turned up and did every competition of the season, whereas as we got to later sort of teenage years I would see people picking up injuries, some people giving up, other people not being able to do it and I thought, "Well that could happen to me, I'm just the same as anyone else so I need to focus on other things just in case this does go wrong because if I leave school with no qualifications and all my hopes pinned on athletics then I'm going to be stuck", so that's what I did, I changed my focus a little

J Moving onto talking about your athletic life as it is now, I understand what motivated you to do athletics when you were younger, has that changed in any way?

B Em, a little I mean eh, when I was younger as I say there weren't too many kids that I got on too well with and I liked to show off a little bit to prove that I could be successful and I liked to show that I was good at things and I think now that's changed, em, probably to do with the environment and there's a lot more people that I like and have respect for so I try not to show off too much and rub people's noses in it like I did when I was younger, but em, I still enjoy the success and the attention that it brings, em, but I like to be more focused on the intrinsic rewards in sport rather than the extrinsic, in other words winning medals and doing it for the sake of doing well because I like doing well, not because I want gold medals wrapped round my neck and fame and money and all the rest of it, I do it because I like winning, I like to put my best against other people's so to that extent I'm doing it for different reasons now, I'm doing it because I like winning rather than because I like to show people how good I am

J And how important would you say that your athletic involvement is to you now?

B Well I would say it's still one of the most important factors in my life, em, I think the level of discipline you need helps in other areas of life, the sort of time management that you need helps in other areas of life and just being physically and mentally fit helps me for other areas of life as well so with that regard it still is you know very useful for other areas of your existence so...

- J How does it relate to other areas of your life in terms of how important it is to you?
- B Em, I would say it's just above everything else I mean relationships, you know the opposite sex and stuff like that, it's still a little bit above that but I'm beginning to see as I get older how important these other things are – family, friends, em, you know financial things as well - being able to look after myself and just some of the things you realize as you grow up, but I would say that sport is still the thing that I think about the most and want to be more successful at, so it still takes most of the focus
- J But you're allowing more time for other things?
- B Absolutely yeah, I'm more diverse, there's more of a person than there used to be. It used to be that I was an athlete and that's all there was to me and as I've grown up there's different things that have crept into my life that I've realized have more of an importance than they did when I was younger
- J I obviously have an idea of how important athletics is to you, how important is it to you that other people see you as an athlete?
- B Well initially when I was younger as I say I liked to be identified as an athlete, I liked people to know that I had something special about me that differentiated me from other people, you know, when you were meeting people it was always quite an impressive thing to say, "I'm the National Ehamption", or "I'm the British Ehamption", or something like that but now it's different, I would prefer that when people get to know me that they like me for who I am and I find that if I mention my sport first then they like me because I'm an athlete and I tend not to mention it so much anymore so if I'm meeting new people I tend not to mention it straight away, so em, I'm not too bothered if people don't realize that I'm an athlete, I mean there's a lot of people at my university that know me as a big strong guy but don't realize I do athletics and that suits me fine, but eh, it's not too important to me for people to know I'm an athlete, as I say it's more intrinsic the rewards that I get from my sport so you know I'll be as happy knowing that I've got the gold medals and have done my best and you know, it doesn't really bother me if people don't realize that, it's fine
- J And what sacrifices have you made to allow you to do your athletics?
- B Sacrifices, well I would say relationships was one thing because when I'm trying to establish a relationship with somebody and I'm away a lot of the time and have to go training a lot of people have difficulty understanding that, and you know they want to go out and do things and you have to say, "No, I've got to go training", and they'll be like, "Well can you not come out with us tonight?", "No, I've got training", and then they go, "Well is training more important than me?", and I usually say, "Yes", and that ends things so to that extent I'm probably sacrificing things a bit there but em, it's not something that I really get upset about. I'm really determined in my sport so that as I say is more important

- J My next question was, apart from athletics what other areas of your life are important to you? I guess you've already answered that indirectly, you've mentioned your family life...
- B Family is very important yeah and relationships, friends, but eh, relationships are a little bit further down the scale
- J So when you're away from an athletic setting and athletic people do you still think about your athletic participation?
- B Yeah, yeah I mean it tends to follow me about, I mean usually the clothes I feel most comfortable in are tracksuit and trainers so I never really forget about it completely and you know there's very few minutes pass when I don't think something about athletics that triggers off a reaction so you know other aspects of my life, whether it's playing with the band that I used to have or going out socializing you know there would be things that would take me back to my athletics
- J So do you still identify yourself as being an athlete when you are for example...
- B Yeah when I'm out socializing I have to realize that I can't go and have as many drinks as everyone else and you know, dance about as much as everyone else 'cause if I've got training the next day I have to be recovered and rested for it so I can't stay out as long so to that extent yeah, I have to remind myself that I am an athlete and I have to take care of my body so em, when I've got training the next day and we're all out somewhere I usually have to go home early and retire
- J I'd like to get an idea of how you feel about yourself when you fail to meet your goals in athletics, could you describe that for me?
- B Well I mean this season has had it's ups and downs, I mean there's been a lot of peaks but there's also been a lot of troughs as well and I think because I've had a lot of big success people tend to forget about the failures as well, but I mean I qualified for the Europeans but I did miserably when I was out there and when I do badly in sport that, you know ruins my life. I mean nothing else can pick me up, no family, no friends, no girlfriend can make me feel good about myself after I've done badly in athletics. No matter how everything else has gone, whether my exams have gone well it doesn't matter, if my athletics is bad then...I'll give you an example at the Europeans I did badly and I stayed in bed for 3 days straight, I didn't want to speak to anyone, I didn't want to know anyone, I didn't want to eat, I'd done badly at my main focus for the year and my year was ruined. I mean I might've won the British Championships by 5 metres, thrown the best distance in Scotland for 20 years but I didn't care, I'd done badly at the competition that I wanted to do well in and all these things sort of faded away, so when I do badly in athletics it ruins me

- J So would it be fair to say that your sense of self-worth is sort of dependent on how you do in athletics?
- B Very much so, I mean while I don't impress on people that I am an athlete and I don't feel it that important that people identify me as an athlete, em, when my sport doesn't go to my liking there is no self-worth, I just feel like I'm nothing no matter what successes I've had it still doesn't mean anything to me, all it means to me is that I've done badly on this one occasion and I feel terrible
- J We're going to talk about the event that you put down on the log sheet which was your performance at the European under 23s. I'd like to understand a bit more about it, could you explain the background information for me please?
- B Em, well I went there in tremendous shape throwing the best distances of my life, I'd thrown 55 metres, 53 metres just before going out, I'd never thrown these distances before. Training was going perfectly, in fact I'd managed up to 56 metres in training which would've broken the Scottish Native Record so I was in tremendous shape, I was just getting my momentum going, I'd started seeing a sport psychologist and everything was beginning to fall into place and I went out to the competition and everything was still going well and everything seemed exciting and challenging and I had a lot to look forward to. On the day of the competition everything started to fall to pieces beginning with the call-up time. I went in and there were 16 other athletes, everyone psyched themselves out and everyone else did badly and I suppose watching other people who I thought might have been a little bit better than me doing badly, I kind of talked myself into doing badly as well because I had an excuse for doing badly because everyone else was doing badly, and afterwards I just felt like a charlatan, I just didn't feel like I belonged there. I was one of the worst people in the competition in terms of distance in the final so I didn't feel I could justify myself being an athlete or a discus thrower anymore. In fact after the event, em, one of the officials, who was Polish, came up to me and asked me if I was supposed to be doing the high jump and initially when somebody asked me if I was trying to find the high jump I thought, "Well how can I justify myself as being a discus thrower when people don't see me as that and I don't see myself as that because I've thrown so badly?", em, so for 3 days I felt terrible and didn't want anything to do with sport, I didn't wear my GB kit to the track, I never went to the track, I couldn't be bothered to watch, I had no interest in the final of the discus and as it was the performance in the final...I mean 3rd place was 56 metres, a distance I'd thrown 2 days previously in a warm-up for the competition, em, so seeing that I suppose was the inspiration to turn things around so from initially being you know threatened by this bad performance, I saw the next competition as more of a challenge and I wanted to establish myself and put right what had gone wrong at the Europeans.
- J That's really interesting to get that level of detail from you there, you've obviously thought about it a lot and you're obviously able to talk about it in a lot of detail. Can I just pick up on a few things, you put down on the log sheet

that at the time you felt that it was a sort of threat/loss type feeling, could you explain for me a wee bit more about that feeling?

B Em, well I mean having guided my whole season towards this competition it was a pivotal point for me in my development as an athlete as well as you know a goal for the year and em, when I'd put so much into that and invested so much of my own time, I didn't feel it was anyone else's time, it was time because I did a lot of the work myself without a coach, and so to put all that work in and then not to have anything from it at the end of it, nothing tangible to say, "Well this is what I did", there was no medal or anything to take back, I just felt a tremendous sense of loss. I thought 56 metres could've possibly got me a medal and as it turned out 56 metres would've got me a medal had I thrown it, so it felt like a loss. I felt like I lost out, I never got to the final so I lost out on that, I lost out on getting a top 8 position and I lost out on getting the medal I could've achieved had I thrown what I usually throw in training, so that was the initial sense of loss. The sense of threat was as I say to my identity as an athlete and as a discus thrower, em, for somebody to mistake me for a high jumper made me feel terrible and it was literally minutes after I'd thrown. I was walking out of the stadium and somebody tried to herd me into the group of high jumpers and so I thought, "Well I don't feel like a discus thrower anymore, how can people see me as a discus thrower, how can I see myself as a discus thrower when I've thrown so badly and thrown distances that most capable decathletes throw?", so I just felt threatened as a discus thrower and lost

J And you put down on the log sheet that the stress you experienced was quite uncontrollable, why was that?

B Yeah em, I didn't feel in control of anything, em, I mean I had to go back to the place where we were staying when people dictated it to me, there was not a lot of choice so I couldn't control that. The first thing I wanted to do was go back to the hotel and I couldn't do that because there was no network to take me, you know there were no buses to take me straight away so I wasn't in control there, I couldn't go where I wanted, there were restrictions on places that I could go because of security and that's what it stemmed from, not being able to do what I wanted. After that terrible performance I wanted to just go to the most remote place I could possibly go but I wasn't allowed to, you know?

J You've already explained in some degree of detail the kind of emotions that you felt, could you just summarise them for me again please?

B Em, immediately after I just felt flat, my surroundings were completely alien, there was a surreal feeling to everything. It was like I'd woken up and was in the stadium, it was completely unreal, in fact some of my memory felt slightly impaired, I couldn't remember walking out to the track, I couldn't remember much of what had gone on before I got to the throwing area and I certainly couldn't remember what had happened when I'd thrown so I don't know, I think I was just walking around with my mouth gaping open. It was like my brain couldn't process all these new different stimuli and just looking around it just completely knocked me for six. I mean being in this huge big stadium and

it was the most unfriendly place you could possibly think of, nobody was chatting to anyone, there was nobody to direct me, there was nobody to tell me what to do, I didn't know how things were going, warm-up throws, what order they were to go in and it just felt terrible. I felt really lonely and especially afterwards I felt that nobody wanted to talk to me and I didn't want to talk to anyone else so I just felt on my own in a strange place in a strange country not knowing where to go and everything was unfamiliar...alienated

J I get the sense that part of this was the fact that it was such a new competition because it was perhaps a higher level of competition than what you'd been used to

B Absolutely

J To what extent had you experienced underperforming before, was it new to you or...?

B I've underperformed a few times before and most of those occasions were competitions which perhaps didn't mean too much, em, in my first international performance at the Eeltic Games competition for the Scottish team I didn't do too well, but that was kind of out of my control, everyone did badly because it was gale force winds and pelting down with rain, em, it has happened a couple of times but it was by no means a catastrophe, I'd maybe thrown a metre or two down on what I was expecting to do but this was a complete catastrophe at the biggest possible level, I was on the biggest stage that I'd ever been on and I'd thrown the worst distance I'd thrown in 2 seasons at the point when it most mattered, you know I was 8 metres down on what I'd hoped to throw

J Who or what did you blame at this point?

B I blamed myself, there was nobody else to blame, I didn't blame my coach for the fact that I had to do a lot of the sessions myself, em, I blamed myself because at the end of the day I could've focused better. I felt that if I'd played a little bit more attention to what my psychologist had said and less to what other people were doing...I was distracted which is the only way I can put it, I was distracted and inhibited and I let other things get to me, I wasn't able to block out the things that I should've been able to. I'd been practicing with my psychologist em, so initially I blamed myself but looking back to a number of people who've had the same problem, it sounds only natural for that to happen to people who make such a big step up in such a short period of time, em, so I got over it as the weeks went past but initially I just blamed it on myself, there was nobody else

J So going back to the period of time straight after this had happened, how much of your time was spent going over it would you say?

B Eonstantly, I did nothing else. I mean for 3 days I did practically nothing, I would say most of the time I spent in bed and that whole time was spend contemplating what had gone on, "How could I have done so badly, how was I

8 metres down on what I was supposed to have done, how was I 7 metres down on a distance I'd thrown 2 weeks previously and you know, 8 metres down on a performance that I'd done earlier that morning before the competition, how could this happen?", and I was just trying to justify why I'd done so badly and trying to understand why I'd done so badly and that lasted pretty intensely for 3 days, that's all I did. After that I would still do it but not for as often... When I was back at my hotel room I was in bed and that's all I did. I sat up awake thinking, trying to puzzle what had gone wrong, I couldn't understand it and that's what I did, for 3 days I sat in my room and tried to puzzle it out. I tried not to go back to the track because it just brought it back to me how badly I'd done and I just saw how well a lot of people in the team were doing and I just felt like a charlatan as I said so I just stayed in bed and thought and thought and thought and that's all I did for 3 days

J You've touched upon some of the coping strategies that you used and on the log sheet you've written down some of the coping strategies that you used, so if we just refer to them could you maybe briefly talk me through the coping strategies that you used following the underperformance?

B Well the first thing I wanted to do was get away from everything. I mean I felt terrible that I'd done badly so I just wanted to get away. I wanted to get away from the stadium, I wanted to get away from people, I just wanted to be somewhere by myself to just maybe let things sink in. I thought I was going to cry so I thought, "Well I'll go somewhere where nobody's going to see me", unfortunately I got lost which never helped things, but to an extent it helped because when I got lost I was more concerned about finding my way around that I was about how badly I did and eventually I bumped into some people who were part of the team management and they said that I was in good company, other people had done badly – Steve Backley, Jonathan Edwards had you know walked out of major championships not even having made the final so that it had happened to even the best of people and to the first person that said it I said, "Well that's fair enough, but it doesn't make me feel any better", but then the second person said it, the third person said it, the fourth person said it and I thought, "Right I've got to get away from these people 'cause they're all saying the same stuff it just sounds like such a cliché, "Oh well it happens to the best of us and I thought, "Well it shouldn't happen to me, that doesn't make things any better. I've just wasted a good opportunity here", so I wanted to get away and I did get away and I went somewhere cool. I mean it was really warm, it was 37 degrees and I don't like the heat so I wanted to get out of the heat, it was making me in a really foul mood. I felt like I was going to cry, I was going to smash things up and I just felt that I had to you know, hold my composure, that's just the way my father brought me up, you know, controlled aggression – I did feel like smashing things up but I was representing Great Britain and I didn't want to make a fool of myself – it's one thing to do badly but you know, it's another thing to be eh, a bad loser so I thought, "I want to keep in control of my emotions", and I went inside to the warm-up area and it was very cool and I started to feel better and I saw some friends of mine and my friend Darren said, "How did you get on?" and I thought, "Oh Ehrist, I don't want to see this guy", 'cause he just kind of took the piss out of me, em, "He's going to make me feel even

worse, I don't expect any support", and he just went, "How did you do?", and I said, "I did terribly, I'm not even telling you how far I threw", and he said, "Did you qualify for the final?", and I said "No, I did rubbish, it was my worst performance of the year", and he just went, "You idiot, what the hell did you do that for?", and I said, "Well I didn't mean to, everything was strange I didn't know what I was doing and I didn't feel like I was even supposed to be there...", and he went, "Oh, shut-up, I love you anyway, it doesn't make any difference", and from that moment on I thought that he was the one person I didn't think I could count on and I could, em, what I realized at that moment and what turned things around for me was that there were other more important things in life, this was *one* moment in time and there were going to be a lot more things for me in the future, as some of the coaches had been saying, "talent doesn't appear over night and if you can pick yourself back up you'll soon be back on track", and I thought "Well yeah, I can get myself back on track now", and I looked forward to the next competition which was the British Championships and that was another thing where I could rectify the situation – "If I do well there then I don't have to worry about it, however if I do badly then I'm back to square one", and eh, that's what picked me up, my friend giving me a bit of support and that's what really initiated the change. I still felt bad for a couple of days but I thought, "Well it's not the end of the World, my friends are behind me which I didn't think they would be and if the team management are going to drop me at least I've still got my friends there to support me", and as it was I went to the next competition and threw 53 metres and got the bronze so things started to pick up again, but if my friend hadn't given me that response I don't think I'd have coped so well and I think I would've smashed something up

- J So when you spoke to your friend Darren, did you feel that the whole thing became more controllable?
- B Absolutely, em, I expected people to take the piss and they didn't and I felt more relaxed. I felt sort of as if I was walking on egg shells because there were people going to be coming up and asking me how I did and a lot of them were quite strong characters and I thought they would just go to town, and because they didn't I thought, "Well they've still got a bit of respect for me and they've not done that for a reason so they must have some respect for me because I was the only male thrower to get taken to this event", so they perhaps realized that and I thought, "Well I must be in control here because I've gained the respect of these people, so to an extent I did feel that I'd gained some control back
- J So once this happened and you started to see it more as a challenge I guess, what sort of coping strategies did you implement to get you back to where you got to in your next competition?
- B Em, I tried to think about what I'd done and that was something that played through my mind a hell of a lot and there was also a thing on a web page that had been written about me and it was about my performance at the British Under 23 Championships and I was the first person to get a mention, I was just underneath the headline and the first paragraph was all about me and I

thought, “That’s terrific because anyone looking at this web page which gets seen a lot will see my name”, and I thought, “Well that’s good for sponsors and for other reasons”, but the first thing it said was that his day started with an inspirational performance by S.T. and then the next 2 athletes that competed after me had done well as well and perhaps I had contributed to them doing well because I knew them and I thought, “Well that’s terrific”, so I carried that about with me as well. I printed it out and I took it with me to training and for the next week I thought about these things – this inspirational performance that I’d done... So I carried this sheet of paper with me for the week after the Europeans to try and boost my confidence and think about the amazing things that I’d done this year that I wasn’t expected to do and I kept thinking about them and I thought, “Well this is the same guy that was around 3 weeks ago, I’m still as strong, my technical ability’s still there so perhaps we can salvage this”, and that’s what I thought about was, “Salvage what you’ve got”, and that’s what I did. I didn’t throw as well as I had done but I thought, “If I get 80% of the guy that was there before we’re going to still be throwing pretty far”, and I did, I threw 53, so... it probably won’t work all the time but that was what I needed at that moment

J And how effective would you say that your coping was in relation to that event?

B Em, the coping strategy for afterwards I thought was quite good, em, I’d spoken to the team managers and said, “Look I feel awful, I feel physically sick, I can’t eat”, for somebody with my appetite to not want to eat, you know there’s something wrong, “I don’t want to go down to the track, do you mind if I don’t go down to support the team and just stay in my bed for a few days?”, and they were fine, they were just happy to get me out the road I think, that’s what it felt like so...

J Do you feel like in a sense when you were doing that it was almost as if you were deliberately detaching yourself from your athletic persona?

B Yeah, I didn’t feel like part of it, I didn’t feel like an athlete anymore, this is what I was saying about the identity thing, I didn’t feel like an athlete, I couldn’t identify myself as a discus thrower because a European classed discus thrower wouldn’t throw 48 metres in a final so I didn’t feel like I was an athlete so I felt alien, I felt, I keep saying the word charlatan because that’s what I felt like, I felt like an imposter, so I wanted to keep away from it and I didn’t feel like I belonged there and em, whilst it seems a bit extreme I think that was the right thing to do, that’s what I needed to do for me to get back on track so I was very happy that that’s what I did and the fact that I’d spoken it through with the team manager so that it wasn’t taken in the wrong context, no doubt if I’d stayed in my bed and didn’t want to speak to anyone people would just have seen that as me being huffy and not wanting to support the team and being a bit of a prema donna, but because I spoke it through with them people didn’t take the hump with me for not coming up to support them because people had come to support me and I had to let them down by saying, “Look I can’t go to the track to watch you throw because I’m going to get upset, the last thing I want to do is watch somebody else throw because I’ve no

connections with throwing at the moment”, and eh, I was quite pleased that I’d done that and brought myself to go and speak to people ‘cause I didn’t want to speak to anyone but I managed to bring it to their attention, “Look I don’t mean to be selfish but I can’t be around to support you at the moment ‘cause I’m just a wreck”, and they understood so I was happy that I’d done that because it took so much for me to speak to people and look people in the eye when they were trying to do the same thing that I’d tried to do

J So you’ve given me a very detailed description of how you responded to this underperformance, do you think that that response would have been any different had it been at a previous time in your career?

B Yeah, em, I think there was one competition I can remember when I was 16 and I’d done badly, I was expected to win the British Championships and I wasn’t too far down on what I was supposed to throw but I came 3rd and eh, I was expected to win and as I said with the Europeans I controlled my emotions because I had the British tracksuit on and everyone was watching me, you know I didn’t want to let the side down, but when I was at this British under 17 Championships and I’d done badly I took my umbrella and I rammed it round the side of the cage where I’d been throwing, I snapped my umbrella and tore it to pieces. I was throwing my bag around and kicking it and shouting and swearing and kicking bottles of anything that was lying about and being a real idiot, you know I didn’t care who saw me...

J Why was that different do you think?

B Well I think you learn by your mistakes, I felt like doing exactly the same thing again at the Europeans but you learn by your mistakes and you hear people going, “Look at him”, and you realize that you have to control your composure because you’re in the public eye, I mean it might only have been the Under 17 Championships for Great Britain, but there’s a lot of people watching you and those things stick with you throughout your career, they remember these things, so I thought, “Let’s give them something more positive to focus on in the future and not give them something bad that’s going to stick in their memory”, so I think a lot of people took a good impression of me for managing to control myself having known what I was like in the past

J If this situation was to happen tomorrow say, how do you think you’d respond to it?

B I think I would laugh to be quite honest because I would say, “Here we go again”, and I think I would take it more lightly, I don’t think I would be in bed for 3 days like I was at the Europeans because the realization that happens that you know I’m not going to go from a 56 metres discus thrower and stick at 48 for the rest of my life, you know there’s going to be another competition that I can go to afterwards to rectify the situation so I wouldn’t be so down

J what about the idea that you mentioned before that you’ve started to realize that there’s more to life, do you think that because you’ve made that realization now that that could change your response?

- B Yeah I mean obviously I realize that there's more important things to life and that as it is I might not make the World's best discus thrower, I might not make a World Championship or Olympic Final em, so maybe these things aren't as important, if I set my life towards reaching these standard and I don't do it how bad will I feel? So I've got to realise that there's more important things to cling onto because at the end of the day everyone's career comes to an end and if that's all I identify myself as, as being a discus thrower, then what am I going to do when I get to 40 years old and can't throw a discus anymore? I'm going to be stuck, I'm going to have no career and no identity so I've started to think about that and I've thought, "Well I've got a film and media degree that I'm going to be finishing soon, I've got a family that's very important to me and I've got a lot of other things going for me outside of my athletics so I should pay some attention to these other foci and work on them"
- J And we have a measurement of your athletic identity here and it has gone down very slightly between now, the end of the season, and the beginning of the season so is that why that's happened?
- B Yeah, very much so I think that was the turning point, speaking to Darren and realizing that yeah if I'm going to put all my focus on athletics, if I live my life by athletics and my athletics goes badly then I'm going to be a wreck every time I do badly, I'm going to be you know, like a jack in the box when I do really well but the ups and downs are going to be terrible and if I don't have anything else to level out my life then I'm going to be a mess every time these situations occur so I need something else to take myself away from athletics and I think I now have a network or process by which to do that, I've got the relevant means to get away and escape from these stresses that are caused by athletics
- J And how would you say that your image of yourself has changed as a result of your season as a whole?
- B Well I mean although it's been the most successful season I've ever had, despite my performance at the European's, the distances I threw still surpassed what I expected to do. My coach told me I'd throw them but I didn't realize I would, now you would've thought that would've made me more keen on being an athlete but to an extent I'm still as determined in my sport don't get me wrong, I still put in all the hours that I'm supposed to, but I don't identify myself as that much of an athlete. If people come up and ask me, "What do you do?", I say, "I'm a student", so unless they specifically ask about sport I don't tell them so it's less important for myself to be recognized as an athlete but it's just as important for me to do well as an athlete, I think that's the main point, em, before I might've stressed the point that I was an athlete, "Oh I can't do this, I'm an athlete, I don't do these sort of things, I'm an athlete", I would now just say, "I don't do these things, I don't want to", em, instead of saying that I'm an athlete so em....
- J Do you think a lot of this is because of the experience that you've had then?

- B Yeah, yeah a lot of it, I mean as I say if you focus on just being an athlete then when you no longer can be an athlete then you're lost and that's what I've started to think about, "Well how long can this go on for? When am I going to stop getting personal bests? When am I going to stop winning medals? How much further do I have to progress?", and if I can't throw over 60 metres in the end then there's no future for me as a discus thrower 'cause I won't get on the grand prix circuits, em, so they'll be no money to make from the sport as such so if that's the case then something else is going to have to take the main focus which is my career and so I'll need to focus on that, so with these things in mind I've shifted things around so that I'm less identifiable as an athlete
- J Given your experiences of athletics and underperforming, what advice would you give to other athletes?
- B Well to focus on the other things in life, as I say athletics isn't the be all and end all, you train so hard that your mind makes it so, but when you do badly you have to realize that you know these bad performances are only momentary, you think about the person you are in training and what you have the potential to do and if you focus on that enough and work with a sports psychologist you will be able to back up these thoughts that you have and eh you know, it's only temporary, don't dwell on the poor performances look forward to the next performance when you can prove yourself and other people wrong and keep looking forward instead of back, learn from your poor performances and use them to your advantage and look more forward to the next one to come
- J Well that's been really interesting talking to you, that's just about all I have to ask you. Do you think there's anything that we failed to discuss or...?
- B No I think I'm all talked out, I think that's pretty much everything
- J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?
- B No, I think that's a fairly informative set of questions you have there and eh, yeah I think we've covered everything
- J Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3 - NIKKI

- J First of all I'd like to get some background information from you so to begin with could you tell me a bit about your age and your occupation?
- A I'm 22 years old and I'm a medical student. I've done 4 years already at university
- J And with your athletic participation what would you say have been your main achievements?
- A Em, probably the biggest things would be running for Scotland on a number of occasions and doing fairly well in British Championships, never getting to the stage of running for Britain but em, being one of the top runners in Scotland
- J And what age were you when you first got involved in athletics?
- A Em, I was always interested in it, I would say that I properly got involved when I was about 15, 16, but I'd been doing athletics for a few years before that but I started training seriously when I was about 16
- J And what helped you to decide to start taking it more seriously would you say?
- A Em, I think it was my school. Because my school recognized that there was something there, that I had a bit of a talent they suggested that I went to the local club and then from there I started getting more involved and that's when I realized that it was something that I wanted to do. I started to train a wee bit harder and found a coach there and things
- J Ok, and thinking back to that time when you first got involved in athletics, what would you say was motivating you to do it?
- A I think it was more the social aspects of it actually at that time because it was good to go along and meet new people and I just really enjoyed it, I think that was the main thing and it was something that I'd always liked and when I realized that I was getting better it was something that was good to aim for
- J And going back to that stage in your life how big a part of your life did athletics make up would you say?
- A Em, it would probably be a fairly big part actually because I trained at that kind of stage I think about 3 times a week, em, but it became a big part of my life because I had to travel to go to where I wanted to train so I relied on my parents to do that so you know it took up a bit of time, but I had other things as well, it wasn't s if I was just doing athletics
- J So you didn't feel as if you missed out on anything then?
- A No, nothing at all

- J And as you got older and made plans to go to university and study medicine did athletics play any role at all in your thoughts at that time?
- A yeah, definitely, I mean I considered not doing medicine 'cause I knew that once that started it was going to be difficult to keep up the athletics to the extent that I wanted to do it, em, so there was a time where I thought about doing something else but I'd always wanted to do medicine as well so you know, I decided that that was going to be the most important things really, to go and get my career sorted, I could always come back to the athletics
- J What would you say it is that's motivating you to do athletics now?
- A Now I think it's just the sense of achievement. I think when you do achieve something in athletics you feel great, you really do 'cause you know you're working really hard say through a winter of training, you're working so hard to aim for something and if you do achieve that it's an unbelievable feeling that you can't really describe to anybody else, em, so I think that's probably a big part of it and em, I think that because I know that my family and friends have seen what I've done in the past and they're very encouraging as well and I want to kind of do things to show them what I can do as well
- J And obviously you've described how it makes you feel so good about yourself, are there any other areas of your life that give you that feeling?
- A Yeah there would be areas where I think I would get that kind of thing but probably not to the same extent as in athletics. I mean I think in medicine I can get that as well if I do well in a certain subject or I do well in exams and things you can get that sense of achievement but in some ways it's just not the same as in athletics, there's something different about it
- J Why do you think that is?
- A I've got no idea. I think it must be probably in any sport because sporting things just seem to be classed as something above other things, so a bit more high profile
- J So would you say it's the sort of major source of happiness in your life?
- A Yeah, probably not the main thing but it plays a huge big part in it definitely
- J And obviously your athletic participation is very important to you. Have you got any examples to explain how important it is?
- A Hmm...I think I would say that last year when I wasn't doing it, em, I just felt terrible, I hated it and I wasn't as happy as I am this year when I have been able to do it and I think when it's taken away from you, you really realize how much you want to do it and how much you miss it if it's not there
- J And why was it that you weren't doing athletics last year?

- A Em, my course became too heavy, em, and I had problems with illness as well where I couldn't cope with the training load because of being ill and then I just decided because of that that there was no point risking failing my exams so I just took the time off and concentrated on my course for 3 months
- J And how did you cope at that time with not being able to train?
- A Em, it was horrible. I hated it but I knew that I had to do well in my exams and I knew that that was important to me as well so em, I suppose I just kind of worked a lot harder because I didn't have the training to go to and I wanted to do so well in my exams so I knew it was worthwhile, so it was a motivational factor for doing well in my exams em but it was horrible, I hated not being able to do it and I hated then going out to do the one race that I did do last year and feeling like absolutely rubbish, so yeah it was awful
- J So would you say that one way that you coped with it was to divert attention away from your athletic life and focus it on something completely different?
- A Yeah, I mean I didn't go and watch any events because if I did I felt that I was missing out on something and it frustrated me that I wasn't able to do it so I would just avoid anything to do with athletics really, yeah just the whole thing in general. I mean I would still speak to people who were doing it but I wouldn't make that much contact
- J And how important is it to you that other people see you as being an athlete would you say?
- A I think it's a big part. When people ask you what you do the two things I would say would be first of all that I run and then I'd say that I was a medical student, em, and people are always interested in it and it makes you feel good about yourself and they ask you what you've done and you're able to say, "I've run for my country", you know it's a great feeling and em, so definitely a huge part
- J And just how big a part of you identity would you say that being an athlete makes up?
- A Em, I would say that it's probably half. I mean there's a few other things that I'd put in there apart from like doing athletics and being a medical student, you know like friends and things like that, but it's a huge chunk of my life definitely
- J And what sacrifices have you made to allow you to participate in athletics?
- A Em, I think there's the things like doing the usual going out and when you're a student going out drinking and things like that and I don't do that anymore, you know I will occasionally go out but you know I won't take a lot of alcohol and thinking about your diet as well, you've got to consider that and there's a lot of things that I enjoy that I won't eat now and that's really only been over the past year that I've started doing that, em, before it didn't seem to matter

that much so those are maybe two things, em, I think this season because I took a year out of university, although I probably gained out of that year as well it's put me back a year on qualifying and things like that but it's something that I don't really feel that I've given up 'cause it's something that I wanted to do, so

J So do you think that your lifestyle is quite balanced then?

A Yeah, definitely

J So when you're away from the athletic setting or athletic people do you still identify yourself as being an athlete?

A Yeah, definitely, em, it's something that everybody knows about me so it's something that all my friends whenever I meet up with them it's one of the first questions, "How's your running going?", you know so if they're introducing me to somebody it's not, "Oh she's a medical student", it's, "This is my athlete friend", so definitely

J So would it be fair to say that your thoughts are very much focused on that as opposed to the other areas of your life?

A Yeah, I think particularly during the season it is. I think during winter when you're just training all the time it's not as big a thing 'cause people don't really ask you that much about it 'cause they know that you're not competing, em, so I don't think about it probably as much during the winter but during the season then it's what I think about

J I've already got an idea about how you feel about yourself when you're unable to do athletics because something inhibits you. Have you got any other examples of failing to meet your goals?

A Em, I'd say I had a few injuries this year but they never really prevented me from training or competing but they still put doubts in your mind that you're able to do things, em, apart from that failing to meet my goals, em, I set very high goals for myself so it's often unlikely that I will meet them so in one respect this season I have met every goal that I've set myself but one I realised the extent of what I could do this year I kind of set higher goals for myself which I didn't end up meeting, em, and that makes me feel like I've failed this season but if I look back to how I felt at the start of the season if I'd known that I've done this season then I would've been delighted with it and I wouldn't have thought anything of it

J And how does that compare to failing to meet goals in other areas of your life would you say?

A Em, I think it's very similar actually because I'm very much a perfectionist and if I fail to meet goals in other areas of my life I get very angry with myself or down about it so it would be the same with athletics as with anything else, it

takes me a while to get over things and I question a lot of things that happen and analyze things a lot

J I'm looking at your log sheet here and you experienced a couple of deselections this year. Could you just maybe set the scene and describe them for me?

A Em, the first one would be with my club up here, em, and it was the first Womens' League which is one of the big competitions in Scotland because the whole of every team in Scotland is there and the majority of people will do it, em, and for that one I'd decided that because I hadn't competed the year before I went out at the Scottish Uni's just to prove that I had a level of fitness, em, I ran a good time, better than I'd ran the year before with absolutely no competition there and so felt that I'd proved myself, em, and I phoned up the team manager to let him know that I'd run this time to be told that they'd already had the meeting and they decided that I was only going to be offered a relay place, em, I then found out who the person was that had been given the A and B string 400 metres. The A string I didn't mind because I felt like because I hadn't run the previous year I couldn't expect to be given the A string spot but the B string runner didn't even have a PB that was quicker than the run I'd done with no competition, em, so you know that was a big thing. The second time was the British League where the same person actually got my place again em, because she ran for the club down in England as well and I'd been given the place and then her mum had complained about it and the team manager had then backed down and given her the place instead of me

J Oh dear, the joy of athletics! Is this something that you've experienced in the past before?

A No, never before

J So was there an element of shock involved?

A Yeah there was, em, I think it would've happened last year if I'd tried to compete last year but em, I mean there was a shock because I felt that I'd done everything I possibly could to show people that I was back to fitness. For the club down in England I'd gone down to an open graded they'd put on just to show face, to show them who I was because they hadn't really seen me much since the year before and I went down and did a good race, showed them where I was and had made that effort and felt that I got nothing back from it

J And what exactly was it about the deselection do you think that made it stressful for you?

A Em, I think it was the fact that for the British one I wanted to make myself known down in England before going down to any major Championships. One of my aims this year was to try and get a relay place in a British team, em, and to do that you've got to be known down there and you're not going to get selected until you are known, but I knew that I only had one British League before the British under 23 Championships so it was important for me to run in

the first one which I got deselected for so I wasn't able to do that so that was one of the first thoughts in my head, "How am I going to do it now?", em, for the Scottish one I think it was the fact that I needed races and I really needed to get fit to get back into race fitness and I had a lot to prove to both myself and other people that I was back to the fitness level that I had had and even better than that so I needed to come out and do that but I wasn't going to get the chance to do it and I think it was the fact that people weren't believing in me as well, people didn't think that I had it in me to come back and do it and that's why they weren't selecting me, that was one of the things that was always coming back to me was the fact that people didn't believe that I could do it

J And how did it affect your perception of yourself as an athlete?

A I would say that at the start as well you know, if other people couldn't see it, was I not going to be able to do it? Was it too much to try and come back after a year out? em, but in the end it just kind of made me more strong to prove myself and show them and when I spoke to my coach about it he just said that it was just a hurdle that we had to get over and that we'd find other races without the help of a club

J And you've described a bit about the goals – it was part of your goal for the season that you were trying to prove yourself. How important was it to you that you met them?

A Em, it was very important. I knew that trying to get in the British Squad was a very high goal and we knew that it was a slim chance but at the same time it was important to me, you know I felt like because it was my last year as an under 23, once I came into senior it was going to be a lot more difficult to try and get into the British squad, em, so I felt that this was maybe my last chance to do something like that, em, so that was very important to me, to come back and show people in athletics that I was back was a huge goal, em, and if I hadn't done that this year I don't think I'd have gone on next year to do anything. I think that would probably have been it for me and I would've stopped

J So again it was the idea that it's important to you that other people see you as an athlete?

A Yeah, definitely

J So thinking back to the time when you first found out about the deselections can you describe how that made you feel?

A Initially I was very angry, em, I remember the first one feeling like I could break down into tears because I think the whole loss of not being able to compete and just the doubt in my mind of what people thought of me, it hit me hard first time definitely, eh, by the time it came to the second one I'd had it before so it was slightly easier but again I had the British thing there which made it worse than that one but anger was probably the biggest one

- J So obviously you put down on the log sheet that you felt a sense of threat when you first found out about this. Why do you think that was?
- A Em, I think it's the thought of not being able to meet your goals. If you're not getting the chance to do races then you're threatened of being able to do the things that you want to do and it would take away from me being an athlete, you know if I can't do these things then it's not going to be me
- J So there's the personal anger involved with not being able to meet your goals and then on top of that there's the idea that it might threaten your persona?
- A Yeah
- J Ok. And you put down on the log sheet that you felt it was quite uncontrollable, can you explain that?
- A Em, I think because I got so angry I mean I'm not the person who does get angry very easily and that to me showed that I wasn't in control of the way I was feeling, em, and I also knew that there was nothing I could do about it to change the selection and how it was done so there was nothing I could do and so the stress would kind of escalate more because I couldn't resolve it
- J And who or what did you blame for the situation?
- A Em, well in the first one the team selectors definitely because one of the team selectors was the parent of the person that got the A string and that was in the Scottish League and I knew that that particular person had a bit of a thing against me so that was difficult to take as well because I felt that maybe it was more to do with the fact that a family had a problem with me just because I'd beaten their daughter em, so you know I blamed them more than I blamed anyone else because the person I spoke to from my club was my old coach who ensured me that he'd put my case forward and he'd tried to convince them to put me in the team, so I didn't blame him as much but mainly the other team selectors
- J And again when you were first faced with the situation how much of your time would you say was spent thinking about it?
- A I would say for the rest of that day definitely, em, I spent time on the phone to my coach, on the phone to his daughter, em, on the phone to another friend, Gary, who I always got to about athletics, my mum and dad. I spoke about it all day kind of thing, just working out if there was anything that we could do, what this meant for the rest of the season because it was one of the first events and something that I wanted to do, did this mean we had to change things around for the whole of the rest of the season? And people were spending time calming me down and explaining that it wasn't the end of the World and that I could do other things
- J So did you find it quite hard to switch off from it at that time?

- A Yeah, definitely, I don't think I did anything else for the rest of that day
- J This section is about what you did to cope with the stress associated with the deselections
- A Could you talk me through what strategies you employed?
- J Em, well first of all when I spoke about it on the phone I got upset about it which I think you have to release some of that but on the phone I didn't release any of that because that would just have been me not being who I want to show people that I am, but when I came off the phone I definitely got upset but straight away I went and spoke to other people about it and as soon as I put down the phone the phone was back up and I was phoning someone else so that would definitely be the thing that I did first, eh, I spoke to my coach and he was very good about just explaining why these things happen and you've just got to deal with it and like gave me examples of when this has happened to his daughter and things like that, so I then went on to speak to her about it 'cause I knew she'd had personal experience of it and I mean even straight away from that we tried to even change clubs at that point in the season but realized that it was too late 'cause I'd have got a ban for changing clubs mid season, em, but that even went through our heads so we were doing everything that we possibly could to try and do something else and I spoke to my mum and dad as well and friends about it so tried to get some positive influences from them, em, on the phone I did try to speak to them about you know why this had happened and why didn't I get the chance even although I'd gone out to prove myself, em, and although I put that forward I was told that it wouldn't make any difference that I was on this reserve list and if somebody decided to drop out which was highly unlikely then I would get the place, but even then it would feel to me as if I was getting it as second choice and although other people wouldn't know that, to me it just wouldn't seem right, em, but from then on through positive influences from like my coach and things it just kind of became a motivational kind of factor 'cause I just wanted to go out and prove myself even more to people and that kind of thing just makes me train harder and work harder at things and you know with the second one I got the phone call just before I went training and that training session was unbelievable. My coach just stood and looked at the watch and just said, "What's going on here?", 'cause I was just flying 'cause I got so angry about it and I used that anger to help me run quicker, em, but you know I just turned it round to motivate myself to make them at the end of the season regret not picking me because they'd see what I'd done throughout the season so they'll see what I could've done for them in the first couple of meetings and how much further up the League table they would've been
- J So you were able to convert the thing initially from being a threat to a challenge?
- A Yeah, definitely
- J And you put down that you started to look for other races

A Yeah, I looked for other options, tried to change clubs, looked for other races and it ended up that on those two days when I wasn't selected there wasn't actually any other races so I decided that I wasn't even going to bother going to the event because I didn't want to be there and know that I should've been running in the race, em, so for the first one I stayed longer warm-weather training, I was prepared to go home early for the race but I decided to stay for an extra few days out in Barcelona and then for the second one I went and did a small League match for my club at home and ended up running a PB in my 200 so I then phoned up the team manager straight away and told her what I'd run just to spite her, em, and so I just refused to go and do it

J So you've obviously gone from the threat to the challenge. What sort of time scale was involved in being able to turn that round would you say?

A Em, I would say that I felt threatened about it for a few days definitely between finding out about it and the next training session where I got a chance to speak face to face with my coach, em, probably for the next couple of training sessions I was still feeling threatened and I don't think I trained very well for those few days but then after that when it eventually sunk in and I thought, "Yeah, I have to do something about this and I can just put this into doing better over the season", it would've been less than a week I would definitely say where I would say that I turned it around and used it

J So what strategies out of all of those that you used would you say were effective?

A Em, definitely speaking to people, for me talking through things is definitely important, I need to get other people's perspectives on things 'cause often I just go through things in my head too much and it just goes round and round and it never gets sorted so if I let all the stuff out to somebody else then it's a lot easier and they can tell me what they think, em, I think then taking my anger and using it in a different way was definitely something that was worthwhile and in some ways them doing that to me has made me run quicker this season, so yeah they would be the two ones

J So as time went on your ability to cope with the situation improved and you said originally that you saw it to be quite uncontrollable as well?

A Em, yeah, because once I'd got in control of it and realized that I could use it for my benefit then you know, it was under my control and even although them doing it is uncontrollable, I can be in control of what I see in it and what I do and can change it

J Would you say that your whole response to this deselection would have been any different had it happened in the past?

A Em, probably now I'm a lot stronger. I think in the past I might not have been able to turn it around and use it. I think in the past I might have struggled to do that and I would just have felt the threat for a lot longer, em, whereas now I

think that I've grown up a bit over the past few years and I think that's why I could turn it around for myself

J And how do you think you'd react to it if you were to be faced with it tomorrow?

A Em, I think I'd probably still struggle with it 'cause I think no matter what, if somebody deselected you you're still going to feel that kind of threat to you and a bit of a loss, em, but now that I know how to deal with it I reckon I could just do the same things that I'd done before and get on with it

J Going back to your questionnaire responses between the start of the season and the end of the season, you seem at the moment to be identifying yourself a little bit less as an athlete than you did at the start of the season. Have you any idea why that might be?

A Em, it might be because I'm on my break at the moment so I'm not really thinking about athletics. I've put it behind me for the season and until I go back in you know, a few weeks time I don't want to think about it because a lot of the time during the year you are thinking about it and it's a nice break and I've got a lot of other things that I'm doing at the moment that are taking my mind off it so that's probably why

J Overall how satisfied would you say you are with your performance this season?

A Em, I'm definitely satisfied with it, I mean compared to last year I've run 4 seconds quicker which you know, you can't complain with that, em, but I know that there was a lot more to give this year but I just didn't have the luck with the conditions or the competition and the races, em, when the conditions were right there was no competition there to push me on to do a good time and em, I know I could've run a 54 seconds this year definitely so in that respect I'm not happy with it but when I've had comments from people saying that it's good to see me back and you know that I've made such a big jump from where I was even 2 years ago and to come back from not doing anything last year to run to the extent that I've run this year then you know, I'm definitely pleased with it

J And in what way if any has your whole identity as an athlete changed as a result of what's happened this season?

A Em, I think this year I've really put a lot more into my athletics than I ever have before, em, and I've noticed that I talk about it a lot more with other people, em, because it's a big part of my life, it's one of the things that I can talk about and it comes up in conversation a lot so that's definitely changed and people definitely look at me as more of an athlete now than they did before, em, and I concentrate a lot more on it. I think about my diet, I think about what I drink and really concentrate... It used to be just a few days before a competition I would think, "Oh I shouldn't eat that", kind of thing whereas

now it's all the time, it's just become more natural to do it and it's just a part of my life now really

J I'd just like to get an idea of how you reacted to another event this season and obviously you did experience a couple of injuries so could you just tell me a wee bit about those injuries?

A Yeah, em, it started right at the beginning of the season. It was just before my first race that I first had the problem and it was knee that in a training session I'd kind of felt it a little bit and on one of my runs my knee just gave way underneath me and I had to completely stop and I had to stop the training session early which is something I hate doing em, and it kind of stayed with me for most of the season where it didn't stop me from competing or training very much, there were occasions where I had to stop sessions but it didn't really do much like that but em, it was still there and still niggling in the back of my mind. It was always there in warm-up but by the time I got warmed up and into a race it seemed to be ok and I never really seemed to feel it, so it was there for basically the whole season. It only really went away I would say at the end of June so it was a big part of it

J And you've got down on the sheet that it made you feel a sense of loss. Can you describe that for me?

A Yeah, I think it would be because I knew that if I didn't get it sorted quickly then I wouldn't be able to compete and I thought that I wasn't going to be able to do what I wanted to do this season em, and it just felt like that was going to be it and I was going to have a bad season again and I'd put so much time into the winter and so much effort into trying to come back that it would just have been such a big loss to me if I hadn't been able to compete

J So again it was endangering your goals?

A Yeah

J Ok, you felt a sense of loss, what other emotions did you feel at that time?

A Em, I definitely got upset about it straight away and was extremely worried about it and there was obviously the pain aspect of it 'cause it was pretty sore, em, and I suppose I probably felt threatened as well 'cause I knew that things weren't going to be as good as what I thought they were going to be

J And who or what did you blame?

A Em, I don't know if I blamed anything really because it's difficult in that kind of situation. I mean I could've blamed myself and thought, "Well did I warm-up properly or not?" and those thoughts did go through my head but I know that I did warm-up properly, em, I could've blamed my coach and thought you know, "Was this training wrong?", but it wasn't and there was nothing really that I could blame and that's sometimes harder to deal with

- J And is that why you felt it was quite uncontrollable?
- A Yeah
- J And how much of your time was spent thinking about it when it happened?
- A Well that night I went home and straight away spent the rest of the night icing my knee and things, em, and then phoning my physio to arrange appointments and speaking to my parents about it 'cause I phoned them straight away to let them know, em, and then thinking about it for the next few days you know, any time I felt any pain I it and worrying about the race that was coming up that weekend and whether I was still going to be able to go warm-weather training the next week and things like that
- J And how did being injured make you feel as a person?
- A Em, it took away the whole point of being an athlete really because I wouldn't have been able to do it and whenever anybody had asked me about my athletics I wouldn't have been able to say, "I've done this and that", it would be, "Oh I'm injured", which I think is really difficult to do. It just means you can't do it at all really and that would worry me
- J And you've already mentioned quite a lot of the things that you did to cope with it – you iced your knee, you made an appointment to see your physio, again you got support from your parents and other people. Is there anything else that you did?
- A Em, I can't think of anything else actually
- J Obviously at some point the stress of the situation reduced. Did that mean that you were able to turn it round again or did it ever become more of a challenge at any point?
- A No I don't think it did. I think that would probably be the difference between these two stresses is that because it stayed with me for most of the season there was never a point really until it went away where I felt like I was completely fit and didn't have any niggles or anything to hold me back, so I think throughout the season I had the problem every time I went to a competition during warm-up I'd be thinking, "Oh my knee's sore, is it going to be ok in this race?" Although I never felt it in races I was still on the start line thinking, "Am I going to feel my knee in this race or not?", and at the end of the race thinking, "Right, I need to go away and ice this and I need to make sure that nothing's going to happen to it again", so I think it was more a constant stress than being able to use it
- J And the severity of that stress possibly decreased as you got used to the fact that the injury was there. How long did it take before you were able to get to that stage would you say – for how long was it in your mind constantly?

- A Em, I would say it was in my mind constantly for at least a month or so until I got used to the fact that it was going to be ok once I actually started running. I mean it would be sore occasionally when I was walking around and that would worry me and any time that it would flare up the stress would then come back again 'cause it flared up a good few times through the season, em, but with each one it would be a few days. And I think with each one the amount I thought about it was less each time because I started to realize, "No, it's just a flare up, it'll go away again", but at the same time you still have it in the back of your head, "Is this going to be it again?"
- J And you put down on the log sheet that your coping wasn't very effective. With hindsight do you think that there's anything that you could've done to help you cope better with it?
- A I think it was just circumstantial. I think because I like to go to an event knowing that everything's fine, so for me going to each event knowing that I had a niggle meant that you know, it was always in my head and there was always that little bit of me that didn't feel quite right, so because the stress lasted for so long I think that's why I didn't think it was effective but I think if it had just been an injury that had lasted for a short time I could probably have coped with it a bit better
- J So basically it remained a sort of threat/loss type appraisal throughout the season and it didn't become a challenge?
- A Yeah
- J Do you think you would react with it any differently if you were to be faced with it now?
- A Em, I think you react the same to an injury most of the time, apart from it depends what point in the season you're at. I think if it happens at the end of the season you're not so bothered about it. If you've done everything you want to do that season then it's not so bad, em, and if it happens during winter you know that you've got a long time before you have to compete but no matter when an injury happens you're still going to feel the same kind of stressful things that you feel at any time during the year, em, so I think it would be about the same
- J Well that's just about all I have to ask you so thank you very much for your time, but before we finish do you think there's any important factors that we failed to discuss?
- A Hmm...no, I don't think so
- J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?
- A No
- J Thank you very much

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3, MEGAN

- J Ok first of all I'd like to get some background information from you, so to begin with could you tell me a bit about your age and your occupation please?
- L I'm 34 and I'm a pharmaceutical services coordinator
- J Ok, and let's talk about your athletic participation. What would you say have been your main achievements in athletics so far?
- L I've had England vests, GB vests and silver indoors in the British 800 metres and a gold medal outdoors in the 800
- J And thinking back to when you were younger, what sort of age were you when you first got involved in athletics?
- L About 15
- J And how did you get involved?
- L My P.E. teacher suggested that I join a club
- J And what would you say it was at that age that was motivating you to do athletics?
- L I enjoyed running
- J What was it about it that you enjoyed do you think?
- L Em, it was something that I was good at
- J And at that stage in your life how big a part did athletics play in your life would you say?
- L Not much, I just trained occasionally with a club
- J So how much were you training at that age?
- L Em, maybe once a week
- J So you didn't feel that you missed out on anything because of athletics?
- L Not really, no
- J Ok. And as you got older what plans did you make for future employment?
- L I did a degree in a nursing qualification
- J And did your athletic participation have any influence on your decisions for future employment at all?
- L No I'd stopped running by then

- J I'd imagine now that athletics plays quite a big part in your life and obviously when you first started it didn't. Could you talk me through sort of when and how it became a bigger part of your life?
- L When I was about 26 I went back into running and then as I got better and progressed it became more important
- J Ok were your reasons for stopping athletics originally?
- L Because I had all my exams
- J The next questions are designed to help me understand how big a part athletics plays in your life now. So what would you say it is that's motivating you to do athletics just now?
- L What I've achieved so far and what I hope to achieve
- J And in what way does that motivate you would you say?
- L Because I want to be more successful and I feel I've started and I haven't completed, I haven't done everything I'm capable of
- J So would you say that you're quite an achievement oriented person?
- L Yeah, very
- J And is that something that's just in your athletic life or..
- L Probably all life but very much more in athletics than anything else
- J Why do you think that is?
- L Because I feel that I've worked very hard and I've invested a lot of time in it and I've given up a lot so I know once I give up with me being 34 then I won't go back into it, whereas with other things you can carry on in your life with. It's a one-off opportunity I'll never have again
- J Ok, obviously I've got an idea of how important your athletic participation is to you. Could you just tell me a bit more about that?
- L It's very important to me. It's basically my life, em, it's what I think about all the time and it's all I really want to do
- J And would you say that it's important to you in any way that other people see you as an athlete?
- L I think everyone would say it's very important to me because everyone else thinks it's all I do with my life and that I've given everything else up for it

- J Is it important to you that for example, someone else thinks of you as being an athlete as opposed to you as your job role, or...?
- L Yeah
- J Ok and just how big a part of your identity does being an athlete make up would you say?
- L Most of my identity, a lot of it. It's very much that is me
- J And what sorts of other areas, or are there any other areas that would contribute towards your identity would you say?
- L Not really, athletics is everything
- J Ok, now you mentioned that you've made a lot of sacrifices to allow you to do your athletics. Could you tell me a bit about that?
- L I've spent a lot of my money on the athletics. I don't see my family or my friends, em, and because I don't see my family or my friends it can be quite lonely when I'm not running or if I have a bad day because I've cut off my social life so everything revolves around my running
- J And apart from athletics what other areas of your life are important to you?
- L Well my family obviously and work but athletics overrides everything
- J Ok. And when you're away from the athletic setting, like say you're at work or whatever, do you still see yourself as an athlete?
- L Yeah, it's always on my mind. Everything I do has to be geared towards my athletics – what I eat, what I drink, how much sleep and rest I get
- J I'd like to get an idea of how you feel about yourself when you don't meet your goals in athletics, could you describe that for me?
- L Very depressed, I can't think of anything else, frustrated, em...
- J What sorts of thoughts go through your mind?
- L Just wanting to know how I can improve but feeling that I've got no control. I'm very dependent on other people around me and like the frustration of knowing that I could do better and not wanting to give up although sometimes I feel like giving up because it just seems pointless but deep down I don't want to give up
- J When you say that you feel dependent on other people what do you mean by that?

- L Just on people helping me train, em, it's just I feel sometimes that the situation's not something I can control and I find that very depressing and very hard to cope with
- J And how does failing to meet goals in athletics compare with failing to meet goals in for example your work life or other areas of your life?
- L It is a lot more important. If I didn't achieve in other areas of my life I probably wouldn't even think about it but it's the only thing that's ever on my mind from the moment I wake up to the moment I go to bed
- J And, well obviously I already know the answer to this, but would you say that athletics is the main area of your life that makes you feel good about yourself?
- L Yes, definitely
- J So I guess your sort of sense of self-worth would be based around...
- L Yeah, if I've trained well then I'm on top of the world and I can conquer anything but if I've had bad training or a bad competition I just feel very, very depressed
- J Ok, so this section is about the stressful experiences that you encountered this season so I've got your log sheet that you completed for me and one of the stressful events that you encountered was a stress fracture. I've just got a small amount of detail about the event here. Would you be able to describe it for me please?
- L Basically I got a stress fracture after training and it was very painful. I couldn't run on it at all so I had to stop all the training and all I could do was go on an exercise bike and it took ages to heal and I just felt like giving up because I felt I was losing fitness, I'd never be able to compete again and it all just seemed a bit pointless and cycling on a bike is quite depressing anyway and I enjoy running and I don't enjoy cycling on a bike
- J And had you ever experienced anything like that before?
- L No, nothing like this at all
- J So was there an element of shock involved in it as well?
- L I suppose so but gradually and gradually the more it sank in the more depressed I got 'cause I think at first you think it'll get better quickly and then as time goes on and you realize it's not then you get more depressed
- J And what was it about the fact that you got the stress fracture that made it so stressful for you?

- L The fact that I knew it was going to take a long time to heal and again because I feel I'm 34 that I don't have the time to get back into running and achieve things so an injury is a major set back to me
- J And what goals did the stress fracture endanger?
- L Basically I had to curtail a lot of the competitions I was planning to do. I had to change my training and I just lost a lot of confidence because I couldn't do the proper training so I wouldn't be able to compete at the level that I'd intended to so that was very hard
- J How important was it to you that you achieved those goals that you'd set for yourself?
- L It meant everything to me 'cause I'd been training for the last 6 years and it was just like the whole 6 years that I'd sacrificed everything for had been completely wasted
- J Now obviously you've described to me that you felt very depressed and frustrated about this. Thinking back to when you first learned that you'd actually got a stress fracture, could you describe the sorts of emotions that you experienced for me?
- L Disbelief, I kept thinking that it probably wasn't, that it would get better, em, I felt that people training me would give up on me because I was injured so I wasn't that interesting to coach because they couldn't achieve their goals. I felt fairly alone, very, very depressed. I felt that people didn't understand how I felt. I felt angry and I felt that if I'd made a slight change to the training I'd done it wouldn't have happened
- J On the log sheet you put down that originally you perceived the event to be quite threatening. Could you explain that for me please?
- L Basically I felt that by having the stress fracture it would stop me from training and so I felt threatened that I wouldn't be able to achieve everything that I'd wanted to and everything that I'd sacrificed to achieve my goals
- J So it was the idea that you'd put so much into this and it was stopping you from achieving the goals that you'd set yourself?
- L Yeah it was just a complete waste of everything I'd put in over the last few years and not just the kind of physical things – the training and the money and time – but just emotional, everything that I'd dreamt about and planned and hoped
- J Ok, and who or what did you blame?
- L I blamed my training because I felt that there were certain sessions that probably increased the risk of me getting that

- J So was that your coach then?
- L Yeah
- J And you put down on the log sheet that you felt that the event was very uncontrollable, could you explain that for me?
- L I felt that I had no control over the situation. I couldn't do anything about the injury and I had no control about the future training so when I wanted to be getting fit all I could do was just keep on the exercise bike
- J And I'd like to get an idea of how much of your time was spent thinking about the stress fracture
- L All the time
- J Were you able to sort of detach from it in any way?
- L No, it was constantly on my mind
- J And what sorts of thoughts were you having at that time?
- L I felt sorry for myself, very depressed, very angry, just not having that control was quite stressful
- J And even when you were at work or in a completely different environment was it still on your mind?
- L Yeah, it was still playing on my mind. Also the people at work know I run and they'd often ask me how the running was going so even if I tried to switch off people would then ask me how things were or something would happen, there'd be a programme on television about running so even if I tried it was constantly on my mind
- J And did it affect the way that you saw yourself as an athlete at all?
- L Yeah I felt worthless that I couldn't even compete at the lowest level. I just felt like I wasn't an athlete anymore
- J So was it the idea that, obviously a lot of your self-worth comes from your athletic accomplishments and was it the idea that you were unable to do it anymore so it was really quite threatening?
- L Yeah, yeah, I felt worthless
- J In this section I'd like to get an idea of how you coped with the stress fracture, so first of all do you think you'd be able to talk me through the coping strategies that you used from the time when you were first faced with the injury?

- L Eertainly talking to people would be the main thing, em, emotional outbursts, I'd get very upset and depressed and express it by crying, em, and blaming my coach for the training. I'd try and think about other things in my life but it was very, very difficult to do that because my heart wasn't in that, I just wanted to get back running, em, so mainly talking to people
- J And did you seek any advice from professionals?
- L Yeah physiotherapy
- J Obviously I've now got a list of the kinds of coping strategies that you used. Would you be able to sort of tell me them in a sequence as in what sorts of ones you used first if you can remember?
- L Well first of all I went to a physio because I didn't realize that it was actually the bone and he thought it might have been tendonitis and then finally when it was diagnosed as the bone I realized there wasn't much I could do other than rest, em, talking to others was quite soon at the beginning and then as the time went on and I realized that it wasn't going to get better quickly I then got more angry with my coach and more upset and depressed, so probably then more blaming my coach laterally
- J Right, and did you use any other modes of training at all or...?
- L Just on the exercise bike but that was very hard because it was basically on my own. I wasn't training with anyone else and that was almost the worst thing because it just made me feel like giving up even more 'cause it was a stationary bike and so I just sat in the lounge on it and it was very depressing night after night
- J So it affected your motivation as well?
- L Yeah
- J Ok, so out of those coping strategies that you used, how effective would you say that your overall coping was?
- L Not effective, I didn't cope at all. It was comforting talking to other people and I find that the best thing to comfort me but it didn't actually help the situation. It didn't actually make me feel any better about myself, it was just comforting
- J Ok, what about seeking advice from the physiotherapist?
- L At first with the physiotherapist I felt positive but then when that treatment wasn't working and they decided it wasn't actually the tendon and that it was the bone I just felt more depressed because nothing was getting better, em, the exercise bike, I tried to believe that was going to help because that's all I had to kind of believe in but some days when you don't feel like training and

you're not motivated and you haven't got a group around you, you just feel like giving up and it's just more and more soul destroying

- J And did your enjoyment with athletics change in any way as the situation unfolded would you say?
- L I started thinking, "I might as well give up." I didn't believe that I'd be able to come back and run as well, em...
- J So again it was this idea of the change in your level of motivation?
- L Yeah, I stopped seeing myself as an athlete who could achieve at a high level and just as someone who wouldn't be able to compete at club races anymore
- J Now obviously you have come back from that event and you've returned really strongly, how did you get from it being such a negative thing to it eventually becoming, well I don't suppose it was ever positive, but how did you get yourself out of it would you say?
- L I think probably just perseverance because I want to run however low I get I will do anything and everything to keep running, but it was just perseverance. I never, never expected to get back 'cause I really didn't believe I would. I felt so low but it was just keeping on working through it
- J So it was like time as well
- L Yeah, and I think I didn't aim as high and I think just by keeping persevering I managed to get back, whereas I think mentally I'd lost it a lot. I don't think I had that confidence in myself. It took a long time to build that up
- J So when you say you didn't aim as high did you sort of re-evaluate your goals then or...?
- L Well my coach told me what competitions I should do so I didn't really think about it. I mean if it was just left up to me I might've just given up all together, but I did the races and I didn't expect myself to do as well and I probably didn't have the right attitude before a lot of the races because I felt negative before the start of them instead of feeling positive
- J Do you think the fact that you didn't expect so much from yourself helped in any way?
- L Well no because my coach still did so he was putting pressure on me when I was really getting stressed, so
- J Ok, so obviously that just caused further stress
- L Yeah, it didn't help

- J Do you think that your response to this event would differ if it had happened at a different time in your athletic career?
- L No I think it would be the same. If it happened again it would be the same. I think that you, well I want so much from running that any set-back however small is like the end of the world
- J I'm just going to go through a different stressful event that you experienced this season and according to your log sheet that was an underperformance. Obviously again I don't know much about that event so could you just describe it for me please?
- L I was racing at Watford and I thought I'd run a good race and somehow I managed to get off the pace of the other athletes who normally I'd be up with and not only did I get off the pace but I was a long way behind and it was just devastating
- J Why do you think that happened?
- L It's very hard to know exactly why. I thought it was probably because tactically I got it wrong and I don't know, probably mentally I lost it as well
- J Ok and is this something that you've experienced before?
- L Yes but not as humiliating as that
- J So what was your goal in that particular race?
- L I'd intended to win it
- J And how important was it to you that you achieved that goal?
- L Very important, that was the reason for going to the race
- J And what would you say it was about the event in particular that made it stressful for you?
- L The fact that I'd come at the back and was still with the other athletes or I'd done a decent time then it wouldn't have mattered that I didn't achieve that goal because goals can change because you can't always predict a race, but I'd come so far behind everybody else it was just totally humiliating and it made me lose my confidence and I thought that everyone else would then not think of me as a good athlete and...
- J Ok, so again it endangered your sense of how good you were as an athlete?
- L Yeah and how other people perceived me
- J Now on the log sheet again you stated that you perceived this event to be a loss. Could you explain that for me please?

- L I felt that I'd missed an opportunity that I'd invested a lot of time, money, emotion and sacrificed seeing family and seeing friends particularly when some of my family are quite elderly and some of my family have died in the few years that I've been running, but in the back of my mind I'd sacrificed an awful lot to progress as an athlete which is why every loss just crucifies me so much
- J And you've talked about how you felt humiliated following that race. What other sorts of emotions did you experience?
- L Very depressed, empty, just numb, sad and very angry as well
- J So again it was similar sorts of emotions that you experienced with the stress fracture
- L Yeah
- J Ok, and who or what did you blame this time?
- L I blamed to a degree when I was at work I blamed the fact that there was a lot of bitching at work that was making me stressed and I wasn't sleeping and I was in the process of changing jobs and I wasn't being allowed annual leave and that was quite stressful so I blamed work, em, I always blame my coach
- J So it was like a combination of other people, but not yourself?
- L I always could've done better but I always blame other people first
- J And again I'd like to get an idea of how much of your time was spent thinking about it
- L All the time
- J And in this situation were you able to detach from it at all?
- L No, no it's all I ever think about is my running, especially if I've run badly then I just can't think about anything else. I can't get over it – I can't just put it down and think, "Ok, that was yesterday, move forwards." And then my coach gets angry as well if I run badly so he will then be angry and it drags on and on
- J Right, so it's a bit of a vicious circle
- L Yeah
- J So again when you were at work were you still aware of it?
- L Yeah and then I was angry as well because I felt that people at work weren't being particularly helpful to me and so it just made me even more angry

because I was thinking about why I'd run so badly and then when I went back to work and I was with the people who had made me have sleepless nights it just constantly played on my mind

J Ok, and how did you feel about yourself in general after the underperformance would you say?

L Humiliated, depressed, angry, just gutted

J And you explained how you felt that it affected the way other people would perceive you as an athlete. Did it affect the way that you saw yourself as an athlete?

L Yeah, I felt that I didn't have the mental determination when I started to drop off the pace to fight back. The fact that I just light myself drop further and further back made me feel that I haven't got the kind of mental aggression that I should have

J So going onto the next section, again I'd like to get a picture of how you coped with this particular underperformance. I have a list here on your log sheet of the coping strategies that you used. Would you be able to just talk me through them please?

L Again I always talk to people, that's the first thing I do straight away, em, I cried, em, and I blamed other people, I blamed people at work. Those were the main coping strategies

J Now obviously these stressful emotions occurred I would imagine as soon as you crossed the line. How long would they last for would you say – I'd just like to get an idea of the sort of timescale of your coping

L Well they probably started before I crossed the line, they happened during the race but, em, they went on I think until I next had a good race which I can't remember, was probably a few weeks later, but until I had a good race I didn't believe I was capable of running a decent time or a decent race. I had to actually have the physical proof. I couldn't just believe it - I had to do a fast race until I finally started to have confidence again

J Ok, so within that two week period between your underperformance and your next good race, did the intensity of the emotions that you were experiencing change at all?

L No, I think they were quite intense anyway and they probably just remained intense. It was just constantly on my mind

J Ok, and actually going back to the stress fracture - this was a question I should've asked but I forgot – you talked me through the emotions that you felt when you were first faced with the stress fracture. I'd like to get an idea of sort of how long they lasted

- L The stress fracture, I wasn't training for about probably 2 months but then the rehab was quite a slow process
- J And during that time did the intensity of those emotions change?
- L Once I started doing the rehab I felt a lot better, it was not being able to run that I found incredibly difficult
- J Why do you think the rehab made you feel better?
- L 'Eause I felt I was actually starting to get better and there was still some hope, but I still felt low because I knew I'd lost my fitness
- J So when you mentioned that you were able to feel a sense of hope during the whole experience of the stress fracture, did it ever change from being a threat to more of a challenge or was it always quite negative?
- L Not really a challenge, I think when I was able to run I was probably more hungry because I was so desperate to run having not been allowed to run for 2 months. I was really keen whereas when you've not been injured and you're tired and you're training every night or most nights sometimes you turn up to training and you're just really not in the mood, but having been told that I couldn't train and knowing that it was too painful to train, suddenly you have a new kind of hunger to run again but I don't think I felt it as a challenge, it was more like a panic to catch up with what I'd lost, but it was some form of relief that I could finally run again
- J Right, ok. Sorry to muck you around with the 2 different events – going back now to your underperformance, your coping strategies were talking to other people, letting out your emotions and blaming other people. How would you rate your coping with regard to that event?
- L I don't think it helped me cope any better. I always find that talking to people takes away the panic that I feel inside me. I can't cope if I can't control a situation and I find I can't sleep and I lose my appetite but if I talk to somebody it helps calm me down so I can maybe sleep a little bit more or have more of an appetite but the depression's still there and the kind of stress and feeling like I'm never going to get back and achieve anything is always there, but the comfort of talking to people helps
- J So it kind of takes away the edge
- L Yeah because when I get depressed I run badly. It is just horrible, it's not just I feel a bit low, literally I go into blind panic
- J And did your involvement with athletics change in any way following your underperformance?

- L Em, I think it made me kind of more desperate to not waste any more time with any more injuries and probably made me a bit more cautious so I was a bit more careful that I didn't do certain things
- J And going back to the underperformance, do you think that your response to that would be any different if you had experienced it at a different point in your athletic career?
- L No, I'd still react the same
- J What about if you had experienced it back when you first started. Like when you were 15, 16?
- L I think the more you probably make the same mistakes in a way the harder it is, especially with underperforming because you feel that you shouldn't have done that. If you make one mistake once then you think, "Oh I'll learn next time", but when you make the same mistake again it's harder to then think, "Why am I still making these mistakes?"
- J Ok, now I've got an idea of how you've coped with 2 separate stressful events in athletics and there are some similarities in that you've become quite emotional during both events, you've tended to blame other people and you've also sought support from other people. Would you say that those are coping strategies that you tend to use in general?
- L I always talk to people regardless of what the situation is. I don't necessarily blame people as much. I think because the athletics means more to me I get more emotional about it, but I always talk to people if I'm depressed
- J You've filled in for me at the start of the season a questionnaire that measures your level of athletic identity and I have another measure that you've done for me today. You are quite consistent in both questionnaires but there is one small discrepancy and that's with the question that says, "I feel badly about myself when I do poorly in athletics." Now you rated that 5 whereas at the start of the season you rated it 7. Do you have any ideas why that would be?
- L I think towards the end of the season because I hadn't achieved as much as I'd wanted to in my mind I started giving up a bit and so whereas at the beginning of the season if I wasn't achieving it would upset me more because it meant so much more to me. By the end of the season I was so fed up that even though I do care a hell of a lot and it's still very important to me, just being worn down by the emotional strain of it all I just started thinking, "Is it really worth it?", whereas at the beginning I was so keen and enthusiastic to do well that it meant more to me then than at the end of the season
- J So do you think at the end of the season you perhaps detached a little bit from your level of athletic identity?
- L Yeah, a lot

- J And do you think that that in itself was a coping strategy?
- L I was trying to concentrate on other areas of my life. I think because I feel that sometimes I have so little control over my running and I want control that by trying to focus on other things I could control like meeting up with friends and things that made me happy was just giving me some space from the strain that I've had all year with my running, the emotional stress of running
- J Ok, that's interesting. Have the things that you've experienced this season had any impact on your image of yourself as an athlete would you say?
- L Yeah, I mean when I don't run well I lose all my confidence that I can actually achieve anything and when I do have a good race such as the AAAs it fills me with a whole lot of new enthusiasm
- J So where would you say you're at just now in terms of your image of yourself as an athlete?
- L Em, right now I'm on a bit of a low one. I'm kind of trying to not think as much about my athletics as much as I can because it's the end of the season and I'm just so mentally drained I just can't bare to think about it, even though I am thinking about it every second of the day I'm trying harder than ever before to just put it to one side, and as an athlete I'm probably not, though I hate to say it, as committed as I would've been maybe a few months ago
- J And that's because you feel drained from the season?
- L Yeah, totally
- J When you mentioned that you're trying very hard at the moment to take a slightly different perspective on your athletics, do you feel that you've learned anything at all?
- L I feel that I got myself so stressed out that even though running means everything to me, I was getting to a point where I was worried that I was getting so stressed about running that not only would it affect my athletics in a negative way, it would affect my job, my health and everything else to such a degree I think I need to think about other things and do things other than athletics, the trouble is however strong I try and be it is so much harder to do it than just talk about it but I am trying, but we'll see what happens
- J Well that's just about all I've got to ask you but before we finish do you think there's anything that you'd like to add or anything that we've failed to mention?
- L I don't think so, I think that covers about everything how I feel
- J Ok, any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?
- L No it was good

J Thank you very much for your time

L Ok thank you.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3, CHRIS

- J First of all I'd like to get some background information from you, so to begin with could you tell me a bit about yourself, like your job, your age etc.
- G No bother at all I'm 22 years old and I'm an account executive for a sports marketing company called Maximize and I've worked for them for a year. Before that I worked at Scottish television as a researcher in the sports department for a year full-time, and before that I was at college
- J So your job's always involved sport?
- G Yeah, ever since I was 5 years old I've been into sport and since I didn't make it as a footballer I wanted to find another avenue and sport journalism came up so I decided to follow that route
- J So obviously from a young age sport has played a big sort of part in your whole identity?
- G Yeah, everyone that knows me knows me through sport, they won't know me through anything else, em, even back home in Fife anybody that knows me will know me from playing football years and years ago, it's always been a big, big part of my life
- J And going back to your athletic participation, what would you say have been your main achievements so far
- G Eh, I'd say about 3 years ago my main achievement would be being ranked number 1 in Scotland under 20 and ranked 7th in the UK as an under 20, eh, finishing 3rd in the Scottish Senior Championships as a Junior, em, that was a great achievement, em, winning an international in Eyprus was probably the best feeling I've ever had in my life, even though it wasn't the best of times or anything like that – it's not always about getting PBs, it's about winning races and that's probably my most memorable race
- J And when you said that it was the best feeling you'd ever had, can you describe that for me?
- G Em, I think when I was over in Eyprus we got all the start lists and everything beforehand and there were a couple of guys in the race that were close to the same personal best as myself and I knew it was going to be tough but I knew I could get a medal and when I went out there I was in good form at the time, I just went out and ran the race and didn't think too much about it, ran to my strengths and pulling up the home straight I heard my teammates cheering and knowing that you've got it in the bag and crossing that line, it's just overwhelming, you know, and you're standing on the rostrum listening to the National anthem and watching the flag going up, there's no better thing in athletics, it's just sheer joy and delight

- J So you said that from the age of about 5 that you've been involved in sport, what age were you when you got involved in athletics?
- G I was a late starter in athletics. I was 16, em, I'd played football since I was 5 until I was 16, probably 17 'cause I mixed athletics and football for a year, em, and I used to do swimming when I was a kid and I used to play badminton when I was a teenager, em, I've been involved in all sports. I've played golf ever since I was 5 years old as well probably, so sport's been a massive part of my life, eh, athletics more so since I was 16
- J And between the age of sort of 5 and 15 when you did football, how serious was it?
- G I played at a very high level in football, em, I played in the school football team, the local football team, the district football team, em, I played for Dundee United when I was 12 so it was a very high level of football that I was playing, em, when I thought I was going to make it as a full-time footballer I just took my foot off the gas thinking that I'd made it, but I got taught a severe lesson in life. It was just at such a young age, 12 years old, and you know that you've been selected to play for a top club in Scotland and then you get booted out because they think that you're not pulling your weight, it was a big reality check and most guys will tell you that you don't get the chance that often to make it as a footballer and I missed my chance, but as I say, 12 years old and learning a lesson like that was quite hard to take but it's helped me throughout life to make sure that I don't make the same mistakes again
- J So they kicked you out because you weren't pulling your weight?
- G I wasn't the only one, there were about half a dozen. The club got relegated at the time from Premier Division and they got rid of a lot of the guys 'cause they had to cut back and they just looked at the guys to see who didn't make the grade and unfortunately I was one of them, but it was hard, it was hard because I was known in Fife as one of the best footballers in the area, em, but I was always hopeful that other clubs would come in but then I played on for 4, 5 years and there were always people coming to watch but no-one ever approached me, em, it was all about being in the right place at the right time and unfortunately I never was apart from that one chance, but I'm not complaining, I've moved onto athletics and I'd never look back
- J So when you were 16 and got more involved in athletics, how did that sort of come about?
- G En, when I was at school we used to go to the school championships for a day off, just for a skive so the P.E. teachers knew me and knew that I was quite quick, so I was fastest in the school over 100 metres. One year I went and did the 100 and 200 but never did anything and then there was one year when I couldn't honestly tell you why, but I entered the 800 and J.B, a well known coach, approached me after it saying, "Look, do you run for anybody?" and I said, "No, I play football", so he said, "No, come along to training, I'll make

you an athlete”, and I thought he was winding me up at the time but a few of my mates said, “Eome along and see if you like it”, so I ran 2.12 that day in the 800 and within a year J.B. had knocked 13 seconds off my personal best and that just gave me the taste for it then and I owe that man a whole lot of my life, he’s a great guy

J So when you say that it gave you the taste for it, what exactly was it that was motivating you to do it would you say?

G Success, em, football was a team game, you were a player out of 11 so if you have a good day it doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re going to win – there are 10 other boys there, but in athletics it’s down to you and only you and that’s what I’ve enjoyed, it was a real change, going out onto that track, running for yourself, running for your club, whatever, em, but the success of winning medals, gold, silver bronze, whatever, even just a personal best, whatever. And I set myself a few challenges over that first year and the first one was to break 2 minutes and it’s a very, very hard barrier to break, but when I did break it it was, oh it was a great feeling...I used to complain about training twice a week for football and then I was training 4 nights a week for athletics and then 6 nights a week and I felt bad if I missed a night. It’s a totally different lifestyle, it’s crazy

J So when you were first getting involved in athletics how big a part of your life did it play then?

G Eh, I would say a reasonable part of my life because sport’s always been a massive part of my life, whether it’s football or athletics, em, but at that stage I was still at school so my school life was always important but athletics would’ve been right up there alongside it, em, ‘cause I’m the sort of guy that gives 100% to everything that I take part in so commitment wise it was as good as, if not better in fact, than it is now, em, obviously I train more and stuff nowadays but at that point my commitment and dedication was 110% so I’d say it was a massive part of my life

J And did you feel that because of that that you missed out on anything?

G Not really, em, all my mates used to say, “Are you coming out at the weekend?” and stuff like that but it was a weird one because I met a girl in athletics that I was seeing for 2 years and she trained with me and we used to spend all our time together and I don’t know if that’s why I was going to training all the time but it never affected my life, athletics was what I ate, slept and drank. Every night of the week I was going training apart from a Friday so I never missed out on anything. I went out before I started athletics so I wouldn’t say I missed out on anything. You make sacrifices, lose a few mates, but you’re going to meet new people anyway

J And as you got older you obviously decided that you wanted a job in sport. What impact do you think the fact that you were involved in athletics had on that?

- G I was always going to have a job in sport, em, I don't think athletics influenced that much, it couldn't have 'cause as I said earlier, I was always going to do something in sport, if it wasn't in football then I wanted to be known some other way in sport, whether it be athletics or football or anything else, em, athletics certainly helped to get me into my job. When I first started going out on work experience and stuff like that, it's always worthwhile giving something to them instead of them just giving to you all the time, so through my contacts in athletics I was able to get stories for them or whoever I worked for, so they saw that as a valuable asset and I started to get a good reputation within journalism and it helped me that way and it still helps me to this day 'cause obviously all my friends are involved in athletics, so it did play a part but I wouldn't say a massive part
- J And you said there that you just wanted to be known, could you expand on that a wee bit?
- G Since I was a very young kid I've watched football and I've always wanted to be famous if you like, em, a sort of celebrity. I wanted to go out and get noticed. I know it sounds sad but it's good to have ambitions like that, I think you've got to set your sights high. A lot of my mates used to say that I was off my head setting my sights as high as that, but I'm only 22 years old and I've almost got to the level I want, but I want to go higher, em, the likes of Murdo McEloud who I used to watch playing football and think...but it comes as second nature to me, em, I'd watch Paul McNeil and guys like that and these guys would stop in the street and talk away to you or go for a drink or something like that, so I always wanted to be well known
- J So the sense I'm kind of getting is that it was all about constructing this kind of identity as being well known as an athlete. Do you think the fact that you went to get a job that was also involved in sport was also forming part of that, or was that something that was completely separate?
- G No I think it was forming part of that because sports journalists always get the contacts so you're still mixing with the footballers, the athletes, the golfers, anything like that so I think after I realized that I couldn't be that sportsman then the best way to do it would be to be someone that would mix with them on a daily basis, so I think that's why I turned things round and thought, "Well how else can I be a part of that?" So to be a sports journalist you're still mixing with the elite, em, 'cause at that stage I didn't know where my athletics career was going to go but I think now at this stage in my life that the 2 avenues are still there, I can still become a well known athlete or I can become well known on the business side of things so I think I'm approaching a cross road, I'm not there yet but 2 doors are still open and it will come to the stage where I'm going to decide what one I'm going to go through to get the full benefit – it's ok juggling both but you'll never ever achieve the maximum that you can do. If I want to be an athlete then I need to focus all my energies on that and become the best athlete that I can be
- J But at this stage you don't know what one it's going to be

- G My career always comes first because that's my life, but I reckon that if I get the balance back that I had when I first started I reckon I can still become a well known athlete and make Eommonwealth Games, Europeans, whatever, and still be very successful in my career
- J So you've talked about what motivated you to take part in athletics when you were younger, is it still the same thing that's motivating you now?
- G I think it's changed in that when I first started I wanted to be the best and I got there, and I took my foot off the gas and thought, "Oh I've made it, I don't need to work so hard", but it's harder, once you get to the top it's harder to stay there because there are other guys setting their sights on you so it was a difficult time in my life in that when I made it to the top of athletics I was about to leave home to start my career because my education had finished so it was moving out of my solid foundation if you like, moving out and living on my own which is a very difficult transition to make so I would say that my ambition now is to get back to where I was. It's very difficult to do, in the last few years it's been very difficult in that way because I've been trying to juggle my lifestyle and moving from place to place, so I was never settled
- J And is that what you think has caused you not to be as consistent as you've been in the past?
- G Yeah, that's been the main reason for the downfall if you like in my career. Juggling things was never good, I was never settled and I've now got my own place and I'm just about to get my coaching network all sorted, but I think I made a bit of a mistake – I went to the wrong coach at the wrong time but you know yourself that if it doesn't work it doesn't work and it's cost me 3 years of my career, but I've got a long way to go so I'm still being positive
- J So obviously I've got an idea of how important athletics was to you as a youth, how important is it to you now would you say?
- G I think if you were to ask me that question at the start of the year I'd have said that it's not that important but now it's very important. I had a big turning point in my athletics career when I went warm-weather training when I was just about to jack it all in, that was in April. When I went out there it was just for a week but then I was considering, "Well I can't be doing with this anymore, I've not got the time, I've not got the commitment"
- J What do you think was causing that?
- G I think it was a mixture of things, the mixture of not being successful, guys beating me that had never beaten me before, em, that was hard to take and also the fact that I knew that my coaching structure wasn't right and I knew that his heart wasn't in it as much as mine was so all of that together was just bringing me down. And I'm usually a very positive person and my career was doing well and I just thought, "Oh well, I'll keep fit", 'cause I'd never stop doing something in sport so I was just about to throw it all away but when I went out

to Barcelona I met up with Tony Borsematto, Eolin Jackson, Paul McKee, all these guys and I trained with them and after the winter that I'd had I didn't think that I'd be able to train that well but I surprised myself and I trained very well with these guys like Eolin Jackson, you can't beat speaking to that guy - he has experience - and all of these guys sat me down individually just chatting away and they saw the talent that I had and they used to think, "I wish I could run like that", when they were watching me run round the track and their confidence in me started to cheer me up again and I was believing a lot more in myself and it gave me the buzz for it again. To meet guys like that who are all Olympians, they've all been there and done it, Eolin's done it and he's had the World record and all of that, it was just great to be part of that and when I came back I said, "Right, I'm going to give this a go", but it was too late for this season because I never had the base to be successful so I reckon with the work I've put in this summer, it's given me a good foundation to go out into my winter and I know what I want coaching wise and I reckon, maybe not next year, but definitely the year after for the Commonwealth Games I should be there

J So obviously it's forming a very big part of your life just now

G Definitely, yeah

J How big a part is that would you say?

G I would say it's back up to the same level as my career, em, my career was miles in front at the start of the year but over the last 5 months I've tried to fit as much athletics in as I can, but since I've moved in here I've decided that I'm going to alter my working hours to try and take in more training so that I've got more time to relax, more time to chill out and not be as tired as I was last year, so I don't want any excuses

J And you've mentioned your work and you've mentioned your athletics, are there any other areas of your life that are important to you?

G Eh, I would say that athletics and my career are the major things in my life and obviously my family, em, those are about the only 3 things that I think about, em, there's nothing else, but I think I would think more about athletics at the moment, definitely, em, my work's my 9 - 5 job but athletics is a bigger part of my life at the moment

J How important is it to you that other people see you as an athlete?

G I think everybody that knows me knows me as an athlete, even through my work they all know me as an athlete as well, em, they all know that I want to be an athlete at the highest level and they will all help me to get there and I like people knowing me as that, I don't want them to think of me as anything else so that's another reason why I'm striving to get back to the top of athletics where I feel that I belong. I should've been up there 3 years ago with the best, but I underachieved then but was still number 1 in Scotland, so I feel as if I've got a lot more to offer

- J What sacrifices are you making to allow you to participate in athletics?
- G Eh, I would say that I haven't really sacrificed anything over the last couple of years, ever since I started full time work, but I realize that I've got to make sacrifices to get back to where I want to get, so my social life is going to cut down big time and a lot of people are saying, "Oh well, you'll not get your nights out", and stuff like that", but I don't want my nights out and I want them to realize that I don't want to do that and I want to do my training 6 days a week and then on my rest day so exactly that, rest, because I know that the winter work is very, very tough and it'll take a hell of a lot out of me, but as I say I don't want any excuses next year. I want to go back on that track and prove to everybody that I'm still a force at 4s and 8s.
- J And how balanced would you say that your lifestyle is just now?
- G It will get better, I've not moved in here long but by the time I start winter work my life will be very balanced between work and training and my social life will just take the back seat.
- J When you're away from training or away from the whole athletics arena, do you still think about yourself as being an athlete?
- G Yeah, I do, em, I think moving in here you'll see that I've got trophies and stuff from successful times and that's the reason that I've brought them here. I want to get up in the morning and see trophies that I'm proud that I've won and to make me feel that I am a talent and that's the reason that I want things like that in my house, so that I've got things around about me that remind me that I am a class athlete, but I do think about athletics when I'm away from it
- J So say you're socializing, do you still think of yourself as an athlete?
- G Yeah, because it'll be athletes that I'm out with because the people that I'm out with are all athletes and if they're not athletes they know that I am a dedicated athlete so they respect what I'm all about, so I'd say that athletics is with me 24, 7.
- J How easy do you find it to switch off from it?
- G You can switch off from it and relax and let your hair down but not that often, well you can if you like but it depends on what your targets are and how badly you want them, em, I can switch off and enjoy myself but at the back of my mind I'm always thinking, "Well I'm an athlete, I better watch what I'm doing I've got this and that coming up", so it's all about preparation and it's very difficult to switch off
- J I'd like to get an idea of how you feel about yourself when you don't meet your goals on athletics, can you describe that for me?

- G Eh, annoyed, frustrated to say the least, eh, this year alone I've known that I've had a good one in me but it never ever came out and it's frustrating to know that. You know yourself that you can train as hard as you like and do it on the track and most of my races this year I've gone out on the track confident and not performed...I'd say that the last 3 years for me have been more frustration than anything else
- J And going back to the few hours after it's happened, how intense are these emotions?
- G I tend to analyze my race as soon as it's finished and know where I've gone wrong and what I can do to improve that so I like to think about it as soon as. I probably think about it while I'm at the track, whether it be at competition or training and I find that when I get away from the track then that's when I start letting it go
- J So basically it can be quite intense but then you're able to switch off from it?
- G Yeah, it's intense when I'm at the venue but as soon as I leave and get into a different environment I can switch off or at least calm down
- J And how does this compare to failing to meet goals in other areas of your life?
- G It's very strange. I think it affects me more in athletics if I don't meet my goals. It's quite difficult to set yourself goals in your career, athletics you can set yourself times that you want to reach or what titles you want to win, so those are specific targets, em, but in my career there's not much I can set my targets on, but it's not as obvious as in athletics
- J What I'm trying to get at is athletics the main thing that's going to make you feel bad about yourself if you don't do well?
- G Yeah definitely, em, there's no worse feeling than going out onto that track and being a favorite or anything like that and letting yourself down, em, failing to win something that you know should be yours, like in my final year as a junior there was one race that I lost all year and it was the Scottish Under 20s and that hurt...you can have equal enjoyment but there's pain that matches that
- J Could you give me a brief summary of how your season has gone in general?
- G My season was below average. My winter work wasn't great, that was partly down to my work commitments and my lack of enthusiasm for the sport, em I didn't have the heart to put in 110% as I had done, em, warm-weather training went well considering I was about to jack it in and then I managed to swing things around, eh, race wise I suppose it went ok in terms of from my first race to my last race every one was an improvement, I never ever went backwards, but it was just a lack of base that meant that I didn't achieve what I wanted to achieve, but it was well below my own personal standards

J So I'd like to talk about a stressful event that you experienced this year. I'd like to understand it in a bit more detail, could you describe it for me please?

G Eh, the most stressful race of my season would've been an open graded meeting at Grangemouth in early June and it was a 200 I was running and I don't understand why, but when I got there they had put me in an A race alongside some really fast guys, but I'm known as an 800 metres runner so to be in with these guys in a 200 was a bit of a shock but I went out, I felt quite good, training had been going ok but I had a niggle with tendonitis behind my right knee which was always causing me slight problems but when I went out and ran I could feel myself short striding so much but that should never have been noticeable to the athlete until after the race watching a video or something but it was probably the slowest time I'd ran since I was 17 years old which was not long after I first started so that was very, very hard to take, em, just in terms of underachieving, just frustrated and angry and all of those together made me feel very, very low, em, there were a lot of guys there that I knew that night because there was a Scotland select 4 x 400 on so a lot of the top Scottish athletes were there and I'd actually gone there to try and prove a point, but I proved no point apart from the selectors being right enough in not selecting me, em, but that was the most frustrating thing, that 200 metres race

J What exactly do you think it was about the event that made it stressful for you?

G Em, not achieving what I wanted to achieve. The hurt that I felt was, I wouldn't say it was the worse that I've felt in athletics but it wasn't far away, em, it was very threatening in terms of I thought I was getting better but I wasn't, so it was hard to take that away, but I think just letting myself down and what I'm all about with all those people in the stand that know me and the persona that I try and give out to others, em, wasn't there. I'd showed up as somebody different, it wasn't me that was out on that track. I want people to think of me as being a good athlete, talented and going places but I did exactly the opposite, I showed that I'm just an average athlete that's had his day so it was hurtful in that way

J So you put down on the log sheet that you saw it as a threat and you've explained how part of that was because you felt that your persona had been damaged, would that be right?

G Yeah, definitely

J So did you start to see yourself slightly differently as a result of that?

G I did at that stage, em, because I'd always thought of myself as one of the top athletes in Scotland but that was when I realized that I was no better than an average club athlete, which I would never think of alongside my name, I wanted to be a national athlete, not just a club athlete, so it was hurtful in that way and it definitely damaged what I set out to achieve and the persona

- J And you put down on the log sheet that you felt that it was quite uncontrollable, can you explain that for me?
- G I'd say it was uncontrollable in the way that I'd never felt that sort of pain since I lost my Scottish title, I say my Scottish title, it never was but I thought of it as mine, but just the pain of that was very hard to control, em, it was just really difficult and I never had long to get over it, em, 'cause I had another race that was taking place just an hour and a half later on, em, so because I thought, "No, I'm not going to do anymore damage", but it was the 4 x 400 and the guys got my spirits up and we were only going to race because the Scottish team were who we'd have to race against, so it was a chance to prove that, fair enough I ran terribly in the 200 but I tried to tell myself that no-one knows me as a 200 metres runner, eh, they know me better over the 400 so that would give me a chance so it went from being very uncontrollable to reasonable within a very short space of time because it had to be
- J Ok, we'll come back to that later. Obviously you've described how you felt when you were faced with the situation, you've described the hurt, em, the anger and frustration, em, would you say that it affected your sense of self-worth in any way?
- G Definitely yeah, em, I like everybody to think of me as an international athlete, top class athlete in the country, but I didn't believe myself that I was that at the time, em, so it definitely affected what I thought of myself
- J And who or what was it that you blamed at the time?
- G Em, myself and my coach. I'd been thinking for a while that he wasn't pulling his weight and I think that was the final nail in that coffin, I think that's when I realized that he wasn't as dedicated towards me as he was to other athletes, so that was when I realized that I needed a change, so it was a big turning point not just in my season, but in me as an athlete and my athletics career, but I blamed myself for putting myself through a race that I wasn't in shape to run, but I like to think that I'm always in shape so I went out and did it
- J So you blamed you and your coach, was there one that was more than the other or...?
- G Em, Probably him more than me because he should've known that I wasn't in shape to run well. I reckon that's a coach's job. I'm still inexperienced, I'm nowhere near as experienced as most guys in athletics so he should've noticed that I wasn't ready for it
- J And I know that you had to try and get your thoughts turned around quite quickly because you had this race afterwards, but forgetting about the race afterwards how much of your time would you say was spent thinking about it?
- G Right up until I got the baton in the 4 x 400, yeah definitely, I would never get it out of my mind because it was always at the back of my mind, "What happens if it happens again?", but it was just a matter of telling myself that it

couldn't have got any worse, em, I know there were a lot of people that were staying behind to watch but I'd already done the damage and the only thing I could do was to redeem myself so I thought about it all the time

J So once you'd redeemed yourself were you able to switch off from it or were the thoughts...

G No, the thoughts were still there

J And once you got away from the situation how much of your time was spent thinking about it?

G I would've said for the next couple of days at least, just going through in my head 'cause there were a lot of decisions to be made since as I said I was blaming my coach as soon as the race was finished I had to think, "Well am I doing the right thing, should I stay with him or should I go somewhere else? Am I doing the right event? Should I go back to doing 8s and forget about all of this?" So there was a lot of decision making to be done so that one race caused those thought processes for at least a couple of days

J And how did you feel about yourself as a person after the event?

G Very low, I did get back some credibility after running in the 4 x 400 but only ever so slightly, I could sort of believe that there were guys in the crowd that were saying, "Oh he's past his best, he'll never get back to where he was", but I see that as a challenge to prove these guys wrong. I've had it in the past and I'll have it in the future but everybody gets that, so I was very low about myself

J This next section is trying to get an idea of the kinds of coping strategies that you used, so do you think you could talk me through the coping strategies that you used from when you crossed the line?

G Em, immediately after the race it was letting my emotions out, em, swearing quite a bit at myself and just I think sheer annoyance then after that it was just a case of sitting alone and trying to gather my thoughts and then I.M. who was in the race behind me who I'd been training with for a few weeks, sitting with him afterwards I was telling him that I wasn't going to run in the relay because I felt so low but I's been around for a long time and his words of wisdom really helped me realize that it's like falling off a bike, the best thing to do is to get up and try it again, so he had a point in that what I needed to do was get up and race again so I had that chance an hour and a half after the race so it was just a matter of trying to put it to the back of my mind, but it never did, it was always there, I'd always known that I'd ran crap basically, em, sitting with the guys that were in the 4 x 400 team, using them to try and keep my mind off it, em, running in the 4 x 4 relay helped a little bit because we beat the Scotland team, but it wasn't the same as an individual race because it could've been the other 3 guys that ran in the relay and I was the weak leg but it helped the feeling that I wanted for my persona, I wanted people to realize that I was part of that team, so it helped in that sense. It was difficult the next

day but I got over the initial hurt and the next day it was just a case of the decision making process that I knew I had to go through where it was the right coach that I was with, what I wanted to do, whether I wanted to stay at 4s or go back to 8s, there were loads of decisions I had to make so I spoke to a few other coaches that I knew I could speak to in confidence. I spoke to my own coach but I didn't take what he had to say onboard because I didn't think he was interested and if he was he would've stopped me before I went to Grangemouth the night before, so I think that all helped in easing the blow and it cleared my mind

J So the fact that you started to make choices about your future helped you cope with it?

G Yeah, definitely because it started to paint a picture of where I wanted to go again. I knew where I wanted to go the night before I raced but that clouded that picture and redirected me in a way because I knew that I had to change certain things to achieve

J When you were first faced with it you described it as being quite threatening and uncontrollable, at any point during your coping efforts that you've described to me did that change?

G Well a few days after it started getting a lot easier, eh, a lot more controllable. Once I'd made decision after decision after decision it was getting easier and easier, it was just painting a much clearer picture in my mind. It was a lot more controllable and I'd say that a couple of days the event all was back to normal and it was still on my mind but I could control it, it wasn't making me feel low or anything like that. I felt a lot stronger in myself and the experience of that event probably has helped to make me stronger

J And would you say that at that point it was becoming more positive – would you describe it as a challenge for example?

G Yeah, I probably would because after the decisions that I had to make it was a challenge to make those decisions, em, decisions like changing coach and whatever had to happen to make it back to the top of athletics so it definitely became a challenge instead of a threat

J During this time when you were coping, did your involvement with athletics change in any way?

G Em, it did yeah, it made me more dedicated and I realized inside that I needed to be more kind of for the sport so I think at that point I was starting to realize that I had to make more changes in my life to give it more time to achieve what I want to achieve, em, so it definitely changed in that aspect

J Do you think that the whole way that you responded to the underperformance differed in any way to the way you might have responded to it in the past?

- G At the very beginning of my career if it had happened I wouldn't have thought about it, but once you make the breakthrough in athletics and you become a known figure, em, that's when things start to affect you. When I first started I just went out and ran, I didn't care about reputations or anything like that. I didn't know who anyone was that I was racing against, but then once that's you that's in the spot light and it's you that everyone's setting their sights on to beat, that's when it starts to affect you so it definitely affected me more at that stage because that's when I was trying to make a come-back and I just thought of myself as being back down the ladder, so I think over the last few years it would've been the same feeling but if it was to happen 4 years ago then it would've hurt a lot more when I was in my prime
- J And how do you think you'd respond if you were to face it now, would it be different in anyway?
- G Eh, yeah it probably would be slightly different because I would know what to do to get over it so it wouldn't take so long to get over it and I'd just try to put it to the back of my mind as soon as possible
- J I've got a measure of how you see yourself as an athlete and one for at the end of the season and they are pretty similar but your athletic identity level right now has gone down slightly, do you have any ideas why that might be?
- G Eh, when I did the one at the start of the season it was when I was full of confidence and raring to go for the season ahead so I think it could be partly due to having a bad season, em, probably since I've been away from athletics a bit for the last 4 or 5 weeks so even though I've been thinking about it I've still not felt as though I'm fully part of it, em, but once I start my winter work I'll probably go up another notch or two
- J And you said that part of it was probably because you had a bad season. Can you explain that?
- G I think just a bad season in terms of I'd set myself goals at the start of the season. I wanted to reach Pb level again and I think that put pressure on me because the only way I was going to stay in the Area Institute was if I got close to my Pb in the 4 or 8 and I felt that I had to achieve that and I got nowhere near it and maybe it was too much pressure on myself instead of just going out and enjoying in but that is why it was a bad season
- J And what's the link between having a bad season and having a slightly different score on the questionnaire do you think?
- G I think just because at the start of it my confidence was high, I'd just come back from Barcelona a renewed athlete, my confidence and self-belief was there, the commitment was there and I felt an athlete, em, after mixing it with the likes of Eolin Jackson you can't do anything but feel an athlete even if you're not one, so then I was full of confidence but after the sort of season I've had my confidence was low and I started to doubt who I was and what I thought I was

- J And this has had a bit of an impact then on your whole sort of identity as an athlete?
- G Yeah, not a massive one but at the start of the season I thought I could be back up in the top 3 or 4 in Scotland but unfortunately I wasn't so therefore I would doubt what level of athlete I was
- J Well that's just about all I have to ask you but before we finish do you think there are any important factors that we missed out?
- G Not that I can think of
- J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?
- G It's been a pleasure
- J Thank you very much for your time

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3 – AIDAN

- J First of all I'd like to get some background information from you so to begin with could you just tell me a bit about your age and your occupation?
- D I'm 28 years old and I'm a full-time athlete. I've been jumping for about 12 or 13 years
- J What would you say have been your main achievements so far?
- D Em, well I'm Scottish National Native Record Holder both indoors and outdoors, em, the first Scottish jumper to jump over 8 metres. I've represented Great Britain. My best achievement was competing for them in the European Eup in 1999 in Paris which was good, em, 4th in the Eommonwealth Games, good but very frustrating, so those are the key achievements
- J So you said you've been involved in athletics for 12 years so what sort of age were you when you first got involved?
- D Well I mean I've been jumping for 13 years. I started when I was 15
- J What would you say it was at that age that was motivating you to do athletics?
- D Em, because of where I'm from I played rugby as well at school so you know from the Borders it's a big influence because rugby's a big sport there and it was through friends that I joined athletics and it was the Scottish Schools indoors and I came second and got silver in the long jump and silver in the triple jump and em, you know, got the opportunity to represent Scotland at a junior level and that was really appealing and I enjoyed it, you know that competitive environment and that just motivated me further for other things
- J So obviously you liked the competitive environment, was there a bit there also about the achievement would you say?
- D Well yeah I mean to be like second best in the Scottish Schools. It was the people I met as well, it was just the whole new experience of meeting new people, you know, for me from the Border town going up to the big city in a huge Kelvin Hall arena and you know to become the second best in the schools and I never really trained that hard at the time and I was then given the opportunity to represent Scotland and get involved in the Junior Eommission weekends and to be involved in that development was really good
- J So did you do rugby before you did athletics?
- D Yeah
- J What age were you when you first did rugby?
- D About 11, 12 years old

- J So basically sport has formed a big sort of part of your identity from a young age
- D Sure. I mean I remember my first lesson in P.E. where a little bunch of us had to run to the end of the field and back up again and I was one of the first ones back and it was like, “Right, training Tuesdays and Thursdays and you’ve got a game on Saturday”, and that’s how it was and that was right through until sixth year when I played rugby and went to Canada on an Olympic tour, you know I’d done all that kind of stuff as well and you know being part of the team that won the Scottish Eup and it was at the end of the school year in sixth year when I was like, “What do I do? Do I do athletics or rugby?” So I did athletics, but yeah it was from the age of 11, 12
- J So how big a part would you say that athletics or sport in general was playing in your life at that age?
- D It was just part of it, you had your education and what you wanted to do when you were older and it was never to be a professional athlete, it was to be a pilot or you know the classic stuff. I wanted to be a pilot when I was younger and aim towards that
- J So was it more a sort of hobby at that stage?
- D Well yeah, it was just part of what you did. It was never ever the attitude of you *must* do well or you *must* do that and you know, you *must* perform these goals. It was never the pressure from my parents or anything. It was just going out and enjoying it
- J Ok. We’ve touched on this a wee bit but as you started to get older you obviously thought about being a pilot or whatever, what impact did your athletic involvement have on that decision would you say?
- D The athletic involvement never really had any. I applied for a sixth form scholarship for the pilot and eh, you know it’s a very small percentage of people get that and I never had the grades and I was too young and naïve. I wasn’t prepared enough and in the RAF you have 2 chances of applying as an officer and that blew one chance straight away and I was really discouraged so I just carried on with my school work and working with electronic stuff and I pursued that area and then I became an electronic designer, so the athletics was just something that I did and that I was good at and enjoyed and em, but still at that point I never ever thought that I would become you know where I am at the moment.
- J So the next questions are designed to help me get an idea of how important athletics is to you now. I’ve got an idea of what motivated you to do athletics when you were younger, has that changed in any way?
- D Yeah big time, now it’s like a full-time job and you know I still enjoy it but the enjoyment isn’t the main motivation anymore and eh, it’s completely different. When I decided I wanted to become a full-time athlete the

realization of what's needed is completely different and now it's a lot more serious. It's a job and that's the way I look at it

J So is it more a sort of financial motive?

D Well yeah, it's not really the financial side, it's the aspirations of where you want to be and em, ok yeah, the financial side is a bigger part because you have to have money to continue doing what you're doing but it's to become an Olympian, to become a medallist at a World Championship level and that's what it's about. A lot of it's all about achievement and status, you know my goal is when I finish athletics I want everyone to remember DR and you know there's also David Walker who held the Scottish long jump record for 30 odd years with 7m68 and I just want to nail a distance that's so far out that nobody's ever going to break it

J So your identity must then be based on you seeing yourself and other people seeing you as a very successful athlete?

D A bit of a legacy yeah, just when I finish that you know I was a complete success

J So how important would you say that your athletic participation is to you now?

D Yeah, it's 100% now, em, it's completely who I am, you know in the past when I've been in a relationship it started to actually have a negative effect where the relationship started to become more important than the athletics but then through reasons the relationship terminated and I was basically just left with athletics, eh, in the future work will start I guess to become another identity for me, em, but at the moment the athletics is 100% who I am

J So basically athletics makes up pretty much most of who you are just now, yeah?

D Yeah, I mean I guess I have hobbies and stuff but that's just pass time, chill out time to take my mind off other things

J So obviously it's important that you see yourself as being an athlete, is it important to you that other people also see you as being an athlete?

D Em, I wouldn't say I'm caught up on how people think of who I am. I would like to think that they think I'm at a respectable level but that's not why I'm doing athletics, to get a third party's perception of who I am, em, but you would like to think that they respect who you are

J Ok, so just how big a part of your identity does being an athlete make up would you say?

D Em, 99% of the time, you know it's all athletics at the moment. Where I am in my career I'm actually taking a year at a time, it's 100%. I can't afford to

allow anything else to sort of affect it em, so I do have another relationship but that isn't as important as the athletics is at the moment. It does take up some of my time but at the moment athletics is eh, the key element in my life

J And what sorts of sacrifices have you made to allow you to participate in athletics?

D Em, well first of all when I left school I worked for 7, 8 years and eh, in that period I went from full-time working to part-time, so I went from a 5 day week to a 3 day week so that was the first sacrifice. The reason for that was that I was injured all the time and because I was working sometimes up to 60 hours a week I was trying to fit in time for training and it just wasn't going to happen so I made the sacrifice to go part-time to really put a halt on my career and see what happens with my athletics. And then a year later I realized that I needed to go full-time and so I made the further sacrifice and just quit the work. Hopefully I'll have done enough work so that I can go back to it and just give this opportunity because I don't want in 10 years time to find that I have regrets and think, "I wish I had", and you hear people saying, "If only I went full-time", and I never ever want to be in that position so that's the attitude I look at that when I finish the sport that I've given it everything and I've given myself every opportunity to be the best that I could, and then you know I've got 20 odd years or 30 odd years to work after that

J So on a day to day basis are there any other sorts of sacrifices that you make or is that the main one?

D Well the social aspect as well which happens every day of the week. A lot of my friends understand who I am now but at the start they were like, "I'm going out tonight are you coming?" I'm like, "No I can't, I'm training at 9 in the morning", and eh, so I've lost contact with a lot of friends because of that and the social side, well there is none, through the season there is none and in the winter time when you have a month off you just blitz it and just get hammered for 4 weeks and then you're back into it again. And there's the dietary, you know I like to go and eat rich foods and I like to eat high fats, you know it tastes great and eh, I like drinking wine but you just can't do that so every day you have to choose what you eat so that you get the best out of the training and that you recover quickly from the training and you don't get any toxins, em, so you've got the dietary side. The other one is other recreation sports as well. People go out and do other stuff like skiing and you know, other kind of stuff and people are like, "Ever been skiing?", and I'm like, "No I can't, I'm not allowed to in case I get injured", so there's a lot of stuff that you can't do as well recreation wise like, "Let's go and kick a ball in the field", and I'm like, "No I can't do that because of this."

J So athletics makes up this huge part of your life and you mentioned that one other area of your life is your relationship. Apart from those two areas is there anything else that's important to you in your life?

D Well friendship and friends, people around you and family a big part because through the good times and bad times they will always be there, or you'd like

to hope so, but they generally are through difficult decisions that you make so that's a good thing. It's almost like a stabilizing factor. No matter how well you do these people never look at you in a different light and will always just be a constant which is I think very important

J When you're away from an athletic setting and you're away from athletic people, you're doing something that's got nothing to do with athletics, are you still switched on to your athletics – do you still think of yourself as being an athlete or do you take a sort of back step?

D Yeah I mean when I've been away on holiday you're always thinking consciously in the back of your mind you know, watch what you're doing and it's almost a paranoia, like if you go out and you have a meal when you're off and you think about what it's doing to your body. There's that and it's almost, not psychotic, but if somebody outside of athletics took a view of what you were doing they would think you were mad. If you think about what you do, you go to bed early to get rest, you can't afford to go out, you know, anybody who's not in athletics takes a third party view of it and thinks you're mad, em, so it's difficult to kind of fall out of that mould. I find it difficult anyway to fall out of it because you've been like that for 11 months of the year

J So I'd like to get an idea of how you feel about yourself when you fail to meet your goals in athletics and we'll probably go into this in more detail later so could you maybe just give me a brief idea of how you tend to feel?

D Em, when I don't achieve my goals I mean it's almost like failure, it depends on the goal. If it's like a sort of minor goal, em, like say a goal within training like not achieving the times you go away and you're in a mood all night like, "Don't talk to me!" And so I tend to use that as motivation if I don't achieve a goal and that is motivation for me to try harder the next time and look at reasons why I never achieved the goal. And when I compete it's a lot worse. You almost have to watch that you don't get into the habit of trying harder because then it can just progressively get worse and worse

J So say you had a bad competition, something that's quite important to you, how would you tend to feel emotionally after that?

D Yeah I'd feel disappointed. I don't really want to speak to anyone. You just want to go away and reflect on it. And I'm very competitive, I don't like getting beat and eh, when that happens I'm quite hard on myself. It'll take you know maybe 3 or 4 days for me to turn it round and say, "Right let's get motivated for the next competition." There are not that many opportunities in athletics and when you get an opportunity and you blow it it's a complete nightmare because you may never get that opportunity that season again

J Is that something that you tend to be in different areas of your life or is it something that's specific to athletics, like being hard on yourself if you don't achieve?

- D Yeah I mean this is an attitude that I've developed through my work. Through designing for like 6, 7 years I became a senior designer and eh, I was quite young to be a senior designer. I did a lot of project management and running a business so that was a big issue so I had to be quite hard. I don't like incompetence and I give people one try, sometimes two and if they don't get it right then I'll say, "This isn't good enough, you need to get this right", and that was the attitude that I had when I was working in the business and that's carried through into my athletics so the work influence has made a big influence on my athletic attitude
- J I'd like to get an idea now of what sorts of aspects of your life make you feel good about yourself as a person, like what gives you your self esteem and your sense of self-worth
- D At the moment it's all athletics 'cause it's everything that I am at the moment, em, I enjoy playing golf and I go to the driving range and I enjoy hitting the ball well you know, and I guess I get a sense of satisfaction, em, the self-esteem and athletics, I mean I like to think that I've got quite a good self-esteem, but I get a lot of satisfaction out of having a good training session, you know you work hard and you know you're hurting and it's pissing down with rain and you get the session done and you think, "This is a good day", and I think that physical activity is a key for self-esteem
- J Ok, I have your log sheet here and one of the events that you experienced this year that I'd like to talk about in a bit more detail was the hamstring injury that you experienced before a major competition so could you just set the scene for me and explain what happened?
- D Em, well I mean the competition in question was one of the biggest competitions of this season. It was a Great Britain match against the USA and Russia in Scotland and eh, other than the World Championships that was the next biggest competition of the year so it positioned very highly in the international calendar, eh, I was competing against the top guys in the world, you know eh, Dwight Philips and Kevin Dilworth were the top Americans at the time so these guys were the top in the world so it was a great opportunity for me to compete against them and eh, there were 3 top athletes in Britain – Nathan Morgan, Ehris Tomlinson and myself and there were only 2 places so I had to perform well early on in the year to put myself in contention for that place and fortunately I had done well enough to get that place so it was a great buzz and great motivation for the rest of the year to actually get that place. A Great Britain vest is something that you know, I kind of wear with pride and eh, there was the press conferences were going on and there was a lot of media attention for that, you know, Scottish number 1 against Britain's number 1 plus the rest of the world and there was going to be a lot of attention that way. It was going to be one of the highlights of the weekend and eh, after coming back from the media it takes quite a lot of energy to do that and it took quite a lot out of me and when I started to train I was fatigued and I broke down and my hamstring went in training during a speed session and it was the second run when it didn't feel right and I basically tried harder and my hamstring went and I basically caught it and kind of slowed down without pulling it and I

thought, “Oh shit, here we go”, and we were talking like just over a week away, it was 10 days away from the competition and em, I thought, “This is not happening.” it was a nightmare and eh, the first thing I thought was that I’d lost it and I was going to have to phone them and say, “Look, I’ve torn my hamstring, I can’t compete”, and you know, you’re talking about 6 weeks to get recovered not just physically but mentally from a hamstring injury and I’ve been in this position before where I’ve torn my hamstring and there’s a certain procedure that you have to go through which I knew I had to do but I felt so pissed off at myself and so angry about it all that you know everything that you aim for and it meant so much to me and it was the only thing that I cared about, it was the only thing I talked about and then all of a sudden it was gone, the whole like almost realization of “Oh no I’ve got to accept that I’m not going to be able to compete.”

- J I’d like you to get your thoughts back on pretty much straight after you’d experienced the injury and try and get a picture of the thoughts that you were experiencing. So if you can take yourself right back to then, what exactly was it about it that made it stressful for you do you think?
- D Oh, just like the, it was almost unreal. It was like, “I can’t believe this has happened”, yeah shock. It was like, “I don’t believe it”, ‘cause I’d been right through the winter and I was absolutely flying and it was all great preparation for going into the GB match and all of a sudden this had gone. It’s difficult to explain. It was just: that’s it, I’ve lost it. It’s gone and em, it’s just when it happened I’ve been in situations when I’ve shouted and screamed and thrown tantrums and blamed my coach for it and you know, but it was like, “No I’ll just keep a cool head and go home, ice it and rest and get the physio and see what the diagnosis is before I make any rash decisions”
- J So you’ve described the sense of shock, what other sorts of feelings did you experience?
- D Well I guess I felt sick in the stomach, you know I couldn’t eat. I guess I was just anxious about the whole scenario, the whole outcome of what was going to happen. I was disappointed in myself ‘cause I knew that I was tired and not to push it and I did because I worked really hard this year. I knew the World Championships were on and I had this great opportunity and it was all about making the most out of this opportunity and I didn’t want to blow it and so I pushed and pushed and then my body said, you’re not going any further so I was disappointed in myself ‘cause I knew. Everybody says hindsight is a great thing but experience is a great thing as well and I’ve done this enough times to know not to push it and I did push it and it just went and I was really disappointed in myself and that’s why I never threw a tantrum ‘cause I knew I was to blame for it
- J And you put down on the log sheet that you felt it was a sense of loss, obviously because you thought that you were going to be unable to compete in this competition. You also described feelings of anxiety and being unable to eat, those feelings are probably synonymous with feeling threatened as well.

Would you say that you saw the event as being quite threatening as well as a loss?

D Well my focus was the competition at hand and it was just a loss. It was just like, “No, I’m not going to compete”, and that’s what I thought straight away. I wouldn’t say it was a threat because a threat is more uncertain but no I felt like that was it. All of sudden I thought, “I’m not going to be ready for the AAAs”, you know because competing well at the GB match would then lead onto an opportunity to compete at Gateshead which is another UK Grand Prix event and you know, you’re talking big money as well so it had consequences, it wasn’t just missing the GB match but the match in Gateshead and then not being ready for the AAAs and then all of a sudden you’ve got the World Championships and this was not ideal preparation for me to try and qualify for the Worlds and I had to jump the furthest jump I’ve ever done, so all of a sudden my mind was acting so quickly. It was like bang, bang, bang, next thing I know my season’s gone just because of making that one little mistake. I guess there was the threat of my season going

J So going back again to the time when you first experienced the injury. How much of your time was spent thinking about what had happened?

D Well I mean I didn’t have much sleep and I had a lot of thoughts about it. I think it was important for me not to rush into making a diagnosis on myself straight away. It was all about waiting 24, 48 hours and it was just through experience when I’ve injured myself and I’ve had time for me to then go, “Right, let’s just wait 24, 48 hours, get some physio treatment. Let’s get it diagnosed and find out the seriousness of what it is and then we can work towards you know telling whoever about pulling out of the competition.”

J So basically you were thinking about it a lot of the time?

D All the time, em, I came home and then the first thing was like grabbing an ice pack and getting it straight on it and you’re just sitting there thinking, “What have I done, what’s going on?” , and eh, you just don’t want to speak to anyone because friends and family would be like, “How did training go?” and you’d be like, “Don’t ask”, and you do feel quite alone because nobody knows what you’re going through. You’re coach would be like, “Just chill out”, and it’s like, “You’ve no idea. I’ve sacrificed all this and it’s about to be out the window”, and so you just need to make sure you don’t go to the bottle! [laughs].

J So was it still on your mind when you were away from the athletic environment and athletic people?

D Yeah sure. When I came home I was trying to watch TV and I was watching it but wasn’t watching it at all, you’re just not taking it in and eh, everything around you – you’ve got your training kit there and your spikes are sitting on the floor and it’s in your face, you can’t get away from it so you think about it all the time and you can’t not think about it until you know what’s going on so as soon as I got home I phoned my physio and I was like, “Look, I’ve tweaked

my hammy, when can I see you? Can I see you tomorrow? Can I see you first thing?” And he was like, “Right calm down, what’s going on? What’s wrong?”, and he didn’t even see me, but until I actually saw the physio I was just like *screaming*. Inside you’re going, “I want to see you now”, but then I know that you need 24 hours for the inflammation to go down before you can diagnosis it

J How would you say that you felt about yourself in general after the event?

D Well I mean I’ve had history of other injuries with my feet as well and every week every month every season could be my last and eh, I’m no spring chicken and you know, I have other things that I want to do when I finish athletics, you know have a family, have a house, have a flash car and stuff, so these kind of things that I want to do are kind of waiting at the moment until I get my athletics out the way until I achieve my goals there and something as big which could have potentially affected all those aspects of my life and my identity as an athlete and could’ve stopped that straight away and the significance of the injury and how long it’s going to take to recover from it, you know my dream, you know my target for the season was to make the World Championships and if not, at least make the Olympic qualifying of 8 metres 10 and I hadn’t done that achievement then I’d be looking at leaving the sport and this was threatening all of that.

J So it was threatening you entire persona I suppose?

D Exactly. It was like, “Shit well if I’m not going to do this, I’m going to have to start looking at getting a job and getting my EV up to date”, and that’s quite a negative thing to think about but that’s what I was thinking at the time, you know, “If I don’t get this right and miss this competition and the next competition and if I’m not ready for the AAAs ‘cause the preparation’s not good and I don’t perform well at the AAAs then at the end of the season it’s reality that this is it, it’s not meant to be and that’s you as an athlete gone”, and when you compete at that level you can’t go back and do it for fun, it’s not going to happen, it’s all or nothing so when that happened it’s amazing how quickly thoughts come into your mind. It was like bang, bang, bang, bang and then all of a sudden, “Shit”, so I thought that was me as an athlete over

J This section is about how you coped with the injury and already you have touched upon a few things but I’d like to go over it again in a bit more detail so could you talk me through the coping strategies you used and when you used them?

D Well I mean when the incident happened it was a case of you know, I’d been in this position before so the experience had taught me what to do and when it happened I just felt gutted and ready to cry but I kept it all in but if anybody asked me you know, “How you feeling? I hope you’re ok”, and I’ve let it out before but I thought, “No, I need to keep in control and I guess be professional and accept what’s happened”, you know, “Right, you’ve tweaked your hammy there’s no point in crying about it.” So it was a case of put your kit on, phone the physio, em, get some ice on it, you know, nobody was telling me this, I’d

been there before and I knew what to do and so basically I did that, phoned the physio, fired some ice onto it and you just go, “Right this is it, you’ve done everything you can, there’s nothing else you can do at the moment to help it”, eh take some anti-inflammatories and wait 24 hours and see what the physio does and em, you know, don’t make any stupid decisions, so when you go to the physio make a note of how it felt, what the sensation was – if it was like a dull pain or a sharp pain and not to test it you know, so I had to discipline myself and say, “Right, don’t stretch it, don’t do anything silly.” So that was that and once I’d spoken to the physio and once he’d assessed it and done a plan of action everything became more positive because then you could then visualize a series of steps of what was going to happen, ‘cause the worst thing before seeing a physio is the uncertainty, you’ve no idea how bad the damage is, em, but I wasn’t going to get straight onto the phone to the GB team and say, “Look I can’t come”, because you know, I wanted it so much I just wanted to wait and see and eh, once I’d spoken to the physio and got it diagnosed then I could you know, take some positive steps towards getting myself ready for it. And the physio said, “When is the last time that you need to train before you compete?”, and then we worked back that way

J Was there anything else that you did?

D Well I mean part of the procedure from speaking to the physio, there was a lot of physical stuff you could do like ultrasound and ease off the areas around it but what I had to do was try and train myself while I wasn’t training, you know go through the event because the long jump is a technical event, so I had to go through the visualization of running down the runway, hitting the board, flight through the air and landing so I had to do all of that. And I’d done workshops where I guess I’ve educated myself so that I would kind of just lie down on the bed and just visualize you know my hamstring as it is at the moment torn with scar tissue and eh, when I get to the point when I’m exercising and running I visualize a healthy hamstring

J Were those workshops with a sport psychologist?

D Yeah – Alma Thomas and Gwenda Ward - 2 weekends down in Bedford where we talked about all the different coping strategies and a lot of it was visualization using the power of the mind so visualization for me is a big part in not just coping with injury but em, you know the whole training the thought, so when you come into a competition you visualize the scenario whether you’re winning and somebody’s beating you or challenging you you’ve got to visualize your scenario and you’ve got to visualize it’s raining and cold and you’ve got the wind in your face, factors that you can’t control, but you’ve experienced it because you’re not unfamiliar with the situation because you’ve already visualized it

J So obviously initially you saw this as quite a negative thing. Was there any point during this whole pattern of coping that you’ve described that it turned into a more positive thing would you say?

- D Well I think I was given an opportunity and I think I'd coped with everything so well that I managed to actually compete and that was the outcome so I was really pleased with that and it actually turned out to be an 8 metre jump. But the fact that the incident happened was maybe telling me that, "Right, you need to slow down, you were working far too hard and training yourself too hard." It was almost like fate saying, "We're just pulling you back a wee bit, I'm going to give you a little tweek here just to stop you training", and it basically rested me up for that competition which in some sick way was fate telling me that if I'd kept on going I'd maybe never ever have jumped as well. But it turns out that because of these sequence of events that I performed really well and I was in third in the competition and you've got 5 other guys who have jumped better than you and you come third and I was lying second for a lot of the competition and that pushed on the Americans and it was a great feeling because the Americans were pushing me on saying, "Eome on, let's go for it", and to have one of the top guys in the world pushing you on and myself in turn motivating them, you know that's what makes me want to continue doing athletics, that's one of the highs of the season and eh, so you could call that incident almost like some fate saying you know, "You need to just sit back and rest up 'cause your pushing yourself far too hard."
- J At what point between the injury happening and the competition did you start to see it as more sort of challenging?
- D Well once I got the rehabilitation programme from the physio and once we had worked out a date where we wanted to be ready and if we weren't ready by this date then we would phone up the people and say we weren't doing it, so we worked back and then once I had that plan in progress then it was something for me to focus on, you know, at least I had something laid down on paper and we discussed what goals I had to aim for so it was like tiny little goals. The first thing was to set each goal and then put all the goals together and achieve the target so the first one was to walk pain free, the next one was to go for a steady jog and everything had to be pain free, so each task and goal was a challenge and em, so you know I was so nervous, you know 'cause every time you attempt the goal you could break down again and that's you, you're shafted. And you only get one chance at each goal so I had a week effectively. It was like 7 days to get myself ready to compete again against the rest of the world after tweeking my hammy and each time I was like so nervous with butterflies going, just walking and jogging. Every single step and goal was a big challenge
- J So initially you saw this event to be reasonably uncontrollable, was this associated with a sense of it becoming more controllable then?
- D Well yeah I mean I put on my form a 4 which was like half way because through experience I knew exactly what I was going to do and I didn't ever think when it happened that I was going to be ok, you know it was completely the opposite. I thought that I'd blown it but experience told me that once I'd accepted it and sorted out the plan of action there was something that I could do about it and so that's why it was kind of like half and half, em, and as time went on it became more and more controllable until the point when it was like

the Thursday before the competition and I did a jumps session and it ended up being one of the jumps sessions that I've done all year. I was jumping 7 metres off 10 strides with no effort and you go, "Right I'm ready", and you know it. You've got Friday off, warm-up on Saturday and then that's it on Sunday

- J Ok, so obviously your coping strategies worked out to be highly effective. Were there any particular coping strategies that you've described that were more effective than others or was it just the whole thing?
- D I think it was the whole package. I think it can never be the whole experience if you can call it that you know, everything that I used helped me towards competing that weekend. I think I'd done everything that I could do correctly. I never made any mistakes, I never rushed anything and eh, discipline and that's all part of being a professional athlete, to try and discipline yourself not to push yourself too hard and try and keep positive and try not to get negative all the time
- J Did you speak to other people as a coping strategy, like your coach or...?
- D Well my coach was like, "You know what to do", and it was pretty much like on you go and do it and it was really just the physio that I spoke to, eh, nobody else really knew what to do. I spoke to friends, like fellow athletes, like I spoke to Ian and you know people have experiences of stories and say, "Look, I've tweaked my hammy and within a week I ran a PB", and all that kind of stuff and that was really good, that was positive reassurance and I can now say, "Well I tweaked my hammy and a week later I jumped 8.08", so it's almost like you use motivation from other people
- J I would've liked to go through some more stressful events with you but because you've given me so much detail we're pretty restricted with time. Would you say that in general that this is the way that you tend to cope – you mentioned that in general you do tend to be very positive
- D Yeah pretty much, that's my mentality. Initially I think it's a natural reaction and I feel like everything's a loss and negative but once I kind of reflect on the scenario and once you actually almost count to 10 and take a new look at things, the best way, I mean the way I've been taught, is to try and take a positive spin on things if you can and eh, that's generally how I work and it takes a lot of energy to do that. I get certain rewards out of athletics, performing well for example and it's motivation and fuel for when an incident like this happens, however, if I wasn't performing well and I had a series of performances which I wasn't pleased with and I wasn't going well and this incident happened I'd probably look at it in a different way, there's only so much energy that I would have for coping with that
- J So if you were to experience this even again next week...

- D Well for example if that happened say a week later and I tweaked it again the motivation would be difficult. I mean it would be *really* difficult. It would be like, “No that is it, I’m finished”, you know I can’t keep on doing this. If it’s repetition time after time after time and if I wasn’t getting the rewards for the effort that I was putting in then I’d be pulling the plug
- J So if you were to experience this with a fresh head, say next year, would you use the same coping strategies that you’ve used this time do you think?
- D Em, it really depends on the scenario. If it was a minor thing as it turned out that one was then I’d probably cope with it but if it was like say something that, well it really depends on the timing as well because in the winter I could probably get away with it and get rehabbed and then get back into training. You’d miss an aspect of your training but you would still have the season. If it was threatening my season I would pull the plug. I would quit the sport. I’m in that kind of frame of mind
- J Overall how satisfied would you say you are with your performance this season?
- D To be honest not very, I’m not very happy at all. Like I said I’d set my goals for the year to jump 8.20 for the World qualifying and 8.10 minimum for the Olympics and there’s funding implications as well for that and I jumped 8.08. The fact that it was windy, it doesn’t count for any standards or anything and eh you know, I’d actually said to myself, “Look, if I don’t achieve these targets I’m going to quit the sport, I need to move on.” So like I said I’d made the choices or goals for the end of the year and I never made these targets so I went away on holiday for a few weeks to reflect and find out what I wanted to do and I still believe that I have a good performance in me. I still believe that I can make the Olympics and I actually believe that I can become top 5 and medal at the Olympics, you know, I believe that because of the World Championships. I think 8.32 won it, 8.28 was second and 8.22 was third and when you jump 8.08 you’re not a kick in the ass off making those standards and I believe that I’ve got so much more talent and ability in me that that’s achievable so em, I made the decision, which was one of the hardest decisions I’ve ever made, to leave my coach and to move to someone who can give me more attention and who’s in my opinion more qualified to coach an Olympic athlete
- J Ok so given all these experiences that you’ve had over the season has your image of yourself as an athlete changed in any way?
- D Yeah it’s almost like another aspect of realization. It’s almost like another dimension and eh, because of the sacrifices that I have made and especially the latest one with moving my coach because they’re my best friends, I’ve been with them for like 8,9 years and we went through everything together, I went to them jumping 7.15 as a junior and within 2 years they brought me to Scottish record holder, AAAs Champion jumping 7.85 legal and em, like I say I’ve been through 2 operations with them and a lot of experiences together and for them to have to actually accept for me to move on and become a better

athlete I need to make a sacrifice and leave them and I was trying not to make it personal but you can't help it you know, and I was almost in tears when I was telling them. I was shaking, my heart was racing but I need to move on for me to be a better athlete and for me to move out the comfort zone that I was in where I had people around me in the training group which was built up around me which I kind of grew out of and eh, I think as coaches they had actually fell into a comfort zone themselves and I needed to push myself out of that environment to become a better athlete and because of that I've moved up one more level of professionalism. I'm now, right, I can't afford to get mixed up in a relationship. I can't afford to go out and eat shit. I can't afford, not go out and enjoy myself, but I just need to have a lot more focus and this is it. The Olympics are back in Athens where it started and the whole symbolism of it all, you know I believe I've made the right decision and it's more motivation for me but it's a sacrifice that I did not want to do. Work I was quite happy to do and there were sacrifices along the way that I was quite happy doing because I was doing something that I was enjoying, but this I did not enjoy and I'm not sure if I've sacrificed a friendship for it yet, time will tell. Improving is not a guarantee though, this is a risk I've taken but I've made all these sacrifices along the way and it would be like these previous sacrifices being in vein if I never went this final step and so there's no precedence set on how to do these things, everybody's different and this is what I believe I need to do to become a world class athlete. I think I'm an international athlete at the moment but not world class and I think I've got the steps in place to become a world class athlete, time will tell

- J Good luck with that. Well that's just about all I'm going to ask you, em, just before we finish is there anything that you want to add or do you have any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?
- D I think this interview was professional, excellent, well-conducted and good luck with your dissertation!
- J Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3, JEN

J To begin with I'd like to get some background information from you so could you tell me a bit about your age and your occupation?

L I am 25 years old and I'm a primary 1 teacher

J What would you say have been your major achievements in athletics so far?

L Em, probably getting picked to run for races like the Great North Run and Balmoral and stuff like that, just getting Scotland vests and I went to the European Elubs' Championships

J And what sort of age were you when you first got involved in athletics?

L 21

J And how did you get involved?

L Em, through university. I used to go to aerobics a lot and the aerobics teacher runs and one day she saw me going out for a jog and she said, "Oh do you want to come running?", and I started running for the uni and then I joined Shettleston

J And going back to that earlier stage in your career, what would you say it was that was motivating you to do athletics?

L Em, success probably. I succeeded in my first few races. I was quite good in terms of relatively for a beginner and I enjoyed the success factor. It sort of drove me from there

J And would you say that you're quite an achievement oriented person in general or is it something that's just in athletics?

L No I'm quite achievement oriented. I like to sort of...I aim high in everything I do. I'm quite an addictive person as well so it's quite easy to get addicted

J And when you first got involved in athletics, did you feel at that stage that you missed out on anything because of it?

L Yeah, my uni social life wasn't a normal student...like I went out but not as much as most students. All my flat mates were out every night and I didn't and em, I missed out that side of it, other than that I don't really think so

J How did you feel about that?

- L At the time it didn't bother me 'cause I'm not that kind of way anyway, I'm not a sort of heavy binge drinker clubber type person, but sometimes I look back and kind of regret not doing some things but on the whole I don't regret it
- J And did athletics play any part in your decisions for future employment or had you already gone down that route before you got introduced to athletics?
- L No, I knew I didn't want to be a psychologist. My degree was in psychology and marketing, my first degree, and I found that marketing was too office orientated and I just find that sitting in an office all day I really hate, but yeah it was very much...I thought with teaching, "You get the holidays, you get finishing at 3 o'clock, you never start before 9", so it's an ideal job for training
- J So your decision to be a teacher was very much based on your athletics – if you hadn't been an athlete do you think you might have gone for psychology?
- L I might have sort of stuck with the marketing but I didn't really enjoy the psychology in terms of I didn't ever really want to be a psychologist, but maybe I would've stuck more in the marketing fields and done some work there but I don't know, you never can tell I suppose
- J I'd like to get an idea of how big a part athletics plays in your life, so what would you say it is now that's motivating you to do athletics?
- L Em, success and enjoyment. I like to sort of do well, on my own sort of level if you like, I'm not ever expecting to be an Olympic Champion, but I like to perform to my highest standards and I enjoy it as well and I enjoy training
- J You said obviously that you enjoy the success. Can you describe how you feel when you are successful?
- L Em, extremely happy, overjoyed. I feel good about myself, very good about myself. It boosts my confidence. I'm not a very confident person and it gives me a lot of confidence and boosts my self-esteem, and sort of makes me feel worthwhile if you like. It just makes me feel good
- J And would you say that athletics was the main thing in your life that lets you feel like that about yourself or are there other areas or is that the only area, or...?
- L No athletics is pretty much the only thing
- J So just how important is your athletic participation to you?
- L Very important. It plays a large part of my life.
- J Could you live without it do you think?

- L Probably not, not now that I've found it. For example when I first damaged my back and I went to see a surgeon and he told me that he didn't think I'd run again I was, I mean just absolutely devastated. Someone could've told me I had a terminal illness rather than that 'cause if someone told me that I couldn't run tomorrow I would be devastated. I don't think I would accept it
- J What I'm looking at here is your identity as an athlete and there are different aspects of identity, there's how you see yourself and there's also how you think other people see you. Obviously it's important to you that you see yourself as an athlete, how important is it to you that other people also see you as an athlete?
- L Quite important yeah, I feel that I'd like other people, especially other athletes, I like them to sort of look at me and think, "Oh she's quite good", or people to fear me if I turn up for a race kind of thing
- J So in relation to all the other sorts of things that you've got in your life, how big a part of your identity would you say being an athlete makes up?
- L Probably a good 75%, yeah 75%
- J And what makes up the other areas?
- L My relationship and slightly my job, probably more to other people than to me – I'd never say, "Hi I'm L and I'm a teacher", kind of thing but I mean I suppose other people will see that aspect of me
- J So say you were meeting someone for the first time what would you want them to know about you?
- L Em, obviously I'd not go straight in and say, "Hi I'm L and I'm a runner", but probably early on it would get into the conversation somehow because it's such a big thing, it's what I talk about and that's what I spend so much of my time doing so if people ask me, "What did you do last night?", it automatically comes out
- J And what sacrifices have you made to allow you to do your athletics? I don't know if you'd say that your job was like a sacrifice but obviously that's been dictated by your athletics. What other sacrifices have you made?
- L Em, obviously my social life, things like I don't tend to go out as much as a lot of my friends do and when I do go out I either drive or go home early, em, at times I've put my relationship on the line for it and previous relationships where guys were just like, "Nah, forget it!" I was like, "Fine then, if you don't take my running you don't take me", em, I think as well my uni to an extent in that I spent so much time training that I think if I'd put more time towards my degree I might've sort of achieved better, I mean I'm not saying that I'm not happy with what I got but I might've achieved better

- J When you go and socialize or do other things are you able to detach from your athletics?
- L At times, it depends who I'm with really. If I'm in company with people who are willing to talk about athletics then no, not really and generally that's the topic of conversation, but if I'm out with other people then obviously it'll come round at some point in the night but I generally am very conscious; "Oh I've got to go for a run tomorrow. I better not have another drink, I better watch my time. I don't want to dance to much, I don't want to wear high heels", things like that.
- J So when you're spending time with non-athletes or you're in a completely different setting that's got nothing to do with athletics is it still sort of at the front of your mind, like do you still see yourself as an athlete as opposed to when your at work as a teacher
- L Yeah pretty much so 'cause even at work I'm sort of, "Oh I better sit down for a bit 'cause my legs are getting tired", or whatever and, "I don't want to run about in the gym 'cause I've got a race tomorrow", things like that, it still plays a large part in my mind so
- J I'd like to get an idea of how you feel about yourself when you don't meet your goals in athletics. I don't know if you've got an example, or...?
- L Depressed, em, low self-esteem, pretty low confidence. I feel pretty down about myself not just about my running, I just feel down in general, just really low and I tend to be quite emotional. I don't really want to do anything if you know what I mean, I just sit and mope about and feel pretty scunnered. It tends to affect my training as well after that because I find it really hard not to motivate myself to train, but to motivate myself to train hard. I just get dead scunnered and for about a week or so I just feel pretty guffed.
- J And how does that compare with failing to meet goals in other areas of your life?
- L Em, I suppose in other areas like my uni results and things I was a bit unhappy but I'd never say I was depressed about it or anything like that, like I don't really get depressed about any other aspects, mostly if I'm down it's because of athletics if you like, generally I'm quite a kind of bright and bubbly person and you tend to find that if athletics is going well then I'm on top of the World
- J Why do you think that it's only athletics that makes you feel like that?
- L Probably because it's so important to me. It plays such a big part in my life and it's a big part of my own identity, it's a big part of me
- J We'll go to the back injury that you mentioned on the log sheet. First of all I'd like to understand a bit more about the injury, when it happened etc. so could you describe that for me please?

L Em, just at the start of May I'd been suffering from a sort of aching in my lower back and a lot of tightness and my hamstrings had been very tight, I'd been seeing some masseurs and a chiropractor to try and ease off my muscles but nothing was really happening. When I was running I just felt really crap basically, really tight and really tired but I just carried on training and then one night I went to go to a race and I literally sat down to stretch and my back just completely went. I couldn't even get back up off the ground, I was just in absolute agony and my Dad had to come and take me to the hospital and I went to accident and emergency and they told me that I had a slipped disc in my back but I knew I didn't because it wasn't instant pain and I went to my own doctor the next day and I needed to get an MRI scan but I went private because they were going to take so long for me to get my MRI scan on the NHS and it turned out that it was just muscle spasms in my back. My back was just ceasing up and going into muscle spasms which I've now linked to the fact that I was on placement at the time and it was the bending over the desks that was causing it, em, and I've also got an imbalance between my quads and hamstrings which is sort of all a part of it

J Originally you said that when you first felt pain you just trained through it, why was that?

L 'Eause I am addicted, I train through anything. I don't like to take time off really and I just thought, "Oh, it's just a niggle." At some points it was agonizing, a couple of nights I went out and couldn't get to the end of the street, I couldn't get any further and would have to walk back. Other nights I would run just in agony, em, but it sort of came and went. It was very strange and I knew I hadn't done anything, I hadn't fallen, I hadn't tweaked it or anything, it just came on gradually and just got worse and I couldn't understand it and I think that's what annoyed me the most. I probably could've accepted it more if I had done something and felt it go there and then and that was me, but the fact that I hadn't done anything really irritated me. I just sort of thought, "Oh, it'll be fine, it'll be fine", and I kept trying to convince myself that it was a wee niggle that would go away with time. I convinced myself that exercising would help it, like stretching it out and stuff, which it didn't

J What exactly do you think it was about the event that made it stressful for you?

L I was just so frustrated that I couldn't train properly and that it was ongoing and again that there was no reason for it, and I couldn't explain what it was that was wrong. Everyone was telling me different things. I saw about 4 or 5 different physios, chiropractors etc. and no-one knew what was causing it, no-one could find what was causing it and that's what frustrated me the most. Mechanically I had nothing wrong with me, em, I had no strains or tears and it was just one of these things that was really getting to me.

J On the log sheet you've obviously stated that you perceived it as a loss. Would you be able to tell me a bit more about that?

L I just felt that I'd lost a whole...I'd done quite a good winter's training and I'd only really just started getting back to a reasonable level of fitness and I was looking forward to doing quite a good track season and aiming towards peaking round about this time, em, and my training was going well and I was enjoying my training again and then all of a sudden this sort of hit me and I just felt that I'd wasted all the training I'd put it. I'd lost the season 'cause it was just going on for so long and there was nothing sort of transpiring that was causing it and I just felt...and I'd lost such a big part of my life 'cause I couldn't train to the level that I was normally training and I found myself at a lost end all the time. It was kind of "I'm used to being out at training every night so what do I do now?"

J Did it have any impact on your sense of self-worth?

L Em, I was very depressed, very down, I didn't really want to do anything, very demotivated, em, it caused a lot of arguments in the house because I was so down and there were a lot of fights, a lot of crying and a lot of just...and it got worse because I persisted in trying. I would maybe rest it for 2 days and then think, "Oh I'll just go for a run again", and I'd still feel crap so I'd come in and be really down again

J Ok, my next question was, did you feel that the injury endangered any goals that you were working towards, so obviously you have explained that, it was all towards running well this season and obviously you felt that you'd been committed to that goal and all the hard work that you'd put in had been wasted to a certain extent. How important would you say that it was to you that you did achieve those goals that you'd set yourself?

L Em, quite important 'cause I hadn't had a great cross-country season, just through my uni work and stuff I just hadn't been able to dedicate the time and em, I picked up a couple of niggles and cross country is generally my better season so I'd sort of felt, "Well, I've not done very well this season but it's all right, I'll be fine, I'll pick up", em, and I never did kind of thing so it just sort of one thing led to another and it just felt as if it was ongoing, I was never going to get back to any decent level

J And we have touched on the emotional state you felt at first, do you think you could go into a wee bit more detail about when you first learned about the seriousness of the injury, just when it hit you how you felt?

L Em, obviously I think the reason that I started training through it was just through fear more than anything. I just kept thinking, "What's wrong with me?" and "I'll be fine." It was ignoring it, trying to ignore the situation and then em, the night I went to the hospital and they told me, "Oh you might never run again", I was devastated, I mean I was just in a complete and utter state, em, and then when I went to the doctor the next day obviously it wasn't as bad but I did realize that I was going to be out for quite a while and I was quite upset about that. I didn't know how to take it, I found it very hard to deal with and I probably tried to ignore that as well and sort of get back as soon as possible

- J So was there a certain element of denial there would you say?
- L Oh yes
- J And at that time who or what did you blame?
- L I didn't know what to blame. I was blaming everybody and anybody, em, I was blaming my trainers...I wasn't blaming myself which continuing through the pain was probably the most...I was looking for anything to blame and I was constantly looking for reasons behind it and never really looking to myself, "What have I done?" It was just, em, I don't know, I didn't really blame anyone, just trying to find wee, "Oh maybe it was that session that did it or maybe it was this that did it or school that did it"
- J Once this had happened how much of your time was spent thinking about it, you know, were you able to detach from it at all or was it just there all the time?
- L All the time. I think it didn't help that I was in quite a lot of pain so I was constantly thinking about it and it was constantly on my mind and em, just knowing that I couldn't go training, it was always sort of being thought about and probably constantly thinking, "What can be wrong with me?" I was going through the internet looking up sites, I was just trying to find anything. People would say, "Go and see Y.F.", so I was away down to Troon and I think in one week I probably saw about 4 or 5 people and that probably wasn't helping as well, I mean I'd go and see a physio one day, a chiropractor the next day and acupuncture the next day. It was just complete desperation, something that was going to...and I wanted a quick fix there and then. I wasn't prepared to wait for it
- J And how did it make you feel as a person would you say, the whole event?
- L Em, very down, very low, no self-esteem. I didn't really feel as if I had much going for me if you like. Because athletics was such a big part of me I thought...I sort of saw myself as an athlete but an athlete not training if you like kind of thing. I just didn't really feel...I was pretty low and...
- J I'd like to build up a picture of how you coped with the situation, so could you tell me a bit about that?
- L Em, well obviously when it first happened I was extremely emotional, em, very stressed and upset, sort of a lot of crying and moods and I basically attempted to continue to run through it. At first when I was told that I'd have to go for an MRI scan I thought it was something quite severe and that helped me to cope with it slightly more 'cause I thought, "Oh I've really got to watch here", though I did attempt to still run even though I was told not to, em, and then when I got the results from my MRI scan and it never showed up anything major I kind of started to almost deny that I even had the injury, I was sort of trying to ignore it basically and I was running sometimes in

extreme pain. I was just so determined that I was going to do the training regardless of how I felt, em, but then I'd come back in and I knew I'd ran crap, I knew I'd run slow, I knew I was in agony and it would just depress me again even more and I'd maybe even leave it for a day and try the next day. And it did get to the stage where I couldn't run, I was just in a lot of pain, em, and at that point I was continually looking for sort of things to blame, thinking, "Well what is wrong with this?" I knew I had nothing mechanically or structurally wrong with me and I was on the internet every night looking up sites to see...looking at backs, looking at this and that, and everything I read about that had similar symptoms I diagnosed myself as having and em, then I was seeing physios, chiropractors, I was seeing 4, 5 people in a week sometimes and spending a fortune

J And did that help?

L No because I was probably doing myself more harm than good because I was never letting each treatment sort of kick in or anything, I was never letting anything actually take its time. I was looking for something that would fix me there and then. If I didn't come out the physio's treatment room feeling better there and then, then I wasn't happy, I wasn't satisfied, em, and then I started doing a lot of cycling and gym work to preoccupy myself basically

J Did that help the emotions you were experiencing?

L It did, although I didn't enjoy it as much, I knew I was still maintaining my fitness, em, so it helped me a wee bit on that side and it just gave me something to do, gave me something to sort of focus on again, although I could never sort of gain the success in those sort of things I knew I was sort of contributing in some way to my athletics, em, and then it was coming towards the end of my uni year as well and I think probably by sheer luck I had a lot on at uni and it forced me to stop. I didn't have the time to do as much training, although I was still doing stuff on the bike and still going to the gym, em, but I had so much on with my uni that that helped as well and I just didn't have the time to think about going for a run. I was so shattered I just couldn't even face it, em, and then of course I started the summer holidays and because I wasn't on placement anymore I wasn't doing the bending and my back sort of eased off and I started to feel a lot better and I built it up from there

J So you said that you had your university work and that provided you with another focus. How exactly did that help you cope do you think?

L Em, just by giving me something else to occupy my time with so that I just didn't have the time to think about it. It sort of took my mind off it a lot more, em, and I just had other things to worry about. I knew if I didn't pass then that was me I was snookered for another year because I couldn't start my probation for like a year later, em, so I knew I just had to get through it so it just gave me something else to do with my time really so that I wasn't thinking about it

J You obviously noted on the log sheet that you felt it was quite uncontrollable. Why was that do you think?

- L Em basically because I didn't know what was causing it. I couldn't put my finger on the source of the problem so I didn't know what to do to stop it and I just felt at a loss. I was just so stressed out. I mean that was the whole reason I was on the internet and things, I was just *desperate* to find what was causing it so that I could stop it kind of thing and I think that's what frustrated me so much, that I just couldn't
- J And how effective would you say that going on the internet and all that was as a coping strategy?
- L Probably ineffective because it was causing me to diagnose myself with just about everything under the sun and I was going to doctors and physios and saying, "I think I've got such and such." You read so much that it's daft kind of thing, but maybe it gave me something to blame or something to point the finger at for a short period of time
- J And you must have reached the stage where, I think you were going to touch on it actually before I got to the next question, where things started to turn around and perhaps it started to change in its controllability
- L Em just when I hadn't been running as much and obviously just the time off did help it. My back started to get better and gradually I started feeling better about my runs, em, and then I joined a new training group as well which gave me a lot of motivation, sort of made me pick myself up and I was training with girls that I maybe didn't think of myself as being able to keep up with or challenge at that stage and I was sort of managing to train with them and that boosted my confidence again
- J And did you feel that that made the whole situation more controllable?
- L Em, I still look back at the situation and the thought of it makes me cringe but em, it sort of helped me, I mean by that time I'd started to feel better anyway so I'd sort of put it out of my mind, I was on a new sort of focus
- J And deciding to change training group, was that something in this coping process do you think, or was it not really to do with the whole injury event?
- L No it probably was coping. I hadn't been running as well as I'd liked to have been before and I couldn't put my finger on why and I just felt that I needed to do something, maybe I needed to put the blame on somebody and I sort of blamed the old training group and training, but I don't regret it, I'm glad I moved
- J So maybe the injury kind of accelerated your decision to change coach
- L Yeah, oh yeah. I'd wanted to do that for a long time and it just gave me the driving force to say, "Right I'm going."

- J And when you were first faced with the injury and you saw it as being a threat, did that ever change or was it always quite threatening?
- L Em it was always quite threatening 'cause I always feared that it would come back 'cause I never knew what had caused it and with any slight niggle or anything I was sort of panicking and doing a lot of stretching and things, so I still sort of see it as a threat now even
- J And did your coping ever get any easier throughout this process?
- L No, the emotions ran the whole time and I just found it really difficult to cope with
- J And you obviously felt that the strategies that you used weren't really that effective 'cause you just rated them 2 or 3 on the log sheet
- L That's right yeah
- J Do you think anything that we've talked about with regard to your response to the injury would have been any different if it had been at a different point in your athletic career do you think?
- L Em, probably because a couple of years ago I had quite a serious injury and I'd just come off a really, really good season. I'd done really well and I think I coped with that a lot better because I hadn't lost as much if you know what I mean, I'd had a good season before had so it was like, "Oh well I'm going to miss out on a few weeks training and a couple of competitions", whereas with this I'd had such a poor year before that I just felt I was going on a continuous loss if you like, it was accumulating. There was a lot of pressure to do well this year which I didn't feel previously because I'd done well so I was entitled to an injury or whatever
- J Have any changes happened in your athletic life since you got the injury that might affect how you would respond to it if it was to happen now
- L Em probably not. I've changed coach and training group obviously but I think I'd still react in the same way
- J So overall how satisfied are you with your performance this season
- L Not at all, I've not really had much of a season. I've just had a few low key races as training races more than anything.
- J And has your image of yourself as an athlete changed in any way as a result of everything that you've experienced with your back?
- L Not really, it still plays a very important role in my life. I don't see myself being as good an athlete but I still see myself very much as an athlete and it still plays a very large role in my life

- J We'll just go through another wee event that you experienced this season. Poor training you noted, obviously that was very stressful for you. Can you just tell me a bit about that just to set the scene?
- L Yep, I'd just done a few weeks of just crap training basically. All my sessions were just rubbish. I just felt I was getting no quality and I felt rubbish in all my runs. I just wasn't enjoying it and felt really low but my problem tends to be that if I feel crap I try to do more so I was probably making myself even worse. If I'd taken a weeks rest it might've helped, whereas I was thinking, "I'm running crap, I must be unfit. I need to train harder."
- J And obviously you saw that as a loss, can you tell me a bit more about that?
- L Again I just felt that I'd lost heart, I'd lost motivation and it just made me feel down. I just felt I'd lost a large part of my life. I really enjoyed athletics, I really enjoyed the participation and I felt that I was losing something and I was no longer enjoying it but still doing it kind of thing and it was sort of getting to me that way
- J Did you feel that this situation endangered any goals that you'd been working towards?
- L Em, well not really because I hadn't long come back from my injury, well, I thought I might at least get some of the season out and em, I just was a bit kind of disheartened really more than anything. My goal was just getting back to fitness and getting back to a reasonable level of fitness, it jeopardized those
- J So what was it that you felt was at stake?
- L Em, probably just purely my...me as a person because I was an athlete, and my fun, my pleasure was at stake. I was no longer enjoying it but I was still doing it, something made me still do it which is probably down to the sort of addictive nature that I've got
- J And when you were first faced with this situation, how did it make you feel would you say?
- L Well at first when maybe I'd only had one poor session it was like, "Oh well, it'll be all right next time", and again I sort of denied it, "Oh it wasn't that bad I suppose", and "I suppose I did too much last night", trying to find excuses for myself and then as it went on I was getting depressed and down and emotional, mood swings, just completely frustrated at the whole thing
- J Do you think it was this idea again that you were looking for external things to blame?
- L Yep, totally or I just couldn't put my finger on it. I was just constantly looking for a reason, I wasn't looking at the fact that I could've been overtraining or just needed a week off, I was looking for excuses, "Oh it was

windy tonight, that's why my reps were slower", or, "Oh I didn't really try hard enough", and when I really looked back I knew

J And why do you think it was?

L Just that I needed a rest and I didn't take one, I'd just fatigued. And then it comes as a vicious circle 'cause if I'm not enjoying my training then I don't put as much into it so it just gradually gets worse and worse and worse and at the same time I wasn't happy in my training group and as much as I wanted to leave them I found it difficult due to friendship ties and things and I was scared of leaving but I sort of secretly wanted to and I think that all contributed to it as well

J Again you've said on the sheet that you felt it was quite uncontrollable, is that just again because you couldn't put your finger on why it was happening?

L Yeah, totally. I was avoiding the reasons of why it was happening and I just couldn't sort of admit to myself that I needed a change and something new and I needed to do it now

J And again, how much of your time was spent thinking about the situation would you say?

L Em, quite a large part. It was during the holidays so I wasn't working and I didn't have anything else to keep my mind on, so I'd try and go out for a run and feel crap and at night I'd be watching TV and I'd not really be paying attention, I'd just be thinking you know, "Why am I not running well?" and that was all that was going through my head and sort of constantly coming up with excuses and reasons

J Did you have anyone you could turn to for support?

L Em, my mum and dad and boyfriend, not so much turn to but moan at and Bill that was coaching me at the time as well, he was sort of there to listen but again he couldn't help, he didn't know so...

J And again looking at how you coped with the event, obviously you said that you spoke to your boyfriend and mum and dad, what other things did you do to cope?

L Em, denial, just kept trying to go out and trying to run through it anyway, the searching for excuses, trying to pinpoint it to something, em, those were the 2 sort of main ones

J And how did it turn back to a positive thing?

L I think I just realized that...it came to a point where I just had to make a break, I just...My boyfriend was sort of at the forefront, he'd always said to me that I needed to move on from that training group and go somewhere else and take a bit of a break and I just thought, "Ok." So I decided that I was going to go to

John's group so I said one night that I was going to go and train with John's group and then when I got to John's group and he'd looked at my training diaries and he couldn't believe how much mileage I'd been doing and I had 3 days off within 6 months out with injury time and stuff like that and he just couldn't believe it and he said to me, "You don't need to be doing that", and I respect him greatly as a coach and I thought, "Well, ok, he's coached such good athletes and if it's working for them then it must be working", so I was willing to accept it then. I wasn't willing to tell myself that I needed a day off but if somebody else did then I was willing to and I'd respect it

J And did that event affect the way that you saw yourself as an athlete?

L Not really, no

J And how would you say that your view of the situation changed as time passed, did it ever become more controllable or more of a challenge?

L Em, as I made the move and my mileage was cut back by 20% that made such a big difference 'cause I was just less fatigued and feeling more comfortable and I had more confidence because I was managing to do the sessions and so that sort of all contributed

J And if you were to face that situation again how do you think you'd respond?

L Em, I think I might be more inclined to take the rest time purely because John's more inclined to tell me to, whereas the previous coach that I had was very much a big miles man and wasn't as understanding whereas John will say, "Just take a few day off", there and then, whereas Bill's very much, "How many miles did you do this week?" So I think I'd probably be more inclined now to maybe take the rest, but then you never know do you?

J I know, it's easy to say, but.....I think that's really all I have to ask you so to finish with do you think there are any sort of important factors that we didn't discuss or anything that you'd like to add?

L No, I don't think so

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

L Fantastic!

J Thank you very much

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3 – SCOTT

- J To start with could you tell me about your age and whether your occupation has changed since the last time we did an interview?
- S I'm 27 and I'm still a student
- J And that's your PhD isn't it?
- S Yeah
- J I know about many of your achievements from the previous interview. Have you had any further successes since then?
- S Absolutely nothing
- J Do you want to elaborate on that or shall we leave that until...
- S We'll come back to that later. It would take too long
- J Ok. I understand that you've now stopped doing athletics on a competitive basis. What was it that made you decide to quit?
- S I had an absolute disaster of a year last year competitively. I trained ok over the winter, in fact I trained incredibly hard over the winter, possibly harder than ever before but just didn't get it together when I was racing at all and I got really pissed off towards the middle of the season and decided to take some time, I think I actually came up with a slight injury as well and I thought, "Right, I'm taking some time off now", and eh, I had a couple of nights out after that and woke up after them and thought, "This is the first time I've felt happy in ages", so I decided at that point that I was going to give up, though it probably took about 2 or 3 months after that before I knew that I was going to follow through on that
- J Why do you think it took you so long to make the final decision do you think?
- S Because I identified so strongly as an athlete that you can't flip round like that in a short period of time. It takes a long period of time to readjust and recast yourself almost as something different. You can't do that in a short period of time, well I certainly couldn't do it in a short period of time
- J Ok so are you involved in athletics anymore?

- S I'm still training, well lifting weights a few times a week and doing a few training sessions, helping out some old training partners but not anything like the level I was before
- J And what are your motives for continuing on that basis?
- S Eh, I guess there's 3 things. Firstly I just want to keep fit. Secondly I want to still look like I'm an athlete and finally if I stopped completely I'd never be able to come back but if I keep ticking over and I change my mind somewhere down the line I'll probably be doing enough now that I can come back to it reasonably quickly
- J So do you think that it's almost as if you're holding onto that little bit of identity that you've got left would you say?
- S Em, maybe just, maybe just
- J When you said that you like to look like an athlete what do you mean by that?
- S Well I still want to eh, look fit and look strong and I'm lifting heavy weights because I still want to be well built, that's what I mean really
- J Ok and how important is your, we'll just call it your athletic participation even though that might not be entirely accurate, but how important is that to you now?
- S It's still quite important, em, but sometimes it's more important than other times. The weights I have to do, I won't miss the weights, but if I miss a run here or there...actually at the moment I enjoy being able to think, "Oh I'll not go a run today."
- J Ok and how does that contrast to how you felt in the past?
- S I just wouldn't have even thought of missing a training session no matter how much I didn't want to be there. I guess I never didn't want to be there though 'cause I knew that I was going to go anyway so there wasn't any point in not wanting to be there in the past whereas now I'll think, "I don't want to go", and then I'll feel guilty about it for a few seconds and then I'll think, "It doesn't matter anymore, I'm not going to go"
- J Why won't you miss a weights session now, why's that the one thing that's remained so important?
- S Well vanity and also the fact that if I do miss a weights session then I'm really sore the next time because you know what it's like with DOMS yourself, whereas I don't have that problem with the running I'm doing 'cause the running I'm doing at the moment tends to be aerobic work rather than anything fast so it doesn't matter if I miss something

- J The last time I interviewed you you explained how your athletic achievement was more important to you than your academic achievement. In what way has that changed if it has?
- S It's totally changed. I now identify myself as someone who's, well I'm starting to look for jobs now which I need to have a high level of academic achievement for so that's now the most important thing to me by a long way
- J So it's almost like a complete turn around 'cause I recall from your last interview it was almost like you would give everything to your athletic participation and only to your PhD what was left
- S It's flipped 180 degrees. Now I'm turning up at 8.20 in the morning to start my PhD and I'm staying into as late at night as I can
- J And in the last interview you described to me the sacrifices that you've made for athletics and at that point you described your lifestyle as being quite unbalanced. Has that changed?
- S Yes, my life's much more balanced, em, I'm probably working more than I should on my PhD 'cause I have to have something to fill the gap from the athletics, something to target myself at, something that I'm identifying myself as doing, but you can't commit to that and I don't want to commit to that to the level that I was doing my running so I've now got that, I still do a little bit of running and my social life is just...I've been out more in the last 3 months than I have in the last 3 years
- J Ok so how do you feel about the new sort of lifestyle that you've got?
- S It's still new enough that I'm absolutely loving it. I'm sure that'll wear off, you know I'm only a few months in. I was at the theatre last night which I haven't done in ages and I was able to come back from uni and I still get stressed when it's getting towards 6 or 7 o'clock and I think I've got something to do but then I think, "It's not running I'm doing." I can go to bed much later than I used to be able to and I don't have to worry about getting up tomorrow because I'll be able to get up. It's brilliant.
- J And is there any aspect of it that you miss or anything that you regret at all?
- S Not at the moment but that's because it's too...I'm still in the honeymoon phase so no, nothing I regret at the moment at all
- J And what position does athletics now take in relation to the other areas of your life would you say?
- S I guess, well I will not miss my weights but you know, if there's something that I want to do instead of going for a run I will do something else so it's not a very important area at the moment at all
- J So where would you rank it in relation to say your social life and your PhD

- S Well after the PhD and probably just after my social life as well on average, sometimes way after my social life
- J How do you think you would feel if you had a bad session now?
- S I don't know because I'm not actually pushing myself hard enough that I can see that happening so I guess if I had a bad session at the level that I'm...Actually no I do know because I have had a couple of bad runs and I was pissed off immediately but that was gone in a few minutes whereas before it would've lasted until the next session that I did
- J So why do you think you were pissed off immediately if it doesn't really matter anymore?
- S Habit, I'm used to being pissed off and I think it matters and it takes me a wee while, that's still my ingrained pattern to think it matters and it takes me a while to consciously overcome that and think, "No it doesn't matter anymore", and at that point I'm able to think, "It really doesn't matter, brilliant."
- J In the last interview your sense of self-worth was very much linked with your athletic success. Where would you say that you derive your sense of self-worth now?
- S Em, probably from my academic achievements, em, although I'm a bit hesitant about saying that because I'm not yet at a point where I feel that I've moved on enough from where I was academically to do that. Probably still a little bit from the fact that I was an athlete and also probably a little bit from the fact that socially I've totally changed, I'm much more confident and I can talk to people much more and that's a large part of it at the moment as well
- J Ok that's interesting. Do you feel that perhaps your athletic participation perhaps inhibited you socially?
- S Totally inhibited me, totally because I wouldn't do anything socially that was going to get in the way. I was always so tired and narky that I couldn't be arsed to talk to anyone and didn't care if I was being narky and eh, quite frankly I didn't want to go and speak to anyone now, whereas now I do want to, I want to engage people in conversation
- J Did you feel as if it inhibited your social skills?
- S I don't think it inhibited as much as my social skills so much as my social participation
- J Right. This section is about the stressful experiences that you encountered this season and looking at your log sheet I see that there were a series of underperformances and obviously on the whole what you might call a performance slump. First of all could you talk me through your season and explain to me what happened?

- S I can talk you through it but I don't know if I can explain what happened 'cause I still don't know what happened
- J Describe then
- S Ok, the first race of the season – West Districts. I felt really easy in my heat and qualified for the final very easily, em, and then in the final I don't know what the hell I did but I was at the back of the pack right from the start and lost contact with the rest of the group, well everybody bar one person I'd lost contact with by the end of the first lap and by the end of the race I was trailing miles behind everybody. But my legs were really heavy and sore and I put that down to the fact that I didn't warm-down enough and keep myself loose between the heat and the final, em, so I figured that all I'd done was just been a bit stupid and just make sure that I didn't do that again. The next race of the season was a BME down in Manchester, em, and I ran well enough for the first 200 metres and then just started going backwards after that, em, and just never felt like I got into the race and got into my running at all. I did actually run a Pb but when it's your first year at an event you'd expect to and it wasn't much of a Pb so I really, really pissed off with that. The first time I just thought it was just physical and I'd been a bit stupid between my races. After that one I started to think that I was going to be having the problems mentally that I'd had in the past and that mentally I just wasn't committing to the race, em, so whereas after the first race I thought, "Ok I know what to do to sort this out", but after the second one I started to think, "Oh f***, I'm going to have this problem again", em, so I thought, "Right, go and do a Scottish League, a nice low key competition. There's absolutely no reason why I can't walk away from the field." I got there on the day of the race and I felt ok. I felt great at the start of the race. Somebody took off and I went after them no problem at all until about 350 metres into the race and then I just started struggling and going backwards and you know, loads of folk went by me and only in the last 90 metres when I started to pick up again 'cause there was somebody coming by me that there was no way in this world was getting by me, em, and after that one I started to think you know, "What the hell's going on here? I have no idea what's going on. This is an absolute disaster. This shouldn't be happening", but I still went and did one more race down in London, a BME again and the time I'd run at the Scottish League was a time that I could run when I was 16 and eh, the following week I ran the same kind of time again having tried a totally different thing in the race 'cause I thought maybe I just wasn't going out quickly enough 'cause I thought maybe if I went out slowly I was just going to die 'cause I'm that type of runner and eh, twice in a row running times that I could've run when I was 16 or 17 I was just thinking, "What's the point in this? What kind of athlete am I if I can't even run times faster than when I was 16?" And the amount of training I'd done that winter was unreal you know, and eh, I was starting to get really depressed at this point about the way things were going so my coach decided to get me to try a 400 but I picked up a little niggle in my hamstring so I had a few days rest and I was just testing out my hamstring a few days before the race that I was going to do and eh, my hamstring just wasn't right but on top of that I couldn't even run at a decent pace and I just thought, "This is absolutely

ridiculous. I'm running like I'm a 16 year old. How the hell am I an athlete? I'm a 26 year old athlete and I'm running like I was 16, running worse than I was when I was 16", and that was it. I just decided to take a break at that point and ended up on the break realizing that I was hating what I'd been doing and there was no point in keeping doing it again

J Ok so you initially attributed your underperformances to tired legs, pacing, you almost exhausted all options. Ultimately what did you blame the slump on?

S Overtraining 'cause my coach was making me do too much but that wasn't a conclusion I came to until well after I'd stopped

J Right, so at the time it was still the idea of pacing or tired legs?

S Yeah, I think I did just assume at that point that it was something like that

J And you did mention that you ran a Pb at one point. Is it possible at all that you were setting your goals too high?

S No, no, no, no, no. My old Pb which was what a second and a half slower I set indoors off a month's training and I'd done a whole year's training, so no absolutely not

J Ok, and what had been your goal for the season?

S Eh, I was hoping to get under 1:50 or certainly under 1:51

J And how important was it to you that you achieved that?

S Well important enough that if I didn't...well actually so important that I knew that I wasn't going to not achieve it

J So rather than taking the underperformances individually, if we take the slump as a whole, what was it about it do you think that made it stressful for you?

S It was the fact that I'd put in a whole winter's training, the best winter, hardest winter, longest winter, most sessions that I'd ever done in my life and I'd come out the other end and I just wasn't an athlete. I was not performing the way I should. I couldn't call myself an athlete the way I was competing. I was a jogger at best

J In your last interview when you experienced an underperformance it emerged that one of the reasons that it was so stressful for you was that it threatened your sense of self in being a successful athlete. Is that what you mean by...

S Yeah, I wasn't an athlete this year because I was running like an absolute numpty. I was running like I'd never done all that kind of work so you can't call yourself an athlete, you aren't an athlete if you're competing like that. I couldn't in any way consider myself an athlete

- J And how important was it to you at that time that you had this athlete persona?
- S Very because that's what I was doing. I was trying to become a successful 800 metres runner and it just wasn't happening
- J You've got down on the log sheet that, I'm sure you've already answered this question actually but just to confirm, you've put down on the log sheet that you saw the event as being a threat/loss, could you explain that for me?
- S Well I'd decided even before the start of the season that I was going to be a good 800 runner. I was going to be a low 1:50 or even sub 1:50 800 runner and suddenly I was a 2 minute 800 runner which, I mean the difference between the two is unbelievable so suddenly I was thinking, "Well am I actually not capable of doing what I thought I was capable of doing?" And you suddenly have to start to think that you're just not the athlete you thought you were, you haven't got the ability that you thought you had, you haven't got what it takes to be that good.
- J And how did that make you feel?
- S Em, angry, frustrated, depressed, depressed more than anything actually, em, just pissed off in general at everything
- J And I recall from your last interview that one of your coping strategies was actually to reconstruct your identity from having been a 400 meters athlete to now an 800 metres athlete. Did that make it worse that you'd striven to do that?
- S Probably 'cause as I say I already considered myself to be not just an 800 athlete, but an 800 athlete of a certain level and I just wasn't, em, so if I hadn't thought up that identity then I wouldn't have had such a big thing that I needed to conform to
- J And you described your feelings of depression, anger, frustration. For how long did those emotions last?
- S Acutely until the point where I'd decided to stop and to some extent for some time after that
- J And how long was that roughly?
- S The first race was early May. I decided to give it up early July and then it still took me a while after that, maybe 2 or 3 months after that before I was completely happy with what I'd done
- J Ok and you put down on the log sheet that you saw it to be quite uncontrollable. Can you explain that?

- S Well, I had plenty of theories about what was going wrong but no matter what I did I couldn't change anything and ultimately I didn't actually know what was going wrong, there was nothing I could do to sort things out and my coach wasn't any use at all either when I asked him to help sort things out 'cause he just decided it was my head which was one of the theories I came up with but quickly dismissed. After the second competition I thought that was what it was. After the third competition I knew that that wasn't what it was. So I knew that it wasn't that. He was telling me it was that so I didn't know what to do about it given that it was not what he thought
- J How could you be sure that it wasn't in your head as your coach had said?
- S Because when I was running my legs just gave way on me. I was ready to race. I wanted to be in that race, I wanted to win that race. I was unbelievably psyched up and in the race after that the folk that were there with me said that they hadn't seen me that psyched up in ages and my legs just went, and you know the difference between your legs going and your head going you know yourself, or there may be some times when you're not sure but this was one time when it was absolutely 100% my legs
- J Ok and how much of your time was spent thinking about your underperforming?
- S Every waking moment
- J And what kinds of thoughts were you having?
- S I was trying to work out what I could do and I was trying to rationalize what had happened and come up with some way of fitting it into think, "Well ok, it wasn't such a bad thing after all and I don't need to worry that I'm not the athlete I thought I was, I am. I can still do it."
- J And were you able to switch off from it at all when you were away from the athletic environment?
- S No, not at all. I hadn't got any work done on my PhD at all over the summer 'cause all I was thinking about was my running
- J And did it influence in any way your sense of self-worth?
- S Yeah, I felt absolutely useless. I felt like I didn't have anything, well I didn't have anything that was going well in my life so I just didn't feel that there was anything that I could cling onto, you know it was...I was a sycamore leaf spinning in the wind at the mercy of everything else and not able to anything for myself to sort myself out
- J That's an interesting quotation. In this next section I would like to get a picture of how you coped with the performance slump, so I obviously I have a list here of the coping strategies that you used on your log sheet. Do you think

you'd be able to describe them to me in a bit more detail? Also if you could tell me them in sequence

S Ok, well the first thing I did was, I just became angry and tried to let that anger out by throwing my spikes across the changing rooms, em, yelling – it's very therapeutic – going away and driving your car and turning your music up really high and just yelling, wordless, just yelling, it hurts your throat but it feels a lot better, em, after that initial thing I guess I tried to rationalize what I'd done and tried to learn from what had gone wrong. At this point I'm probably talking about the first underperformance. I think every single time something went wrong I tried to look at it a little bit differently in some ways so at the moment I'm talking about mainly the first time, so I tried to learn something from what I'd done in that I could take tactical lessons from what had gone wrong in the final at the West Districts because I hadn't got myself involved in the race at the start and there's no way I could get myself back into it after that, em, when I realized that things were a bit more serious than that in that on the later ones I guess silly things that I tried to do was again I tried to rationalize what was going wrong and having done that I tried to work out what I could do about it or approach my coach to ask him what I could do about it or eh, talk to my training partners as well about it, see what they thought, em, and a friend of mine who's not involved in athletics, in fact I'm sure I would've mentioned him in the last interview as well, em, I think actually I said in the last interview that he was no use. I'm sure I talked to him, just to talk about it to someone else that wasn't involved in it you know, em, what else did I do?

J When you said you used rational thinking can you give me an example?

S Well I mean after the first time I tried to rationalize it into you know having not done the warm-down enough between the two [rounds] to keep myself loose you know, em, and then beyond that I wasn't able to rationalize the other ones very well but I did try to, em, I mean after the second one I tried to at least think, "Well it was still a Pb, you're moving in the right direction." In fact in the end after the second one in the season I think I managed to come away feeling more positive than negative because I did think, "Right, I've run a Pb, I've moved on from last time. It's going in the right direction. As long as it keeps going in this direction that's fine", so I was kind of doing that as well, em, but ultimately in the end what I did was just realized that things weren't going to work out. I wasn't going to get to where I wanted to in athletics and it was time to walk away and I just had to accept that and get on with my life

J At what point were you able to accept it would you say?

S When I went out a few days after the point where I decided to take a break. Initially I decided to take a break from athletics and I went out a few days later, had a great night out, woke up the next morning and thought, "That's the first time I've been happy in ages"

J And was it at that point that you were able to accept it?

- S No acceptance took longer to come. That was the point where I knew what I had to do
- J Did that somehow accelerate it – act as a catalyst?
- S Well that was the starting point wasn't it? If I hadn't made that decision then I wouldn't have been able to get away from it and accept what was going to happen, so I had to make the decision first before I could accept it
- J So where did you go from there?
- S Eh, away, I haven't been back to serious athletics since that point. I just decided that I had to get away from it and basically I went away and last time around I took apart my picture of myself as a 400 runner and rebuilt myself as an 800 runner. This time I've taken apart my picture of myself as an 800 runner and I'm rebuilding myself as a...well I haven't decided yet, either a diplomat or a management consultant depending on what job I get, but I've started to rebuild myself as something else so I'm doing the same thing as last time, it's just that this time instead of being within athletics I've actually gone completely out with athletics, and ultimately again that's the strategy that's going to have been the one that finally solved the problem. It's rather major though isn't it – taking yourself apart every time something goes wrong and reconstructing it
- J Well if it works why not?
- S It's a pretty extreme solution though
- J Well it was a pretty extreme situation obviously for you
- S Well yeah
- J You seem still quite bitter about it...
- S I was. I'm coming to the other side now and starting to think, "I'm so glad I'm not there any more"
- J Yeah, I'm just conscious of the way that you'd spoken about your coach and I'm just wondering if in fact you're still coping with it
- S No. I wouldn't be if I wasn't having this conversation just now [laughs]. I've put it to the back of my mind. I don't even think about it anymore. I refuse to let myself think about it but obviously I can't refuse to let myself think about it just now. I used to be one of these people who probably more than I would admit would let things niggle away at me and now if I feel it coming I just slam down the shutters and refuse to think about it. I can't do that just now...I'm a much stronger person than I was before because of that. I have the ability to shut things off now which I thought I had before but I didn't

- J Ok, what was the sort of time scale from it originally being such a powerfully negative thing to you being able to accept it and ultimately I suppose taking the positive out of it?
- S Eh, well that would be...I guess it must've been about 2 or 3 months from then before I, yeah 2 or 3 months
- J How would you rate your coping?
- S Piss poor. I had to walk away to cope. It was pathetic
- J Do you feel that you walked away because you couldn't cope?
- S No, I walked away because...As you would know from the last interview I haven't performed well since 1999. I walked away because I finally accepted, I finally had to accept that I wasn't going to get where I wanted to and I was just wasting my time and it was time to go and do something else. I had goals; I wasn't going to achieve them. I have other goals and I want to achieve my other goals
- J With hindsight do you think that there's anything that you could've done that would've been more effective?
- S I could've walked away four years ago but that's about it, or I could've succeeded [laughs], that's about it...could've had a decent coach
- J Ok, does your response to this event differ in any way to the way you'd have responded to it in the past?
- S It's much more extreme this time but that's because I've had an accumulation of one thing on top of another on top of another
- J Were there any of those coping strategies that you feel were particularly effective and if so what were they? And were there any that were ineffective?
- S They were all bloody ineffective apart from walking away at the end. If they had been effective I wouldn't have needed to walk away, em, I mean in the short term a little bit of violence committed to your spikes helps but no, in the long term none of them actually, apart from just walking away in the end, none of them helped, probably most of them mitigated things slightly in the short term. No that's not true, rationalizing things and trying to take something from it and taking something positive from it, those did help but only in the short term, not in the long term
- J Ok. Obviously every stressful situation that you encounter brings it's own challenges with it and how you cope will differ depending on the situation, but I'd like to get an idea of whether this is the way you tend to cope in general or not. How similar are the coping strategies that you used to those that you might use with other stressful events that you encounter in your life?

- S I do the same thing every time, try and rationalize it, that's the most common one. Most of the time that actually works though, it just doesn't with athletics, but yeah it's exactly the same pattern this time as last time, except that the final move this time was to out with athletics
- J And you talked about trying to learn something from the experience. If there was one thing that you learned from this entire experience this season, what do you think it was?
- S Oh my God, em, what did I learn? If I learned anything it's that you can never control everything, you have to accept that some things are just going to happen
- J And how do you see your future in athletics now and your image of yourself as an athlete?
- S If I do any athletics now it'll be recreational. I might take part in the Scottish League with some of my mates and just have a laugh and if I was in a winning team that would be fun but I don't want anything else from it now other than that
- J So you're very much focused on the other things in your life?
- S Yep, I'm fed up with athletics ruining my life. It's time to move on
- J And to finish with, given your experiences this season is there any advice that you'd give to other athletes?
- S Don't take up athletics or if you're going to take it up then at least don't make it the be all and end all of your life
- J What do you mean by the be all and end all of your life?
- S Well, when things went wrong for me I didn't have anything to fall back on, you know, I didn't have anything else to take my mind off it. So I just ended up obsessing about it the whole time and making things worse probably
- J So is it the idea then of maintaining a balanced lifestyle?
- S I suppose so yeah
- J Ok well that's just about all I have to ask you. Before we finish do you think there are any important factors that we failed to discuss or any comments or suggestions that you'd like to make?
- S No
- J Well thank you very much for your time and I'm sorry if I've made you sad!
- S That's quite all right

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3 – SHAUN

- J First of all I'd like to get some background information from you so to begin with could you maybe tell me a bit about your age and your occupation?
- I Right, my age is 28 so I'm getting on in years, em, and my profession is, well athletics, a professional sportsman
- J What would you say have been your main achievements in athletics so far?
- I Main achievements, em, a bronze medal in the World Junior Championships in 1994 for the 200metres, em, a gold in the same Championships for the 4 by 1 then being selected to represent Great Britain in the Olympics in '96 where I made the 100 metres semi-final em, being the first British athlete in 10 years to beat Linford Christie again in 1996, em, second fastest ever 150 metres in history at 14.99. I should've broken the world record that day but I was too busy waving to people. The world record was 14.97 and the last 20 metres I spent running like that (arms in air), so that was a bit of a bummer, em, and then it's quite quiet actually, em, then this year I ran the final of the World Championships in the 4 x 4 so I'd say those are the definite highlights
- J Ok that's impressive. Thinking back to when you first got involved with athletics, what sort of age were you?
- I Em, I was 11
- J And how did you get involved?
- I It was a teacher at school had seen me not doing the school sports day but just running from one end of the school playground to the other and then basically stopping and then racing someone else back, all the fastest boys or the so-called fastest boys in the school and I just spent about 10 minutes just running backwards and forwards and not one of them got anywhere near me. She'd been watching us from the staff room so at the next parents' evening my mum and dad went down and she said, "I think your son has a very good talent for running fast", so it just basically went from there. She suggested that they take me to an athletics club which my mum and dad did and I was really shy at that age, I wasn't all that keen on going in the first place but eh, they took me down and from the minute I went I loved it and that's been it ever since
- J So thinking back to that sort of age what would you say it was that was motivating you to do athletics?
- I Em, it's hard to say 'cause when you're that age you just do all the kind of different events but certainly at that age I did like winning. I've always been a very competitive person. When I was a child I didn't like being beaten in

board games or computer games or anything like that. If someone climbed a tree I had to climb higher than them, em, all those kinds of things and I just even remember getting really nervous for races even at the age of 12 and I just liked that satisfaction of when you crossed the line being first and winning and just having that really good buzz that you know you're better than everyone else so em, that was probably the reasons why I did it plus the fact that I really liked the sport, em, but I just liked running really fast. It's a strange kind of feeling running flat out, you almost feel like detached, kind of free kind of thing so those are probably the things and even at a young age I could understand what it was all about

J And during your teenage years in athletics how big a part of your life would you say it was making up at that stage?

I Em, it was pretty big because I mean apart from being at school then your main thing in the evenings was going to do athletics and at the weekends you'd do athletics competitions, so probably at that age it was you know, apart from being at school and these kind of things and being at home then the only other place I was was at the track so it was a major part of my life

J And when you got a bit older did you start to think about careers and what you were going to do with the rest of your life or was athletics always going to be your main focus?

I This is a really strange situation and a lot of people think, "Hmmm, I don't believe that", but when I got to about the age of 15, 16 I went to see an athletics match at Meadowbank. I was watching Linford Christie and he won and I thought, "Oh this is great, I want to be like that. That must be amazing winning a national match like that", and basically from that day on you know, I started training harder and I started having really good races the following year and I just even knew from that age that as long as I kept on training hard and kept on running fast enough that I'd be a world class athlete, em, I did obviously at school when you go to careers advice and things look at a few different things, maybe going into the forces or something like that but thankfully I didn't do that because I think had I done that I wouldn't be doing athletics now, but certainly I did know from a very, very young age when I was in my mid teens that something just told me that I was going to be a world class athlete and to stick at it

J And looking back do you think you missed out on anything because it had been such a big part of your life?

I Em, I mean a lot of my friends and all that used to be always going out and saying to me, "Are you coming out" on a Friday or Saturday night and of course I wouldn't go because I had training the next day or I maybe had competitions on and em, you know, some people have said to me, "Have you not lost out on your youth a little bit because you never did anything like that", and I'm like, "Well no 'cause I've been round the world twice and I've been to all these fantastic grand prix races", so in the long run it was totally worth it. I've got a lot of life experience that a lot of my friends don't have, you know?

So from that side of things I don't think I have lost out but maybe on you know going out with your friends and going to night clubs and stuff like that, I still did that but not as much as what they did but I don't feel as if I've missed out on anything at all, I've had a great life

- J So the next questions I'm going to ask are designed to help me understand how big a part athletics plays in your life just now. So I understand what it was that motivated you to do athletics when you were younger and obviously that was all about winning, has that changed in anyway?
- I No, no I'd say it's probably even more so now because obviously you're at the age where senior athletics and world class athletics makes you even more determined and makes you even more obsessed about winning and you know that feeling of winning and of course doing it at this level you're basically right at the top of the world so if you're beating these guys then you're beating the fastest guys in the world and you know, winning a race and then having that behind you and you know there's maybe only 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 guys in the world that are faster than you and when you think about the size of the world, it's a huge motivation to do that. It's still a great buzz and you know just to win something like the Olympics, that's always something that I've wanted to win, or a major medal because you know, to get everything right for a whole year and then with something like the Olympics which is on the one day takes a lot of mental strength as well as physical and to me that was the ultimate achievement, was winning medals at major championships, and that was really my main motivation for keeping them going, just that thing thinking, "Yeah I'm the best, I've got a medal", and that's what it'll always be like no matter how people perceive it because there's a lot of money in sport these days but money's got nothing to do with it, you know for some people it maybe does have but in my case you can take all the money away and I'd still do it for the buzz of winning
- J And just how important would you say that your athletic involvement is to you?
- I Eh, it's very important, obviously it's my career so like anyone takes their job really seriously and like anyone who does sport for a career there's no difference. You still have to get up in the mornings and go training and in some ways you've got to be even more disciplined with your diet and bed times and things like that and looking after yourself, massage, physiotherapy all these kinds of things, so it is full time and it does take up a lot of your time and you know, it is my job so it is a major, major part of my life
- J How big a part of your identity would you say that athletics makes up?
- I Em, I'd say it's pretty major. I mean I've always done it. I mean even when I was a child running against kids that were 4, 5 years older than me. I was not long walking, 3, 4, years old when I could beat the older kids and it was just always the way I've been so em, you know, it's a hard one to answer that one actually. I can't think of a way to put it into words but em...

- J Do you see yourself as being anything other than an athlete?
- I No, I've always done it. It's been something that eh, you know it's the old cliché, but born to win as they say so em, yeah, definitely a big part of my identity
- J And obviously it's important to you that you see yourself as being this highly successful athlete. Is it important to you that other people also see you as having that kind of identity?
- I Em, I don't know really, em, there's a lot of avenues that you could go on that one, em, [difficulty with the question]
- J Is it important to you that the public recognizes your athletic achievements?
- I Yeah for the public then yeah I think so. Obviously being high profile and things the public look upon you in that direction anyway so that's another one that's getting me. I'll get home and I'll think of the right thing to say but at this moment in time I can't, em, yeah it is important for the public to see me like that because you want to be recognized for your achievements and that is, "I.M. the athlete", and I get referred to that all the time, "You're I the [does a running action]", "That's right, I don't have a surname [laughs]"
- J What sacrifices would you say you've made or are making just now to allow you to do this?
- I Sacrifices now, having changed my coach I'm actually spending more time away from home and I have a fiancée at home. We're getting married next year so there's a lot of planning that's to go on for that as well and being away from your loved one's not an easy thing to do, especially when you're away training hard and you know, sometimes it can get a bit lonely when you're just basically training and eating sleeping kind of thing so I would say being away from home is a, it's not a sacrifice all the time because when you're racing then that's part of your job and it's great and you know that's what it's all about but just not having a normal lifestyle, you know 99.9% of the population in this country get up in the morning, go to work, come home from work to see their loved ones, sit in their own house and you know they go on their 2 week holiday in the summertime and things like that, whereas with athletes it's 365 days a year. I mean I train on Christmas Day, New Year's Day, there's no stopping and I think those are sacrifices like, not that it's a problem having to watch your diet but it is nice sometimes just to be able to go and eat what you want but em, if I'm training the next day even if we go out for a meal with some friends then I'm kind of like looking at my watch and thinking, "I want to get home", and "I can't eat this and I can't eat that", and I don't want to be sitting in a smoky bar or something like that so these are sacrifices that you know, you have to make but these are the only sacrifices and I don't mind them
- J Ok. So apart from athletics what other areas of your life are important to you?

- I Em, my family and friends are really important to me, especially my family, my fiancée, em, I'm really close to my family so they mean a lot and they've always been there for me and always stand by me so they're really important, again my friends they keep my feet on the ground. They come from all walks of life, fire men, police men, em, university students you name it, you know I've got people from super stars right down to being unemployed and all these people keep my feet on the ground so really I value all that, em, I'm really into motor sport and things like that so that's my hobbies and my escapism to get away from the momentum and tediousness as it sometimes can become in the winter time, so em, I do have other things that I'm interested in
- J So when you're away from the athletic setting and athletic people and doing something completely different, would you say that you're able to switch off from the athletics or do you find that it's constantly there?
- I Em, it depends on what time of year you're at and how things are going. Generally I can switch off. When I've raced or finished my training I go home and get in my car and as far as I'm concerned the job's been done and training's gone well. I get in the car, drive home, that's it, switch on the TV, lunch, whatever, listen to music, em, I don't think about training at all. I just put it in my diary and that's it done, em, it is a different case when you're maybe injured or you have a niggle and you go home and you ice it and you're constantly thinking about it but em, generally I just completely switch off and get away from it. I think thinking about it 24/7 is not good for you, you know it can tire you out, stress you out and I just like to when I leave the track, leave the track and that's it
- J One of the interesting findings I found in a previous study was that some athletes described a similar thing to what you're describing – it was almost as if they were compartmentalizing their lives, so they had their home life, their athletic life, if they worked they had their work life and never did any of those areas cross over, so in actual fact that was a useful coping mechanism because what that meant was that if something went wrong in athletics they were able to detach from it. Would you say that that's something that you've developed?
- I Yeah, yeah 'cause it's almost like when you walk in the front door of your house that's it, you know it's an athletics free zone, em, and yeah definitely they never cross over and you just tend to push it to the back of your mind and that's it forgotten until the next day, you know you get up and it's all back to square one again, you go and do your athletics, em, yeah, I mean it's never ever been a problem for me to, you know, just to do training and then that's it, you know not think about it again and I know a lot of athletes kind of think about it all the time and have problems switching off
- J I'd like to get an idea of how you tend to feel about yourself if you don't meet your goals in athletics, we'll probably come back to that a bit later on in the interview, but just generally

- I Generally if I don't meet my goals in athletics I get first and foremost I get frustrated and I get annoyed, em, frustrated because most of the time I know I can do better and annoyed because sometimes it's because I've been prevented from doing it in the first place, i.e. I've maybe had slight niggles and injuries and things but em, if there's completely and utterly no excuse for it then inside I get really angry if I thought I was going to run well and I didn't and it's very frustrating
- J And how does that compare to failing to meet goals in other areas of your life?
- I If I set my mind on something outside of athletics and it doesn't happen then I'm disappointed as well
- J So is it the same kind of reaction?
- I Yeah, it's just bred into me I think, you know it's just the way I am if I'm going for something. I mean like for instance when I went to have a look round houses I saw this one house and I thought, "I've got to have it, that's mine", and luckily I got it but I thought, "If I don't get it I'm going to be majorly pissed off, I'm going to be really, really annoyed", and it's things like that so if I set a goal that I'm going to do then I make sure I do it
- J So again it's like the idea of winning
- I Yeah, yeah I must win
- J So the next question is designed to try and help me understand where you get your self-esteem and self-worth from, so what areas of your life make you feel good about yourself would you say?
- I Em, I'd have to say that the area it would come from would be racing, that's what makes me feel good, that's what gives me my big, "Oh yes, this is great, I feel good, I'm invincible right now", and that's how I felt when I was running 400s 'cause when I was running well I might not have necessarily won the race but I felt really good after it because obviously I was learning, I was achieving as I was going along so probably yeah I get the feel good factor from doing my athletics. Probably the only things outside of athletics that have ever made me feel great was like passing your driving test or something like that but it wears off really quickly, so I'm sorry to say but it would have to come from winning in my athletics, that's what makes me confident, that's what makes me feel good. It puts me on kind of like a high and it lasts for ages and that makes it good for your training and you know the next time you come to race as well
- J I've got your log sheet here and I'd like to talk about the injury that you experienced mid season that you obviously found highly stressful so just so that I can get an idea in my mind of what happened could you describe the event for me please?

I Em, the event was the 400 metres at the AAAs Athletics Championships and World Trials and the Tuesday beforehand I picked up a niggling injury in my left heel, em, I didn't feel anything, did the session and it went really well. It was a little sprints session just a few days before and eh, when I got up on the Wednesday morning I had this shooting pain going up into my Achilles tendons and eh, I started to panic. I was getting really stressed out and getting on the phone to the physios and saying, "I need to come and see you today." Thankfully I was able to get in on the next day and in the meantime I just kept on icing it, em, I went along to see the physio the next day and it was still really, really sore. I got treatment on it and they were prodding away and I was really just about jumping off the bed because it was really, really tender, em, they said that I hadn't done any damage whatsoever to it, em, it had just been like overloaded when I'd been running, it'd been stretched too much and eh, it would be perfectly ok for the weekend so I was just to relax and get on with it. But it was still playing on the back of my mind and I then woke up on the Thursday morning the day before I was due to run and it was still really sore. Luckily for me I spoke to an athlete friend who is now my coach and eh, he has a hell of a lot of experience of being at the top of World athletics and he had once gone through this exact problem before and eh, he was such an experienced athlete that I just listened to what he had to say and he really set my mind at rest that everything would be ok and just to you know, get down to Birmingham and get on with the race and he gave me a few little bits of advice over and above the physios as well as to what I could do just to keep myself in check and set my mind at rest and you know, that's really what it did because you know, when I got down there I felt so much better first and foremost when I got off the phone and when I got down there the next day it was still really sore, it was still niggling so it was still in the back of my mind and I was still a little bit apprehensive about everything, em, especially with it being my first championship run in that event and eh, as it was I just went down to the track at night and I thought, "Well I'm just going to go for it, here I am. I've just got to get stuck in there and give it a blast and see how it holds out", and just generally throughout my warm-up I just tried to push it to the back of my mind, you know, just forget about it and actually as I started warming up it started getting easier and easier until at one point when I was just finishing my warm-up I thought, "I can't feel it at all." I went out onto the track and that gave me a lot of confidence. I felt so much better that I'd put it through the stresses of warming up and I didn't feel it, em, so when I got out onto the track I was then able to just go and run the race which turned out to be really good and em, I didn't have any pain in it the next evening or the next day or the rest of the championships so that was really the whole weekend

J Ok, so was this something that you've experienced before in your athletic career?

I Em, not at that stage no, not at such a late stage. I've been injured before and not been able to run at all but not to be in such good shape as I was and really, really desperate to run in as good a championship as what this was so it was definitely a new thing for me

- J And did you feel that the injury endangered any goals that you were working towards?
- I Yeah, em, probably not on the Friday when I got down there 'cause then I started to sort my mind out but in the days leading up to it I just thought, "Oh this is the end of it." I was ready not to go down to Birmingham at all. I thought, "What's the point in going down when I can't even really walk on it?" So I really saw that as a big problem because I thought, "I'm not going to be able to achieve what I want to achieve here", and that's realistically a medal, eh, and it really upset me that I was once again in this position after having put so much work in and training so hard and really, really wanting it so em, I did see it as a bit of a pain in the ass
- J You've got down on the log sheet here that you saw it to be a bit of a threat, I'd like to understand why you saw it as being a threat, could you explain that for me?
- I Em, I saw it as being a threat because obviously athletics is what I am and everyone knows me as the athlete and I didn't really want it destroying the identity I have in the sport so that was why it was you know, a major threat for me
- J And you put down as well that when you were first faced with the injury it was only just controllable, so why was that do you think?
- I Yeah probably in the first 24, 48 hours it was definitely uncontrollable, I started to panic hence the reason I was frantically phoning the physio and saying, "I need to come in today", and you know I was biting all my finger nails, so I was constantly thinking about it all the time. I couldn't get it out of my mind. It made me really grumpy and not a nice person to be around. I didn't want to watch TV, I didn't want to listen to music. I didn't want to do any of these things. I was just completely focusing on that which is the wrong thing to do but I couldn't help it and that's why it was out of control, em, but then once I'd been to the physio and spoken to my training partner and my coach then that's when I started to come round and then became more positive and I thought, "No I'm not going to let this get the better of me. It isn't anything major, I can get through this", and that's when I started to change my mind set
- J And if we just focus this part of the conversation on the first sort of 24 hours when you were faced with the injury, who or what did you blame at that point would you say?
- I Em, I didn't really blame it on any particular thing, it was just one of those things that had happened 'cause when I was actually training the training session went perfectly well, em I finished the training session no problems at all, I did my cool down no problems at all. I went home and I had some food and then it wasn't really until later on that night that I started to feel it getting really achy, so it was just one of those things that came on and it wasn't because of the session that I did that I'd caused it or aggravated it in any way,

it was just obviously circumstances that it happened. I may have placed my foot slightly awkwardly when I was running but didn't feel it at the time and it's just taken a few hours to come out, em, so there was no real blame or finger pointing going on at any point, just a lot of frustration and being really annoyed that why's this happening to me again?

J Ok, you've obviously talked me though the emotions that you experienced. There was frustration, there was annoyance, there was panic, were there any other emotions that you experienced if you can remember?

I Em, I think once I'd spoke to my coach I just felt relieved that I'd spoken to him and relieved that he is an ex-athlete and he'd had exactly the same problem maybe 2 or 3 times throughout his career plus other injury problems he had had at really, really major championships at a really crucial point in his career and how he had gotten through them so that made me feel a whole lot better

J What about when you were initially faced with it before you had the chance to speak to anyone – what sorts of emotions did you experience then?

I Em, I just felt really angry first and foremost 'cause I thought, "You must be joking, not now. Why couldn't it have happened 2 weeks ago when I had no races on and nothing important to do?", em, so there was anger, frustration that you know, that something like this could happen at such a late time on my last training session before going to a major championship, em, I felt pretty sick actually to be honest with you, you know, just a bit hacked off, a little bit depressed actually, eh, just being in the house on my own and going home to an empty house. It might have been good if there had been somebody there to sit down and chat to and even though they don't do athletics they can still reassure you and things like that so those are probably the 3 main things that I felt

J And I suppose you've already answered this but when you got away from the athletic environment was it still on your mind?

I Yeah, yeah it was there all the time because it was obviously something that was really important and something that I didn't want to be there so because you don't want it to be there it tends to play on your mind a lot. You can magnify it as well. Sometimes you can make it a lot worse than what it really is which is what I think I did probably initially, em, because I've had problems in that area of my foot before and I probably blew it out of proportion more that I should have, but yeah it's there all the time

J In this section I'd like to get an idea of what coping strategies you used to deal with the injury. Could you talk me through what strategies you used from the time when you first experienced it?

I Em, basically I tried not to stress myself out, not to get into too much of a panic, not to get too angry and not to raise my stress levels initially because in the past I would've done that, but because it was so near to a major event I

didn't want to make things any worse than what they already were so it was just like, "Ealm down, let's just not get angry here and try and move things along", so that was basically what I did initially

J What strategies did you use after that?

I Em, well obviously straight after that once you get your head together and get on the phone to the physio and that's the person that you really want to phone you know, you don't want to phone anyone else. You just want to get on the phone to the physio and get yourself booked in that day or whenever as soon as possible and get yourself sorted out, em, that helps to settle your mind just that little bit, em, and then obviously you've got to think to yourself, "Well it's happened, I can't go back in time and change the training session. I've got to just accept that it has happened. I might not like it, I might not want it to be there but accept that that has happened and that you know, I've just got to get on with it basically and you know, hopefully the physios can do their job and it's nothing too serious, em, I also spoke to a coach and a training partner of mine who's you know, a very experienced athlete and he had had this happen to him numerous times throughout his career and em, he tried to go through it all and said, "You'll be fine, just get down there and you'll be able to run, it's not a bad injury." I'd spoken to him after I'd been to the physio so he knew all about it and em, so that just took a big weight off my shoulders. I felt much better having come off the phone to him, em, and I was a lot more positive by that point that I was going down on the Friday to run and to run well and to you know, get a medal, em, and then basically from that point on once you feel a little bit better then you try and put it out of your mind. It's a really hard thing to do but em, you know you just try and forget it and think, "Everything's going to be ok", and you just try and think about your races on the 3 days of your running, you try and visualize them and think about what you're going to be doing there and just really try and occupy all your time thinking about the race and the championship and anything that's going to take your mind off of having this problem that's there, em, so then obviously you turn it round and you change the negative into a positive and become more focused on your running and your races ahead. I was running the races through in my head thinking, "Right, I'll be in the top 2 in the heat and then the same in the semi-final and then be in the top 3 in the final and you just put all memories of the injury and how it's going to be nigging away just straight to the back of your mind

J Ok, so would it be fair to say that basically you turned that from being really quite negative and threatening into a challenge?

I Yeah, yeah it was definitely a challenge once you know, I got my head sorted out em, I definitely saw it as a challenge that I wanted to get through it but not only get through it, get through it and do the job really well

J Ok, out of all the coping strategies that you've talked to me about, are there any of them that were particularly effective in helping you deal with the stress or any that were ineffective?

- I Em, the most effective one on the coping strategies was speaking to someone about it basically, getting it off my chest, telling him exactly how I felt and you know, what was wrong so chatting about it made me feel better and having the person giving me feedback and saying you know, “You’re going to be all right.” I needed that reassurance. I needed to know that I was going to be ok so that was probably one of the best coping strategies for me, to speak to someone that was experienced and knowledgeable about being in that position
- J What about the visualization, was that effective?
- I Yeah, visualization’s something that I’ve always done from a teenager. I just run the race through in my head and like I said, it got me away from thinking about the foot being sore and I just imagined myself going up to the starting blocks, getting into the starting blocks and running in my lane and coming out the blocks and feeling no pain at all in my heel and running round the bend and everything was feeling really strong and healthy and easy, relaxed, nice and flowing and just running a good perfect race round the track, but at no point imagining my foot being sore or it hurting or my technique being bad or anything like that and I think that’s really important. You know, your brain sometimes doesn’t realize it hasn’t actually run a race, as far as it’s concerned you’ve actually run a race so it kind of stores it in your memory
- J So it’s like mentally your running but physically you’re not?
- I Yeah, yeah
- J Ok and do you think that your response to this event would’ve been any different if it had been at a different point in your athletic career. What I’m trying to get at is given your experiences of injury is that quite a normal way for you to cope – would you have tended to cope in a similar way?
- I Em, in the past no, em, I maybe would’ve taken it out on something in the house or used something as a punch bag or you know, broken something just to let aggression and frustration out, eh, not necessarily going and smashing things up but maybe even yelling as loud as I can and then laying into the bed or something like that, em, I possibly would’ve done that. I would’ve been really grumpy all the time and very negative, yeah I’d say that would’ve been the way that I would’ve coped with it before which is obviously not the best way to deal with it
- J Why do you think that’s changed?
- I Em, it’s changed now because I’ve seen the importance of not getting stressed out when something does happen. If something happens it happens and that’s it, you can’t do anything about it so what’s the point in making matters worse by getting more angry about it and more frustrated and more agitated and being aggressive when you can think, “Right, it’s happened, just stay calm, get it sorted. The time it takes to get sorted will be the time it needs and that’s it, you can’t do anything about it”, and it generally just does make me feel better ‘cause I tried that a couple of times and I thought that was definitely the way

to go, just to be a lot more mellow about it and you know, not stress yourself really. If you stress yourself then it becomes more magnified and if it's more magnified then you become more frustrated and it's just a vicious circle and it just makes you feel ill basically

J Overall how satisfied would you say that you are with your performance this year?

I Eh, very satisfied, em, it's been a really good season, in fact better than I expected. The times that I ran this year were faster than I thought I was going to run, em, the success that I've had this year was more success than I thought I was going to have so all in all it's been more than a success for me, it's been absolutely phenomenal. It's been a really fantastic year so yeah, it's gone really well

J And as a result of that do you think your image of yourself as an athlete has changed in any way?

I Em, yeah, yeah it has a lot, em, for me being an athlete I've definitely grown up a bit. I feel as though you know if there were any other challenges thrown in front of me now I'd be able to cope with them a lot better because of the experiences that I've had this year, em, and I think from anyone else's point of view I think I've got a lot of respect now for what I've done as well, em, going from the event that I have up to where I've done so I think that can only be a good thing in terms of 'I.Ma. the athlete' and a lot of people are thinking, "Good on him, it takes a lot of guts to do that", well I mean I know that for a fact, people have come up to me and said that

J And how does that make you feel to hear that?

I Yeah it's a great feeling. I mean being recognized for doing something that you're good at is really, really nice but you know it's even better when people say, "I really admire you for doing that", 'cause everyone knows that the 400's really hard and em, you know I think people are just generally, "Well good on the guy, he was at rock bottom and he's brought himself right the way through to a really hard event and done well there]", so yeah it's nice to hear....It's maybe not as hard as the 800 though!

J Maybe not! Well that's just about all I've got to ask you but before we finish is there anything that you'd like to add or any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

I Em, I think we've got everything. I mean I couldn't really comment on what it was like to be disappointed this year because I obviously I haven't had any disappointments so I think we've covered everything that I've done from start to finish

J All right then thank you very much

I No problem.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3 - JACK

J First of all I'd like to get some background information from you so could you tell me a bit about your age and your occupation?

K I'm 21 years old and I'm a bar tender and I'm going to university in October

J And what are you going to study at university?

K Sport and the Eommunity

J Let's think back to when you were younger. What sort of age were you when you first got involved in athletics?

K I can remember exactly when I got involved in athletics. It would've been primary 7 at school. I was always a keen runner in the playground but we had a sports day which let me qualify for a Eumbernauld tournament which was all the primary schools and I was entered for the 100 metres. I had the choice of just about every event and I wasn't a very academic child so winning these wee races across the playground was amazing. I think I got a silver medal for the 100 metres and that was my very first involvement, that's where it was and I've still got my medal. I went along to Eumbernauld Athletics Elub which was local to me which was handy, it was all about me being in close proximity to the place or maybe I wouldn't have gone, I might not have been keen enough, but I actually turned up and asked. I was 10, I was too young to run 800 metres and I walked up and I said, "Can I run 800 metres please?" , and they thought this was amazing 'cause nobody ever wants to run 800, it's long distance when you're a 10 year old, people think you're mad. I stuck it for a wee while on and off. Through high school I got the distractions that everybody gets at high school. I wouldn't say I was a member really of an athletics club, I only went just to have a bit of chat and I did a wee bit of running which probably did enough to get me by, but I did other sports. So that was my first involvement and then there was pretty much nothing, it was 6 months at a time every other year

J So it was just kind of whenever you felt like doing it?

K Yeah

J And what other sports did you do at the time?

K I was a keen footballer, very keen footballer. Queen's Park, that was my team and I used to travel through to Glasgow but it was a bit too professional at the time, you had to wear your blazers and they shouted abuse at you and I didn't like it, eh, do you mind if I be frank? I was 11 years old and they told me I was shite. We were playing Eeltic Boys' Elub and they said, "You're playing

Eeltic K, is it because you support Eeltic that you played shite?” They put me on for one minute as a left back and I’m predominantly a right footer and I really didn’t get a chance to shine, I thought they were just nasty men. Some boys that maybe have made it now could get through that kind of regime, but not me. I needed fun, if it wasn’t fun I dropped out and I played hockey. I enjoyed hockey, my Mum played hockey and we used to mess about at the side of parks and I was kind of good – I like things that I’m good at

J But at that age were you more motivated by sort of social things?

K Fun stuff

J Ok, so at what stage did you decide to narrow your sport down to athletics?

K 19

J And what made you decided that you were going to stick with athletics?

K I saw people who I considered not to be as gifted as me train hard and do well and even silly things like looking at their physical appearance I just thought, “How can you be better than me?” They were getting a lot of support and I was getting none and I wasn’t that far away, not that far away at all, getting no recognition and I kind of wanted to say, “Get it up you!” The big turning point was breaking my ankle though, eh, I appreciated what it was like to be healthy and it appealed to me to be as fast as I could be, it just appealed to me to be fast, to be in Sauchihall Street and challenge someone for a race and just be fast, know what I mean?

J Ok, going back to when you were younger when you did all these different sports, how big a part in your life would you say that athletics played at that time, or sport?

K Sport all of it, every minute of every day was about sport, athletics no not really. I went to athletics, it was like a wee social club like where you would go to play pool almost. It did take up a bit of my life but the athletics didn’t, other sports definitely took priority and if I’m honest I still enjoy playing hockey and football but it’s the daily grind of athletics that I don’t enjoy, but you’d get more satisfaction from a race than you’d ever get from a team sport, but it’s maybe less fun on a daily basis

J So taking sport as a whole, how big a part of your life did that play when you were younger?

K Morning and night, it did play a big part in my life

J And do you think that you missed out on anything because of your sport involvement?

K No, I wouldn’t change it, that’s all I can say about that. I definitely didn’t miss out on anything because of my sport involvement

- J And obviously you've made the decision to go and study sport at university, has your sporting background had anything to do with that decision would you say?
- K Yeah definitely because I have confidence when it comes to that sort of thing. I'd like more knowledge as well about my sport and my hobby and that sort of thing, plus I'm hoping that at some point I can get a job of some sort with maybe just a wee shred of enjoyment, something that's not a chore, although I'm not adverse to having to work and I hope that I eventually find something that's for me. I'm almost buying time
- J Obviously I've got an idea of what motivated you to take part in athletics when you were younger. What would you say it is that's motivating you to do athletics now?
- K I'd like to please my mother, I want to run well for my family to be proud of me and for my mother and my mother only, not my dad and I think that's got something to do with it as well. I'd like him to see me doing well and for him not to have any involvement. It's very peculiar I know, but it's enough and eh, I enjoy athletics, the people are good, the track's fun and I look forward to it
- J So again it's like when you were younger the fun aspect ?
- K Yeah
- J So how important would you say that your involvement in athletics is to you just now?
- K At present it's as important as anything else in my life but not that important, it's not the be all and end all. I could survive without athletics if I had to but I would rather not. It's a hobby that I hope I could take further but I don't want to drive myself round the bend thinking about athletics every day. I could break my leg tomorrow, it isn't the end of the World
- J And how important is it to you that other people see you as being an athlete?
- K Not important at all, it's just not important. It's important to me. Aside from my family who even if I was smoking and drinking would consider me an athlete anyway, which is mad, there's nobody that needs to see me as an athlete and I'd never have thought about it until you asked me that question
- J And do you feel just now that you're having to make any sacrifices to take part in athletics or not really?
- K Sometimes, I don't think so, no. If I'm busy I've been known to miss the odd session. I wouldn't enjoy it if I knew that there was something in the back of my mind so I suppose I'm an easily distracted athlete

- J And how balanced would you say that your lifestyle is just now?
- K It's very balanced. I see my family a lot. My circle of friends would tell you that it's quite balanced. I've many circles of friends with totally different backgrounds. I don't get manic about my diet and I don't stress when I miss a session 'cause I think I can make it up, I'm quite positive that way that the sessions I do do will have the desired effect and that I don't need to stress and worry every single day
- J So you've got quite a lot of things going on in your life?
- K Loads of stuff, the stuff in my life takes its turn and probably at the moment it's not the turn for athletics, it's about enjoying life
- J So what other sorts of things are important to you in your life?
- K I don't have any brothers or sisters so my friends are important to me, so I like to spend a bit of time – they're non-athlete friends – and I like to have good fun. I like the odd night out which can motivate me for running anyway 'cause maybe most people who run enjoy that kind of feeling. I wouldn't say that I'm about athletics, athletics is just a part of me
- J And when you're away from being at the track or whatever are you able to switch off from it and not really think about it?
- K Easily, I don't even have to think about it. I know when training is and I can get organized when the time comes but I can switch off and switch on so probably most days I'm switched off and that's the way I like it
- J I'd like to get an idea of how you feel about yourself when you don't meet your goals in athletics, can you describe that for me?
- K I don't get too caught up in my goals, that way I'm not as disappointed. My expectations are still quite high, I would beat myself up more if my training was more regimented and I had put in all that I can. I don't not put in any effort because I think, "Well that's an excuse for failure", I just perform better if I'm more laid back and that goes for absolutely everything in my life
- J So you wouldn't be the type of person who would feel really down about yourself if you had a bad run?
- K Yeah, for a wee while, it's not nice but I'd get over it, I'd definitely get over it – there's always the next race
- J I'm just going to refer to the log sheet that you filled in during the season. You mentioned that you actually broke your ankle. Could you tell me a bit more about how that happened?
- K It was a league meet, an 800 metres, my first or second race of the year. The gun goes and the 2 guys at the front slowed up. I sat on their shoulder

thinking, “I’m in a nice wee position to strike”, and a guy stuck his elbow into my gut and it could’ve been a mistake but he did it a second and a third time. My spikes got left in the ground and I tumbled and when I tumbled it wasn’t natural, something had to give and it was my ankle, and my knee a wee bit as well, but anyway the ankle was pretty messed up. I actually managed to run an extra 100 metres which the doctors were surprised about. I got up and then just collapsed – I managed to catch somebody as well and I was quite pleased about that. It just got bigger and bigger as the day progressed – it was a bowling ball, it was the size of a bowling ball and I’m not exaggerating

J And what would you say it was about breaking your ankle that made it stressful for you, apart from the obvious pain?

K I didn’t like to have to rely on anyone, it wasn’t so much not being able to run, I knew I’d be able to run at some point in time – that was always going to happen, I’m a natural healer and the fact that I couldn’t walk, just not being able to walk was a stress, going to the toilet in crutches was a stress.

J So it wasn’t the impact that this event had on your athletic participation?

K No

J Did breaking your ankle endanger any sorts of goals that you were working towards at the time?

K No, I keep harping on about enjoyment but that’s really all it was about, it created a few but it didn’t really kill any dreams ‘cause I never really had any major dream

J In what way did it create a few?

K It was the rivalry, some people in Eumbernauld run for other clubs and you see them getting a lot of support and I figured that they don’t have what I’ve got naturally. I saw them working and getting similar times that I could just run just because, and I made it my mission to get fit and get back on my feet. I knew the stookie would come off, the ankle would stop swelling and I would run again so I just accepted it

J So was it the fact that you’d broken your ankle that made you come to that decision?

K That was the reason. I hated the guy at the time but I thank him now, although there’s still swelling and I still get the odd pain but it was probably for the best, it was a wake-up call

J So in what way was it a wake-up call?

K “Listen sunshine you’ve got a bit of talent, there’s wee fat barras that would give their arm to do what you do and you’re taking it for granted”, and I was

- J You put down on the log sheet that you saw this event to be a challenge and I guess you've kind of already answered that, can you just explain to me why breaking your arm was a challenge?
- K A lot of people I know are very negative. It was a challenge because I couldn't change what had happened, there was no point in dwelling on it, no sense in feeling sorry for myself, I knew I was going to get fit and fast again. It was a challenge because it was in my own hands and I could speed up the process, do everything in my power to get fit quickly, that was a challenge
- J Who or what did you blame?
- K Normally I take responsibility for my own actions, not this time. It was the guy who elbowed me, it was definitely deliberate. Anyone who watched the race knew it was deliberate. Someone had it on camera and offered to show me it but I've not watched it
- J And how much of your time was spent thinking about it after it had happened?
- K After that day I kind of giggled about the whole thing. I figured I'm still young, if it happened and I was training like a maniac and maybe a bit older it would've had more of an impact on my life but each and every day it got better, it was always going to improve and I knew that, I knew it was always going to improve
- J So you were able to switch off from the stress....
- K I could switch off right away. I just had to be objective and give myself the advice I would give somebody else that it will improve and it always does
- J And did breaking your ankle have any impact on the way you saw yourself as an athlete?
- K It wasn't the be all and end all athletics, and did I consider myself an athlete? If I was strict about my routine I would say yes, I did see myself as an athletic performer but not so much an athlete so it didn't affect what probably wasn't there anyway
- J Whereas if you'd put an awful lot more time into it and you were in a better routine it may well have had a bigger impact
- K I can't say what the impact it would've been but it would've affected me somehow
- J This section is about me trying to understand how you coped with the stress associated with breaking your ankle, so could you talk me through what sorts of coping strategies you used?
- K First and foremost I knew I couldn't turn back time, I had run the race and I had to be positive and being positive meant that I had accepted it, it was done

so that was half the battle; I'd accepted it, it could only get better every day from then on. My first goal was to get the stookie off, the next goal was about getting walking. After I was walking I would get running. I planned this – I would get a coach and get proper guidance at some point down the line

J What had been your coaching set up before that?

K I picked a lot from books, I did work hard. I picked up information from here, there and everywhere from people at different clubs. I knew roughly the sessions that would get you to some sort of a standard but on a weekly basis I made up my own programme and I did stick to it but it was my programme. I was self-coached so get a coach, get a wee bit more professional, stop taking running for granted, I'm still not going to make it 100% I'm an athlete, but I needed to have years of progressing, another injury like that and I probably wouldn't be able to run so I figured, "Let's get good at this." It was easy to cope, it was a kick up the bum, a definite reality check, that's exactly what it was. I could only improve, it's like everything in life if you believe, you can only improve. That's why I'm going to university I want to improve my mind and improving my mind will improve my body, the two go hand in hand

J So in what way did your involvement with athletics change as you got used to breaking your ankle and time passed

K I got more involved with athletics. It had gone from being something to nothing and at some point down the line becoming a wee bit more important and taking up more of my time

J Obviously you've talked me through how you responded to breaking your ankle. Do you think your response would've been any different if you'd broken your ankle say the year before or in the past?

K Yeah, I was just the right age. I've just come into adult hood. I made my own decision anyway and I've always had a lot of freedom but I think just the right level of maturity to make a decision. Having not broken my ankle would I have chosen to go and smoke that dope on Friday night and go out clubbing and recover on the Saturday and have a fry up? Breaking the ankle was a turning point. If I was any younger I might not have realized this, any older and it wouldn't have been a turning point because the moment would've passed anyway so there would've been no sense in knocking my pan in afterwards, so it was the perfect age to break my ankle

J So you just turned the whole thing around to be really positive

K Yep

J Ok, and how do you think you'd react to breaking your ankle if it was to happen now?

K I would be more stressed but I believe I would get over it, maybe not as quickly. I know I would get over it, I've got over things like that in the past

and I would do it again. My goals may be different but if I don't put any pressure on myself then hopefully it wouldn't affect me too much

J And what are your goals now in athletics?

K It sounds like a cop out but to be fitter and faster and to beat anyone that I line up against, to be the best

J And why do you think you'd be a bit more stressed if it were to happen now?

K More energy has gone in, more time, the odd sacrifice or two. As I say, it's not the be all and end all but if you have to be somewhere on a Monday night or a Wednesday night it would be a shame for you to spend those hours training and for something silly like to fall in a hole or over a kerb, it would definitely make a big, big difference. Before I was just a guy who entered races, now I'm more of an athlete and it would have an effect on how I saw myself

J Ok that's interesting. So overall how satisfied would you say you are with your 2003 season?

K If I had boxes to tick I would just tick satisfied, I am satisfied. I've improved, I'm pleased with the coach that I've sought. I like the track and I know that when I put my energies into the sessions now that they're event specific so I'm pleased that things progressed. I would like to have run faster obviously but I'm more pleased that I have a group, I have some sort of structure in my life

J Ok, so just looking at your questionnaire responses, the importance that you place on athletics now is different from what it was at the start of the season and I believe that's due to what you've explained with your experience of breaking your ankle. Can you just confirm that for me?

K You're absolutely right, I never realized it had changed, well I knew it had changed but having completed the same questions now and I see that they have changed...well I'm training with a group of athletes and these people are real athletes, now I'm someone who likes to win. I can't go along to training...I can still enjoy it but I wouldn't say it was my life, it probably never will be my life but on those nights I want to improve, I want to be better than the next person whereas before, maybe I was a big fish in a small pond, it was just all about having a giggle so it was easy to just get by on being good

J So looking at the way you coped with breaking your ankle, you do look to have good coping skills certainly in relation to that event because you were able to be positive about it and set yourself goals. Is that the way that you've coped with other stressful events in athletics this season?

K Most definitely, in the District Championships there were a lot of people pacing up and down and I was as well but I'm just a bundle of energy, my reason was different, I wasn't particularly stressed, a lot of that's to do with me just accepting the fact that I'm entered. I can only concentrate on me. To

stress, I find stress pointless, I'm not going to stress about other people in the other 7 lanes or however many people are in the race, it's all about me. If I run well I'm pleased, there's nothing that I can do on that day that can change the outcome and I really believe that

J So if you underperformed...

K If I underperformed I would take it on the chin. I'd be disappointed, a wee bit envious, well pleased, if someone else won who's fitter and faster I'd be pleased for them. I'd just go away and say, "Well, there's so many weeks, there's so many months, there's so many years even but I will return and believe that I will", whether it happens or not, but I won't get obsessed about it but believe it will happen

J So again it's the idea of taking the negative and turning it into a positive

K Turning it into a positive yeah, absolutely

J And are you able to do that with stress in general in your life?

K Some might say that I ought to be more...I mean I am conscientious when the time comes about a lot of things, eh, I have been known to be a bit of a loose cannon but again it's like you were saying with being positive, you have to not get negative about these things. I have these things in my personality and I've just got to go with the strengths and if that means being positive about stuff and maybe compromising something that ought to be important for an average human being it just doesn't seem to be important to me - I'm a bit of a smiler, quite laid back and I adopt that approach in my athletics and it works with me. It's all about Linford Christie - PME – I remember the attitude the advert and it was brilliant, that's me down to a tee

J Just to finish off with, obviously there are some athletes out there who are unable to cope the way you can cope with stress in athletics, maybe they're unable to see the positive side of stressors and they're unable to see stress as a challenge, perhaps they see it to be more threatening. Have you got any advice for those athletes who maybe to them it is the be all and end all?

K I wouldn't normally try and give advice but if I was being put on the spot and I had to try and give someone like that advice I would say it's all very well and it's good while it lasts, or doesn't last. You could spend 10 years for nothing to come of it. If athletics falls flat on its face you have to have your fingers in as many pies as possible. What you don't want to do it start closing doors, you've got to keep all your avenues open, that's all I think I would say

J So it's basically about having a balanced lifestyle?

K I think you've got to have a balanced lifestyle, yeah. You've got to have something to fall back on, in the same way that you can fall back on athletics if need be, if something's not quite hunky dory, hope you don't quote hunky dory! Do you know what I'm saying?

J Yeah, I couldn't agree with you more. Well that's just about all I have to ask you. Before we finish though do you think that there's anything that we haven't discussed that we should've done?

K No I don't think so that was very thorough

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview?

K Oh the interview was first class, I liked the structure eh, you put me at ease, eh, it never felt too formal. I knew I had to answer the questions as accurately as possible but it was quite laid back, cheers Jne!

J No, thank you very much

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3, ELLIE

- J Before we start I'd like to get some background information so to begin with could you tell me a bit about your age and your occupation?
- H Yep, I'm 27 and I'm trained as a primary teacher but I've been working as a nursery teacher
- J And is that on a full-time basis?
- H Eh, part-time
- J And does athletics take up your other time?
- H It does yeah, that and em because I'm married and my husband works full-time and when I originally took up part-time work we kind of agreed that I would do all the house work so it's like I'm a kind of house-wife, athlete, teacher, so it's a bit embarrassing!
- J What would you say have been your main achievements in athletics so far?
- H Eh, the Eommonwealth Games and the World Indoors, just getting to both of those
- J Ok, and I'd like you to think back now to when you were younger. What sort of age were you when you first got involved in athletics?
- H Em, it was when I went to high school and I started a cross-country club so I was just 11
- J What would you say it was that was motivating you to do athletics at that stage?
- H Em, I think I was interested in things generally that were healthy or sporty or just hobbies, you know I liked to have lots of different hobbies in general, em, and then the reason that I guess I stayed with athletics was when I tried a number of different sports athletics was the one that I seemed more successful in so obviously there was sort of the feel good factor attached to it, em, and then just as the years went on and I started to do better and better I suppose it becomes addictive and you want to just see how far you can take it
- J So was it like sort of health benefits initially but also the idea of being successful, you enjoyed the success. Would that be right?
- H Yeah, I think particularly coming from a background where our family wasn't very well off when I went to high school, you know, I couldn't have the latest

fashion like my friends did so this seemed like another way of like being...I didn't need to be inferior so em, that was just a different motivator I suppose

J So thinking back to your initial years as a teenager when you were just taking up athletics, how big a part of your life would you say it was making up then?

H Em, it started off just a cross-country club a couple of nights a week, so it started off just a hobby as anything else but em, I suppose you know having a bit of initial success at competitions compared to my other hobbies, em, I think by the age of say 15 it soon became the hobby that you know, outweighed any other hobby and other hobbies started to dwindle a bit, em, in fact I had a lot of family support. I got put in touch with Eric Simpson a national coach who lived just up the road at the time, so I had a lot of support

J So when athletics was becoming a bigger part of your life did you feel as if you started to miss out on other things?

H Em, I didn't feel I was sacrificing anything, in fact I felt it was opening more doors for me because I started to maybe have more of a social life. I was meeting people from other places and so that was really good, em, I guess by the time I was 15, 16, and I was having to train a lot I had to drop other sports. I was interested in hockey and I just had to dump that, em, but I would say at high school at that stage that was the only hobby that got dumped

J So you still managed to maintain quite a balanced lifestyle?

H Yeah, like I was learning to play the piano and I was doing highers and I saw my friends so it didn't go into other parts of my life

J And as you got older you obviously started to think about your future employment and made plans to go into teacher training, did athletics play any role in that decision making?

H Em, not initially because I always saw it as something that maybe you trained at night after you'd done your whatever it was during the day, you know studying or whatever, em, I think by the time I finished university and I finished teacher training I remember thinking, "I'll leave it in the hands of fate. If I get a full-time job I'll just go with that but if I get a part-time job I'll not see it as a bad thing like some people would." I thought, "Oh that would be great, I'll see it as a chance to train", so it's kind of half and half. The athletics was a big consideration but I was probably still slightly prioritizing the employment at that time

J So talking about now, obviously I understand what motivated you to do athletics when you were younger, has that changed in any way now?

H I would say no in that I still like the idea of trying to achieve something [MOTN-AEH] and improve yourself and the health benefits. I think that will always stay with me, em, it seems a little bit less innocent than when I was younger. It seems more complicated and maybe now I'm just trying to hang

onto what I've got and maybe I'll only be able to improve a little bit. But it's when you're younger I think you know life's a mystery and you don't know what could happen in the future, whereas now I'm much more aware of my limitations and maybe there's not that much more I can get out of myself

J And I'd like to get an idea now of just how important athletics is to you in relation to all the other things that you've got in your life

H Yeah, em, well for as long as I can remember throughout university and stuff I always remember having 3 main ambitions. One was to be a primary teacher, one was to get married and one was the athletics, and I would say that's really always remained the case, em, but I would say first and foremost I prioritize my marriage and I always thought that if I met the right person and my athletics had to fall by the way side I'd have allowed it to happen, not happily you know, but yeah, em, and I would say that my family are really important and the health of my family. My mum has had cancer for the past 4 years so that really makes you realize that athletics just doesn't matter at all. If I gave it up to look after it or anything you know that just doesn't worry me at all, so

J How important would you say it is to you that other people see you as an athlete?

H Em, I actually prefer it if my husband and my family don't see me as being an athlete, just see me as being H, especially my husband 'cause he can be really, you know, we go out socializing and he wants to blether about it and I'm just more than happy sometimes you know not to talk about athletics and talk about anything else, and probably that's the same with close friends. I suppose outsiders, em, it's maybe important to some extent that they see me as an athlete in that it maybe justifies why I've been working part-time and there's people that might think I've just been lazy all that time, so yeah it's important but I hate just being thought of as 'H the runner' and that's it, that bugs me. When I was at school I used to be know as 'H the runner' and I used to think, "God, there's more to me than just running."

J Ok, how big a part of your identity would you say being an athlete makes up?

H Quite big in that I'm probably found in my shorts and t-shirt a lot of the time em, equally I love when I'm being a teacher and I love just when I'm being a friend or a helper so I again I like to be more than a runner. Even what clothes I wear, I love nothing better than if you've been training say it was on a Sunday morning, I hate wearing my tracksuit bottoms, I love to just get out of them and get into jeans or something smart. I like going out on a Friday or Saturday night and wearing something a bit dressier 'cause when you've been slogging it out all week you just feel run down and all that and it's nice to glamour yourself up a wee bit again

J What I've found previously was that some athletes sort of compartmentalized their lives so what you would find is when, say it was you, when you were teaching you didn't think of yourself as an athlete, you were a teacher. When you were at home you saw yourself as a wife or whatever and you wouldn't

really think about your athletics. But when you were at athletics you were then the athlete. Is that something that would apply to you?

H Yeah, yeah, em, say for example I'm at home in the afternoon and I'm really getting on with a task like making the dinner. I can really hate it if I get a phone call to do with athletics when I've not instigated it because I think, "That's interrupted my other time when I'm doing something else", em, or if I get a phone call at work to do with athletics it disrupts me a wee bit so yeah I like to think, like for example I was working in the mornings so in the morning I was a teacher and in the afternoon I did housework and at some point I had to be the athlete obviously to train

J So you obviously find it quite easy to switch off from that side of you then?

H Em, I'd say more so in the winter. In the summer it's a lot harder. I'll be doing the house work and it might be going round in my head, all the different, "Should I be doing this race or that race?", and it can be hard to switch off then, but when I'm at work it's easy to switch off

J I'd like to get an idea now about how you feel about yourself if you fail to meet your goals in athletics, could you describe for me in general how you feel if things don't go right?

H I think em, I think if you've got reasons that were out with your control for why it happened then it's easier to deal with. Like em, I didn't get a Pb in the 1500 this year but I can feel good enough because I got pb's in other events and I can think of reasons why maybe I didn't get a Pb in the 1500 so I don't have to crucify myself too much over it, you know I don't see it as failure and that's it [EOPE-GEN]

J So would you say that rather than getting really down about it you maybe tend to see the more positive aspects of things?

H Yeah I think to try and come up with the reasons and then think, "Well how will those reasons not be there in the future then? How can you change that next time round?" Like for example I thought that the reason I didn't get a Pb in the 1500 was partly because come the end of the season I'd only run I think about 4 or 5 1500s so I thought, "Well next year what I'll need to do then obviously is do more 15s and maybe minimize the other distances that maybe got in the way this year", so it's trying to say, "Well how are you going to change it next time round?", rather than you know, killing yourself about it

J And how does something going wrong in athletics compare with something going wrong in another area of your life would you say?

H I think again very similar. If it's something that you couldn't control, I mean say for example with my mum's cancer. Again it's something that I can't control, em, yeah so it's not like I can be annoyed at myself, eh, but I suppose it depends as well how public it is, you know if you failed at work you could be quite embarrassed, em...

- J I suppose what I'm trying to get at it if you failed in athletics would it be worse than failing in something else?
- H Yeah, I think I'd feel far worse about something going wrong in my marriage than something going wrong in athletics because I don't see my athletics as being something that I'll have for the rest of my life anyway. I see that there's an end point somewhere anyway, so if I broke my leg or something that would be it, I'd just give up, whereas with my marriage I'd like to think that that will be there for the rest of my life so that's more important
- J And what aspects of your life would you say make you feel good about yourself as a person?
- H Em, my husband, he's pretty good at dishing out the complements, eh, I don't know why the state he sees me in sometimes, but em, and my family and I think if I've had maybe some positive feedback at work I quite like that or if you've been able to help somebody, em, all those sorts of things make me feel quite happy
- J So this section is about the stressful experiences that you encountered this season and I've got your log sheet here. One of the stressful events that you put down on that was the Achilles injury that you experienced. Can you maybe describe a bit about what happened for me?
- H Yeah, em, I guess I'd had a slight niggle maybe a couple of weeks before it, em, but I'd seen my physio and I'd got the go ahead that yes it should be ok to race, I should be fine and get through the race. However during the race it tightened and tightened to the extent that it was just excruciating and eh, I had to drop out the race, em, it was a very big race and there were loads of crowds there and to just drop out and look up and see the crowds and just not be in the race, you know it was just a horrible way to...and I knew pretty instantly the way it felt that that was the end of the season and I thought, "God, this is how I end the season, just like that in the middle of a big race."
- J What had been your goal in the race?
- H I was looking for a Pb in the 1500 that I'd been aiming for. That had been the whole point of the whole season. I was looking for my Pb and I saw it as being the last big race of the season. I mean I knew I'd had a slight problem with my Achilles but as I said, I got the go ahead from my physio, em, but yeah it was the last big one of the season and the last chance perhaps to try and get the Pb
- J Obviously there were lost of different aspects of the injury that made it stressful for you. What do you think the main aspect of it was?
- H Em, possibly two things, the first the fact that I'd missed out on the Pb and I knew at that point it was so sore that it was sort of serious enough that it would have sort of ended the season so my biggest disappointment was that I

wouldn't be able to get my Pb for the 1500 and that had been the whole aim of the season, em, and then the second thing was probably of course the initial reaction of, "Oh God was it my fault? What could I have done? I shouldn't have run the race? Maybe I should've held off and run another one", and it's all this sort of blaming yourself and, "How did this happen? Did I overtrain?", em, all these sorts of feelings that I had

J You've put down on your log sheet that originally you perceived the situation to be a loss. I'd like to understand what other sorts of emotions that you experienced at the time. Could you describe them for me?

H Em, well I guess I was fed up. I thought, "Oh goodness there's been lots of stresses and this has just tipped it all off, this is the last straw", em, I felt I'd maybe let down my coach, who had had slight doubts about me doing the race but as I say my physio gave me the go ahead and I thought, "Oh maybe I've let him down because now my season's ended", em, what else did I feel? I guess a loss because it was the fact that my season had ended [PRIM-LOSS] and I suppose guilt, you know you start looking at if you could've done anything to prevent it happening

J Ok, and to what extent were you able to switch off from things?

H Em, that was the end of my season so I wasn't quite sure where to take things from there, em, you know what plans to make or I thought you know, "Is that definitely the end of the season, can I just go away on holiday now?" I would say it took a day or two to just kind of establish that, how sore was it? [EOPE-TIME] I couldn't see my physio for a few days, so I'd say there was maybe a good 24 hours and I probably went into you know, rather than being constructive I just sort of thought, "Oh stuff it", and I didn't want to think about it and I just moped about a wee bit and that took up about 24 hours I'd say

J Ok so it was like the ambiguity of the whole thing, not really knowing how bad it was?

H Yeah, almost not wanting to even think about it

J And how did it make you feel as a person this happening?

H Em, I knew that it wouldn't be a long term thing but as a person, goodness...

J I suppose I'm trying to get at whether it affected your sense of self-worth or self-esteem or anything like that?

H Well I suppose you know the first thing you think of is, "How will other people view it? Will other people think, 'Oh yeah, she was overtraining?'" , so there was a wee bit of that you know, I'd got it wrong. Here I was in a position where I just couldn't run and em, so I suppose from that point of view yeah

- J And did it affect that way that you saw yourself as an athlete?
- H Em, it did in that I knew I couldn't really be an athlete for the following 2 or 3 weeks
- J And how did you feel about that?
- H I think once I realized that hey we can just book a holiday and do other things then you know I had a few drinks and a few fish suppers and all that, em, and I think probably I was lucky at the time of the season that it was towards the end of the season anyway and I'd had enough success, I was able to accept that fact that I didn't get my Pb this year, em, so I started to accept it a bit more and then think about what I could go off and do instead for a week or two
- J So again you started to take the positive out of it?
- H Yeah because it had been a very busy time and it felt like from weekend to weekend all you were doing was packing a bag, going away, coming back and unpacking a bag and at first I thought you know, "Oh I can tidy the house, I can get the cupboards cleaned, I can do this and do that and catch up with people and eat and drink 'till my heart's content."
- J So it was like at first it was really quite negative and stressful and then you perhaps started to see it in a different light?
- H Yeah, it almost became maybe a slight relief that "Oh well this continual chasing races and all that is over", em, as I say you know, I'm still not happy that I didn't get my Pb but I started to think, "Well, ok look at the season and sort of try and work out how I can get the Pb I was after next season instead."
- J This part of the interview is aimed at me finding out how you coped with the injury, so obviously I already have an idea of the coping strategies that you used. Could you talk me through them?
- H Yeah, em, initially when it first happened straight after the event there was a lot of questioning and talking with my husband who was there at the time and em, very much thinking, "Was there something I could've done to prevent it? Could I have finished the race?", you know, "Could things have been different?", and I think I just couldn't stop thinking about that because this just wasn't a good scenario to be in, em, and then the next day I suppose I think maybe I'd completely drained myself out the next day and went through the next day where I really just wasn't interested. I wasn't even particularly proactive. I didn't ice my leg like maybe I should've done, em, I really just wanted to pack my bags and get home as quickly as possible and I just moped around. I would say it was only after those 24 hours that I was able to go and see a physio, em, start canceling other races start accepting the fact that my season had ended and I hadn't got my 1500 Pb. And once I'd accepted it I was able to think about what I could do instead, like I booked a holiday and started to catch up with all the things that I hadn't been able to do all season, you know, gutting out cupboards and just getting yourself sorted out I would say,

just catching up with people and em, and then I guess I looked at how I could change things so that that sort of thing wouldn't happen again next season

J Right so you sort of learned from the experience as well?

H Yeah, yeah

J Ok, so it sounds like you managed to turn it around quite quickly

H Yeah, it was after the initial sort of 24 hours spell. Once the dust had settled I started to cancel the races that I had in the 2 weeks after that and I started to accept the fact that my season was over and that I hadn't got the goals that I'd been after, em, once I accepted that I was able to realize that really my diary was free. I was able to go away on holiday and catch up with things that I'd maybe missed out on throughout the season, em, catching up with friends and not having to worry so much about I suppose the timetabling of my training and things like that so I was able to catch up with things, em, and I guess as well I looked at maybe why I got injured and how I could prevent that next year and how I could just structure the season a bit better so that I could maybe get my Pb next year

J So when you talked about the positive aspects of having a more open diary so to speak did you turn from initially thinking about the negative aspects to focusing much more on those sorts of things?

H Yeah, em, I think the disappointment was still there but I very quickly, I mean I think we went on holiday within 2 weeks of that happening so we got booked up pretty quickly and em, I suppose I was able to move on and we kind of devised a plan. We thought maybe it would take you know, x number of weeks for the injury to be over and where I would pick up from so that all happened. I started to make those plans within a week or 2 after the injury happened

J Ok and once you were on holiday did you look back on it or were you more looking towards the future?

H Eh, I looked back on the season as a whole 'cause there had been a few you know sort of stressful things. The season I'd set had been different from other ones because I'd been competing in maybe slightly higher races which brought about different circumstances so I did reflect on it all and just all about what athletics meant to me and how I was going to carry it forward

J And what did you conclude from those thoughts?

H Eh, I had had thoughts about you know, "Do I still want to be an athlete?", but I did think that I still thought I could do it, em, but it was about could I still do it to a high level and do all that hard training but keep a sense of balance and still keep other people happy and you know, still meet up with your family and things like that and not so much with regard to the winter, but more thinking about the summer when it becomes a bit more intense and I just thought that

maybe I need to have a more mature approach to it and try and maybe be a bit more proactive about controlling the season and when I race. For example I hadn't liked the fact that I'd raced every weekend and I thought, "Well next season I'll take more control and try and arrange it so that maybe I race every second weekend and I can do more enjoyable things in between but still reach my goals."

J Ok, so when you got to that stage of questioning whether you were going to still be an athlete was there anything in particular that had brought about that questioning do you think?

H Em, I think I thought, "Have I just come to the end of the line? Has it got as extreme as maybe I want it to be?", you know for example, having to chase say this idea that you might travel abroad, you know it takes 2 or 3 days of your life, you travel all the way abroad to another country for one race and if it's at night and it's a hot place you're not supposed to go out into the heat so you're meant to sit in a hotel all day long, and that you know, conflicts with other values that I have. I don't see it that you spend your life sitting in a hotel room all day long so I had to really question, "Am I prepared to do that?" So I think you know, just the extremities of it sometimes made me think well, "Maybe I can accept that but if I control it", so that was my thinking. It's a bit more complicated than when I was younger, you know when you were younger you had the odd race here and there, it didn't really inflict upon your life

J But now when you're going abroad and stuff it seems like a bit of a sacrifice?

H Yeah and I just felt that this summer just got a bit too intense at times and you know, if you've got no time to do your gardening or things like that, you've got to look after the wee things as well

J So out of all the coping strategies that you've talked me through, which ones were particularly effective and which ones were less so?

H I think you know looking back on the season I realize that when stressful things seem to happen I did spend maybe a bit longer than I should've done moping about or thinking, "Oh this is just another hassle", and "Why can't I just get on with my training? I have to decide this and decide that", em, but I think what was effective was certainly communicating with people really quickly so for example if I got invited to do a race that I wasn't sure about I'd delay the decision, pick up the phone and ask my coach, pick up the phone and ask my husband and get feedback as quickly as possible, em, so I think you do need to think about it but maybe just sometimes not quite as much as I found myself doing, you know that's time consuming

J Ok and what coping strategies did you find quite effective would you say?

H Em, I think talking to other people and getting feedback, em, and I think looking at how to get the positive aspects out of things, so maybe thinking

about how you could do something differently next time around, that kind of thing

J Would you say that you almost detached from your athletic identity at the time?

H I had to a wee bit. The week I went on holiday you know I didn't train and I really took that as being time out and I felt like I needed to have time out to be able to come back and give it another bash again

J And did your response to this injury differ in any way from the way that you'd have responded to it in the past do you think?

H Em, no it looks quite similar to how I've responded in the past. I think possibly the way my coach responds to things, he tends to stay quite calm and look at things from another angle, so maybe if I've been injured or done badly in a race em, it won't be 100% failure or anything, you'll be able to you know, you'll always manage to find something positive about it or change things around a bit

J And overall how satisfied would you say you are with your performance this season?

H Em, I think I'll still look back on it with a fairly positive outlook, just because I felt that although I didn't get my Pb in the 1500 that I was after I didn't perform badly in any race that I can remember and I did get personal bests in an event that was longer and an event that was shorter, so in the 800 and 3000 I got Pb's, em, and I think I remained fairly consistent so overall I'm fairly happy

J Ok. Has your image of yourself as an athlete changed in any way as a result of your experiences this season?

H No probably not actually. I think you know that in some ways that I was able to get into higher races but it maybe needs more commitment but I'm still very stubborn, I still want to make sure that it doesn't start controlling me, that I'm still in control of it and that, yes I am an athlete but I'm still doing other things so I suppose that remains the same, it's just been more of a challenge to be able to keep coping with that idea

J Ok, that's me got a good idea of how you coped with that particular event and looking through your log sheet I've noticed that in general you do tend to cope by seeing things in a positive light and learning from your experiences. Is that a general way for you to cope would you say?

H Yeah I think maybe it's the only way you can get through something

J Well that's just about all I've got to ask you. Before we finish though do you think there's anything that we've missed out or anything you'd like to add or any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

H Eh, no I don't think so. I think it's been well covered.

J Ok well thank you very much for your time

H Oh no that's ok.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3 - FINLEY

- J First of all I'd like to get some background information from you, so to begin with could you tell me a bit about yourself?
- I I'm 23 and I'm an engineer
- J And is that full-time work?
- I Yeah it's full-time work on a graduate training programme so I'm moving around quite a lot to different places every 6 months. I just graduated from uni last year
- J And talking about your athletic participation, what would you say have been your main achievements so far?
- I Eh, World Juniors, European Juniors, European Under 23s, eh, I won AAAs titles at under 17 and under 20 and under 23 and have won a couple of Scottish titles and GB Junior vests
- J Very impressive. Thinking back to when you were younger now, what sort of age were you when you first got involved in athletics?
- I Eh, about 14. I used to play football but my football team kind of broke up – one of my mates went to the running so I just went along with him, eh, and then I just did it for about 2 years and my coach entered me into the Scottish Schools. I didn't have a clue what event it was, I just turned up and ran and I came 2nd in that and then I did a couple of races that year and then straight into the next year I won the under 17's AAAs, so I just kind of kept it going from there
- J You said you got involved in football before that, was that a couple of years before, or...?
- I That was just like social, I'd been doing that since I was about 10 maybe, yeah probably about 10. I did it for a couple of years and our team got hammered in every game 'cause basically everybody left, em, we only had about 7 players in our team
- J So what made you choose to go to athletics?
- I Em, it was just something else to do, there was no reason other than just following somebody else along to it 'cause there wasn't much else to do
- J And what would you say it was that was motivating you to do athletics at that point?

- I At that time it was just going down and sitting with my friends, just really to do something to stop me getting bored, that was about it. I just turned up about 2 nights a week, pretty much just socializing and then after that I just started maybe 4 nights a week and then the more I got into it, I did more nights a week. Mostly at that time it was just the social of doing a bit of running
- J And at that stage in your life how big a part was athletics playing would you say?
- I Hardly anything. It was literally just turning up as and when, if I had to miss it I had to miss it, I didn't really bother
- J So you didn't feel that you missed out on anything because of athletics then?
- I No not really because I wasn't devoted to it in that sense so I was just with my friends and when I was at school I wasn't missing anything out. I still went out at weekends and you know, I wasn't training as much. So I wouldn't be training at weekends, I think it was just Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, Saturday, Sunday was just free so I didn't miss out on anything
- J And as you got older obviously you made plans to go to university and to become an engineer, did athletics play any part in your decision making for a career?
- I Eh, well I wanted to get into engineering and I chose to go to Loughborough because it was good for engineering and also athletics, so it was a bit of both. I had applied to Heriott-Watt and a few other places and the only difference was that Loughborough got the track so I chose uni for the engineering course, not because of sport. But because they were all pretty much the same I thought, "I'll choose the one with the track", 'cause that's what's going to be the easiest one for training.
- J This next section is concerned with how big a part athletics plays in your life just now. So obviously you've talked about in the past that it was social aspects of athletics that motivated you to do it, has that changed at all?
- I Em, the social thing I think is still a big part, em, when you do quite a few European races that's quite a big part, like meeting new people, talking to them and like getting new mates. I think that's as big a part still as just turning up and racing, em, also when you see a lot of the guys at the same races, maybe you've grown up with them since you were 17, 18 and you've seen them for like 5, 6 years and I've been at uni with some of them so it's still the social side that's still quite big, eh, but no I'd say it's probably still a big part, just slightly different so instead of like all the social being at the training it's also at events, after events, that kind of thing
- J Is there anything else that's motivating you to do it apart from the social side?

- I Em, yeah just the enjoyment, just the competition and that, eh training's good fun just going out, you know the fitness side of it, eh, and then just going out and turning up to races and trying to run faster than what you've run before, em, I just kind of enjoy it. If there's nights where I'm just not feeling like running I won't bother going training. If I don't enjoy it there's no point in going out training so every time I'm on the track I'm there because I want to be there, not because I feel I'm being forced to or I've got to.
- J So how important would you say that your athletic participation is to you now?
- I It is quite important, yeah, just purely from a social side but if I wasn't running I'd probably be doing something else like cycling, swimming, some other sport, em, so in terms of actual athletics...if I wasn't an athlete, say if I was in a car crash and I lost my legs I'd be doing something else so yeah it's important but it's not the be all and end all
- J And is it important in any way that other people see you as an athlete?
- I Not at all. I think most people tend to find that they associate me with being an athlete more than I do, you know they'll refer to me as, "Oh you're the runner", whereas I'm like, "Well, yeah but I do other things apart from running", you know? So yeah, I find it tends to be the other way round, people see me as an athlete rather than me seeing myself as one
- J And how much of your identity does being an athlete make up?
- I Yeah again, I won't tell people that I'm an athlete, em, a lot of friends at uni didn't know that I did athletics for months and months and months until they saw me competing on the track, but I don't see that as part of my identity.
- J So what other parts of your life make up your identity would you say?
- I Eh, the job's quite a big part, em, just sort of socializing with friends, just bits and pieces. I don't think of athletics as the big like, "I'm an athlete and that's it", so the guys at work know me through work. Other friends I've got you know, through uni or other socializing
- J And have you ever made any sacrifices to allow you to participate in athletics?
- I Yeah, a lot of the time during the summer I haven't gone away on holiday with my mates that much. When they're all booking holidays I'm like, "Oh I can't 'cause I've got this race here, that race there", but I get the enjoyment from athletics so it's not like I'm really depressed, I'm not losing out so they're on holiday yeah great, but I'm also running in competitions with different groups of friends. You obviously get good trips away with athletics as well so you get to go to some strange places which is quite good, eh, I quite enjoy that. It's got a lot of benefits so overall I don't see that I'm losing out, but you have got to make changes to your lifestyle

- J And obviously you feel that your lifestyle is quite balanced?
- I Yeah, yeah, sometimes if all the guys are going out say on a Friday night and I've got a race on the Saturday, sometimes I'll go out but come home at 10, 11 o'clock so I still get a bit of a night out with them but I also get to have the race as well
- J What aspects of your life would you say make you feel good about yourself as a person?
- I Em, well all parts do. Athletics just gives me the fitness, just leading the healthy lifestyle, work - keeping my brain active and just sort of socializing, just meeting other people and going out and being happy and that sort of thing, yeah I get different parts from everything
- J And I'd like to get an idea about how you feel about yourself when you fail to meet your goals in athletics. Could you describe how that feels for me?
- I Well this season I was hoping to be running a lot quicker but I haven't done that so I'm a bit disappointed but like most athletes you just think, "Oh next year I'll be doing this, I'll be doing that." I suppose it gives me extra motivation for the winter time. You go into the winter season thinking, "I don't want to run that badly, I want to run this time", eh, so...
- J What kinds of emotions do you experience when you fail to meet your goals?
- I Em, initially a bit unhappy and you know, trying to find a reason for it you know, "Have I been doing the wrong training?" or "Is it the weather conditions?", to see if there's anything to justify running badly and then if there isn't I'll just think, "Oh well, it's just one of those things." Sometimes you go out and you have great races and you're not quite sure why you ran so well, eh, but I get a bit sort of unhappy but once I get away from the track I pretty much stop thinking about it, just kind of switch off and then you know, just do something else
- J This next section is about the stressful experiences that you encountered this summer and obviously I know from your log sheet that one of those was not making the final of the AAAs. So I'd like to understand a bit about that event so could you elaborate a bit for me?
- I Yep, the AAAs was one of the main targets for the season and my target was to reach the final of the 1500, eh, basically this year I was concentrating on the 1500, normally I'd been doing the steeple chase, eh, I made the AAAs final in the past for the steeple chase but this was basically kind of changing events for the season and I went out in the heats. It was like first 2 and 6 fastest losers through and I came 3rd in the first heat and I didn't make it through as one of the fastest losers, so I was kind of a bit unhappy and frustrated that I didn't make it through
- J What was it about the event that made it stressful for you would you say?

I Em, I think it was because it was a heat, basically I'd been targeting a fast race in the final. All my preparation was meant for the final, it wasn't for the heats. To not even make the final, that was annoying 'cause you had to sit back and watch a race that you weren't in that you knew you'd been preparing for and my mum and my sister and coach came down to see me and I felt that they had a bit of a wasted trip so I kind of felt a bit bad for them, so it was frustrating 'cause once I was out in the heat that was it, I couldn't do anything to get back into the final, especially with it being the first heat. If you're in the 3rd heat you know what you have to do to get into the final, whereas in the first heat it had to be the first 2 and maybe 2 other athletes in the race, it was always going to be hard to get past them. But when I look back on the race I wouldn't really have changed anything, you know, especially being in the first heat you can't set off like a rocket, em, so yeah when I look back on it I think, "Yeah, I wouldn't actually have run it any other way", yeah I would've run it exactly the same.

J So how important was it to you that you made that goal of the final?

I That was one of the targets of the season 'cause once you're in the final it doesn't matter if you come first or last, you now, you're in a AAAs final, it's quite a prestigious event to be in and if I didn't make it it wasn't like the end of the World, there were other races before the end of the season and there's only 12 athletes can make the final and there's a lot of people that do 1500s so there would have been a lot of other unhappy guys as well, em, but I just kind of reset my targets once I didn't make it to try and get a specific time by the end of the season

J And you explained in the log sheet that you perceived that to be a loss

I Yeah well it was a loss because there was nothing that I could do to change it. It was a loss because I was trying to achieve something and I didn't make it

J So you viewed the whole thing to be quite uncontrollable?

I Uncontrollable to an extent, there were a lot of other factors like the speed of the other 2 heats, I couldn't control the speed that they went at, I couldn't control the heat draw, em, but I did pretty much as much as I could do, there isn't really anything else that I could've done

J Ok. Can you describe for me the sorts of emotions that you experienced when you found out that you didn't make it through to the final?

I Eh, disappointment, a lot of disappointment that night because that's what I'd been preparing for and then to not even make the final... It was more a sort of shock as well 'cause you kind of get to the point in your preparations you know I was running really well and I obviously just expected that I'd be in the final and then when you don't it's a bit of a shock and it's a little bit of a kick up the pants to say you know, sometimes you need to have your finger on it a bit more

- J And is this something that you've experienced before?
- I Yeah, sometimes in previous years it's tended to be times that I've missed and that's not been that big a deal because say I might have won a Ehamptions and the time might not have been great but with most Ehamption running it's more about position than time, so that's generally what it's been but this year I didn't have a major Ehamption to aim for because the World Ehamptions were a bit too far beyond me
- J And did not making the final affect your sense of self-worth in any way?
- I Em, not really, I think it might have improved it if I'd made the final 'cause then you kind of get a bit of respect from other athletes like, "Oh you're a AAAs finalist", but I don't think it did me any harm especially as a lot of people see me as a steeple-chaser, not as a 1500 runner so whatever I did at 1500 was a bonus. This year I was regarding myself more as a 1500 runner, that's why I was a bit more disappointed than what other people were
- J And who or what did you blame for not making the final?
- I Em, I wouldn't say I blamed anybody, it was just the circumstances, being in the first heat and it was very slow and tactical 'cause it was first 2 to get through and the 2 guys in front were sub 3.40 minutes like John Mayoock and Tom Mayo, em, and there were a lot of faster athletes in the race that I beat so in terms of what I could've done - if I'd run faster, those other 2 would just have run a little bit faster as well but I couldn't have beaten them, and then in the other 2 heats I couldn't control anything in that so I mean I can't really say I blame anybody, it's almost just a situation that happens.
- J Sometimes when people are faced with underperformances or they don't meet a certain goal, some athletes will go away and play it over their minds constantly. How much of your time was spent thinking about it?
- I Em, that night I thought a lot about it because I was speaking to my coach and I was speaking to my mum and my sister and the more I thought about it and the more they were telling me how they saw the race then I was thinking about the way I ran and that's when I was thinking, "Well actually I ran it as well as I could've done on the day and there's nothing I would've changed and I kind of went from being disappointed to almost acceptance, like I thought, "Oh well, that's it. I can't do anything about it, it's happened", em, there were a lot of positives I could take from it after it. About 10 minutes after the race I was quite gutted but when I actually sat down and had a think about it I started to take quite a lot of positives out of it, like it was a really quick last lap and there were a lot of other athletes that I beat, so that was the thing that sort of spurred me on a bit and kind of picked me out of the disappointment
- J Could you talk me through the coping strategies that you used after that?

- I Em well straight after the final I was obviously pretty disappointed and gutted about not getting through and within the first sort of 10, 15 minutes I'd spoken to my family – my mum and my sister who had come down to watch and they gave me a lot of input from a spectator's point of view, eh, and then I spoke to my coach on the phone probably about 5, 10 minutes after that and tried to give him a sort of analysis of the race, em, from the point of view of my coach saying, "What else would you have done?", there's not much more I could've done, em, I pretty much accepted the situation that in the first heat I wasn't in the first 2 so there's nothing I could change to get into the final, so it was pretty much just accepting that it had happened and then I just started sort of picking out the positive aspects of the race. I thought, "Right, what went well? Did I do anything different that I haven't tried before and it came off really well?" I had a really fast 400 and I haven't really experienced that situation in a lot of races before so I came out of that really well, em, also there were a lot of high quality athletes that I beat that were more sort of specialist 1500 metres runners so that was a big sort of confidence boost. I think there were about 12 in the heat so I came out of that thinking, "All right, I didn't make it through to the final but there were a lot of other athletes there that I was beating", eh, and also I got a lot of sort of hope for the future 'cause then I thought, "Well next time I'm in a race I know I can be up there with them and sort of hold my own against them. So actually I came out of it more confident than what I was when I went in 'cause before hand I was maybe a bit nervous seeing all these big names and I thought, "Oh well you know, these guys are like specialist runners and I don't know how I'll do against them", but after I came out of it I thought, "Well I didn't get through but neither did 10 other guys in the race", so actually I took quite a lot of positives from it.
- J Ok and how long did it take you for you to feel those positives? Obviously you've explained that for the first 10 minutes you felt gutted, how long did it take before you started to see it as more of a challenge?
- I Oh em, well within maybe 20 minutes, something like that – once I'd actually sat down and sort of looked back on the race and spoken to my coach I tried to readjust my goals for the season, so some of my training and racing changed, eh, I changed who I trained with and picking up new races or not being able to qualify for other races, eh, so within a very short space of time. The feelings of disappointment lasted I would say only 5 or 10 minutes, not anything more than that. Once I actually sat down and started pulling positive aspects from the race I started to get a lot of more positive feelings and a lot more confidence from the race
- J And you mentioned that you readjusted your goals, how did you go about that?
- I Well the AAAs final was one of the major targets of the season. The opportunity was going to be the high quality race with a lot of other sort of good 1500 metres runners and it was an opportunity to sort of gain a lot of respect from other athletes and I suppose you could think of yourself as a better athlete for having reached the AAAs final, em, so I haven't done that so it's like, "Well I'm going to have to run some faster times in other races so

we'll see what BMEs there are, are there going to be opportunities racing abroad?" So it's really just trying to move the goals to find another fast race or some more sort of high quality races just to kind of try and keep my name in the frame as a 1500 runner

J And initially obviously you explained that you felt feelings of disappointment and shock. How did those feelings change as time went by?

I Em, I think I started to feel a lot more confident. The initial disappointment passes quite quickly and then I thought, "Well, I've got to go out and run a fast time", so I pretty much forgot about the bad parts of that race and think, "Right, how do I get into a high quality race where I can get a really fast time or have a really fast race?" And it's pretty much just constantly looking at the future, eh, I even do that when I have really good races, I think, "Yeah, I've had a really great race but that's in the past", you know it's always about what's the next race and the next goal. So I tend to do that after good races as well, so just sort of readjust my goals and think, "Right what can I do now that I haven't done before?"

J Ok and you mentioned that you were training with some really good guys after the AAAs, did you actually increase your effort in training?

I Yeah I was actually training with John Mayock and Rob Watkinson and Sam Ellis. John Mayock's been about for sort of 3 or 4 Olympic Games so it was a sort of a kick up the pants to sort of say, "This is the level that you need to be at", and especially because John was in my heat in the AAAs so I was getting a lot more confidence with him in training, like I was starting to push him a lot more and I was starting to like not give him any space on the track.. I was always sort of right on his shoulders and right on his heels and yeah so it gives you a lot more sort of motivation as well. I had a lot more motivation to train and to go into the other races

J And out of all the coping strategies that you've described, was there any strategy that was particularly good or that was useless, or was it just overall quite good, or...?

I I found it useful sort of speaking to my family and my coach because they can see the race from a sort of spectator's point of view, whereas when I'm in a race if someone maybe comes in front of me I can't see what's happening behind me and they can look at me and say, "Yeah you were running great here but there were loads of guys sitting on you here waiting to kick past you", or "Yeah that was great but you should've gone earlier", 'cause they can usually take split times and that so I think they've got a lot more information than what I do so I sit down and have a bit of a chat with them and they can sort of give me a lot more feedback than what I picked up on during the race, so I tend to find that that's probably the best one, and there have been times when I've come off races and I've thought, "Oh that was absolutely shocking" and they've said, "No that was actually really good", or if I've come off some races and thought, "That was great", they might be like, "That was crap, that was rubbish", so I find that there opinions are sort of honest and valid. They

won't tell me I'm running well if I'm not...so I find that their opinions are quite honest and extremely useful as a coping strategy

J And did you feel that as time went on and the situation became more of a challenge, did it become more controllable would you say?

I Yeah, from the point of view that I knew what I needed to do – the guys that beat me, they could run faster over the last 400 than I could, even though I ran a very quick fast lap it wasn't quick enough to beat the guys that I needed to so the challenge was, "Well you've got to start doing your training so that you could beat them in a race", eh, and it was quite an advantage training with John Mayock and to literally have a target and know where I needed to be. So every time I was on the track I was thinking, "Right, I need to be running in his place, not 5 yards behind him."

J So would it be fair to say that initially you saw it as a bit of a loss but then it turned into a bit of a challenge?

I Yeah it was a loss for the first 5, 10 minutes and then as time went by it was like a challenge and then within half an hour an hour all the sort of negative feelings had gone and it was just all a lot of positives that were coming out of it, so yeah it basically kicked off a sort of challenge, trying hard to almost compensate for not being in the final

J So you sound like a kind of person who copes quite well, you seem to accept that things have happened and see the positives in situations. Is that how you tend to cope with other stressful situations that you've experienced in athletics would you say?

I Em, yeah, yeah because I tend not to dwell too much on any particular race whether it be good or bad, em, so whatever race I've run it doesn't matter how good or bad, I always try and take some positive aspects from it. Even if it's an absolute disaster of a run there's usually 1 or 2 things that you can pull out from it, so yeah generally I would say I can cope quite well with bad races or poor performances

J Referring back to the questionnaires that you filled in for me, at the start of the season you saw yourself to a moderate extent as an athlete, whereas in the one you've just filled in for me you're seeing yourself sort of less as an athlete. Do you have any ideas of why that might be?

I The main thing that I can think of with that is that at work I'm a lot more busy and I have a lot of other things going on outside of athletics. It's almost like athletics is a less important part of my life because I've got other things to take up my time, as I say work, socializing, going out, em, so yeah with it being the end of the season it's like less of a priority 'cause like I've got no more races to target in the next couple of weeks so the focus tends to drift off athletics and onto other things

- J So in general how satisfied would you say that you are with your performances this season?
- I Em, reasonably satisfied, but training was going really well and I was just demolishing my training times this year to like previous years when I've run faster, em, so the only frustrating thing is that knowing that I'm in great shape but for some reason you know the times haven't come out in the races. I think a lot of that has come down to races being a lot more tactical. You get a lot of races that are like really slow for the first maybe 800 or 1000 metres and then they're really speeding up at the end so the times aren't part of it. I've probably got a lot more range in my racing. I can run races off a really fast start or off a really slow race, I can run them either way just now
- J I'm going to ask you about a different stressful event that you put down on the log sheet. Obviously you talked about the time when you felt that you underperformed last weekend, so could you maybe tell me a bit more about that event please?
- I Well that was the British Miler's Elub Grand Prix Final and it was pretty much the last planned race of the season, eh after that there weren't any more races so I haven't been running that quick times throughout the season so I was looking for like a sort of real fast time at the end of the season to try and get my time right down and although I got like a season's best it wasn't as quick as I'd hoped so I was quite disappointed that I didn't get a quicker time, not getting a PB at the BME race
- J And that's why you found it stressful?
- I Yeah because it was my last chance. In other races in the season if I hadn't run well for whatever reason I had like another 2 or 3 races, whereas at the BME that was it, like once that race was over I couldn't identify any other quality races before the end of the season so that's why it was disappointing – if I didn't run well then I was finishing the season on... 'cause you always want to finish the season on a sort of high note
- J And did you feel any other emotions apart from disappointment?
- I Em, again as soon as I was finished I was disappointed not to have run quicker but then I started taking the positives from it – it was the quickest race of the season so I thought well obviously I'm still running really well and it was a good strong race from a tactical point of view. I was always like right up at the front, I wasn't getting shoved about and blown away all over the place so again I was pretty turned onto the positives within about 5 or 10 minutes and I just tried to pull out as much good stuff out of the race as I could
- J Ok and did you blame anyone for not meeting your goal?
- I Em no, the only person I could blame would be myself, but as I said I knew the training was there, it wasn't a case of it being the training. It was probably

just a bit of the polishing, a bit of the race sharpness that I was lacking, em, so I wouldn't say I blamed anybody at all

J And in that event how controllable did you feel that the stress was?

I Well it was 100% controllable because it was just down to me to run fast. It was a paced race and the conditions were fine, it was like a nice cool night with hardly any breeze so there were no sort of external factors that could've pushed me off course, that was 100% down to myself

J And what about the actual stress that you felt, did you feel that you could control that?

I Yeah, having experienced other races before hand in other seasons and like other races I did what I do to cope with any underperformance

J And did you think about it in a lot of detail afterwards or were you able to switch off from it, or...?

I Yeah I mean again I switched off from the negative side and then just sort of picked out the positives, eh, so there were a lot of positives, like the way I ran the race and the time. When I actually look at it I think, "Well, it's not that bad a race you know, there is good stuff to take out from it", yeah so in a similar way that I cope with any sort of stressful situation that I'm in it's just leave the negative thoughts and pick up on the positives and just keep building them up and get the confidence quite high

J Ok and could you outline for me the coping strategies that you used in relation to that event?

I Well because it was approaching the end of the season, eh, I work and live away from my coach back home so I took the opportunity to go through and do a bit of a training session the next day (the race was held near his home town), eh it was probably the best training session that I've ever run. It was a very hard session and we were doing sets of 600s and I just knocked out the laps *way* faster than I've ever done before, eh, so that was actually a huge bonus at the end of the season knowing that ok, it wasn't there in the races but the training was far, far faster than it's ever been in previous years. It's also a great sort of confidence boost going into the winter season knowing that I'm in the best shape ever going into like a winter period. Loads of positives actually came out of the weekend so although initially it was disappointing, by the time it was Monday morning I was buzzing, like wanting to get in some more races and really well motivated for the winter season.

J So obviously that was an effective coping strategy?

I Oh hugely effective, yeah.

J And is that something that you would use in general?

I Yeah I've used it in the past, like sometimes say if like em, say it was at the AAAs I didn't use a hard training session as a coping strategy there because there wasn't like a track there due to the location. Sometimes you can you know if you have a bad run you can just go and knock out a really hard session but sometimes you can do that and sometimes you can't, but yeah I've found it to be very effective, especially when I know that I'm running well. It's a good confidence booster to say, "Yeah, I know I'm in good shape, the training proves I can do it", so yeah I can take a lot of positives out of it

J Ok, well that's just about all I have to ask you, but before we finish do you think there's anything that we forgot to talk about, or...?

I Em, not that I can think of

J Do you have any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?

I I thought the interview was fine, it was really good

J Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3 - KAYLA

- J First of all I'd like to get some background information from you, so to begin with could you tell me a little bit about yourself like your age and your occupation?
- K I'm 24 and I'm a research associate at Loughborough University
- J And what area is your research in?
- K Health design and construction
- J Let's talk about your athletic participation. What would you say have been your main achievements in athletics so far?
- K Em, probably getting my first Scottish vest, under 23. It was just so awesome to think that I was competing for the country and then I think when I won a British Uni's bronze this year it was pretty special
- J And thinking back to when you were younger, what age was it when you first got involved in athletics?
- K Em I think I was 12 or 13 when I started
- J And how did you get involved?
- K Basically I was along at a summer holidays thing at the Kelvin Hall and we did all the events during the week and em, on the last day they said that we could do whatever we wanted so I wanted to do shot putt 'cause I quite enjoyed it and one of the coaches came over and he was coaching me one to one and he's said, "Oh you're not bad you should come to a club", so basically the next week I dragged my Dad along to Erownpoint and that was that ever since
- J What would you say it was that was motivating you to do athletics at that sort of time?
- K When I was a kid probably just fun, just the social side of it, em, I quite enjoyed the fitness thing and going and meeting all my mates so it was probably more the social side than actually going and doing something, though I did enjoy doing physical activity
- J And thinking back to those first few years when you first got involved in athletics, how big a part of your life would you say it was making up then?
- K Probably quite a big part of my life 'cause I was quite a quiet wee shy person so it was pretty much my life and I remember my Dad saying that I wasn't

allowed to go when I had my exams and I was absolutely gutted and my Mum was like, “Maybe we should just let her go”, ‘cause it was just like all my friends and that was kind of what I did so it was quite a big part of my life but probably again more socially

J So when your Mum and Dad said that you couldn’t go and you said that you felt totally gutted, why do you think that was?

K Just ‘cause I wouldn’t get to see my friends I think. I mean it was just my Dad, my Mum was quite happy for me to go but my Dad couldn’t be bothered taking me I think!

J So do you think you missed out on anything because you were an athlete at that age?

K Em, no, not when I was that age, not until I was about 17, 18

J Right, we’ll come back to that later. And as you got older you obviously made the decision to go to university and get a career. Did athletics have any influence on you decision making?

K Not at the time because I wasn’t at a significantly high level but I enjoyed doing sport and I didn’t really want to do a sport related degree. I wanted to do music but that kind of fell through so I wanted to go to Loughborough because my friend was going to Loughborough and we were just going to go because it would be a laugh. I didn’t even know where Loughborough was. I didn’t know anything about it and in the end I didn’t get in there because of my grades so I ended up at Sunderland doing sports science but that was just because they were the only place that let me in and they had no background in sporting excellence at all

J So the fact that you ended up doing sports science didn’t have anything to do with the fact that you had an athletic background, or...?

K I suppose it did a bit because I really enjoyed sport but when I was deciding it was still more music that was my main thing and then because it had a different way of applying somebody said that I should just have done it through Ucas...I applied for architecture, something else and sports science. It was like totally random choices so it wasn’t really at the front of my mind and then when it was the only option I had I just took it because I didn’t have any other option basically which was a bit stupid, but...

J The next section’s about how big a part in your life athletics is playing just now. Obviously you’ve talked me through what motivated you to do athletics when you were younger, has that changed in any way?

K Still socially it’s become a very large part of my life but I have progressed somewhat from being crap to getting to a certain level where I sort of want to push myself on as well, so I would say I compete against myself and I want to beat my own goals. In competition it’s nice to win things and stuff but I’d

much rather compete against myself so that's why I compete and obviously socially it's a big factor as well

J So it's all really about the achievement side of it and also the social side. Are you quite achievement orientated in other areas of your life or is that something that's just specific to athletics?

K No I'm quite achievement oriented in other aspects of my life

J Just how important would you say that your athletic participation is to you now?

K It's a big part of my life. I think if I was taking it injury wise and I couldn't compete in a certain competition I'd be disappointed but I know I could still go along and be part of the social side so that would keep me going, but if I was taken out of the whole social thing of it and I couldn't actually go anywhere, like if I was in hospital for example and I couldn't leave and I couldn't go to things, that would really crush me I think, whereas if I'd just pulled my hamstring but I could still go along and stuff then that would definitely be ok

J How important is it to you that you have an identity as being an athlete?

K Em, people tend to just associate me with athletics but when I'm working people see me as what I do for my job like as a researcher and stuff and like athletics kind of comes into it because people are always interested in it, but then when I'm playing my trumpet I'm a trumpeter and that's what I want people to see me as 'cause that's what I do and when I'm doing other stuff like...athletics people, I don't know, it always tends to come up in other areas of my life but I think I want people to kind of associate me with what I'm doing at that time first and so I want to be a researcher when I'm working and I want to be like a musician when I'm playing 'cause it's like separate parts of my life and I don't like one thing to overtake a certain part of my life, em, but again people introduce me as, "This is K, she's a hammer thrower."

J So the sense I'm kind of getting is that as far as you're concerned you almost have this kind of compartmentalization of your life where you have little compartments and so whenever you're at work you're a researcher, when you're at training you're an athlete but no one of those areas really overrides the other, whereas other people it would appear to...

K To just see me as an athlete, yeah. Other people see me as an athlete and introduce me as an athlete but many people are very interested in it, whereas...I think music is one of the main areas where it probably doesn't cross over as much 'cause it's such a different kind of area and musicians tend to be not as interested in sport, so that's quite cool 'cause I can just kind of escape and just be a trumpet player

J So is it important to you that other people see you as being an athlete?

- K Em, I like people to know that I do athletics but I'm not really bothered if people...People always find out that I do it though 'cause everyone just tells everybody that's what I do but it's not the be all and end all, I'm quite happy if people just want to think of me as a musician, that's fine
- J Ok, when I asked you about when you were younger if you felt that you missed out on anything and obviously you said that it related more to when you were older. Can you tell me a bit about if you've made any sacrifices or anything?
- K Everything has been a total sacrifice. The first day at university I went down and I arrived on the Saturday and everyone else arrived on the Sunday and I was there on the Saturday because I had to go and meet my new coach at university so everyone else was coming in and unpacking and I was coming back from a training session, em, I didn't go out because we used to train at 10 o'clock on a Saturday and Sunday morning so I never went out on Friday and Saturday nights and even like now is the same, I don't drink like a week before a competition, em, I'll go out but I won't go out late. I can't just do things at the drop of a hat really, I have to kind of plan out things socially, but it's quite good. Obviously I have friends who are athletes who understand but then I've got friends who aren't athletes but then they've known me for so long that they understand what I'm like and they'd never put any pressure on me if I say, "I'll come out but I'm taking my car and I'm going home at half 11", and they're like, "Yeah that's cool, fine", so that's really good, so yeah I have made a lot of sacrifices and there's been occasions where I've thought, "I just really want to go out and jump about mental", but I just know that I can't do that. But again that would happen in any part of my life. If I knew I had a big competition coming up for my music then I'd do the same thing. I wouldn't go out and jeopardize throwing away an opportunity
- J So my next question was apart from athletics what other areas of your life are important to you, but I guess you've kind of told me about that anyway, so it's like your life as a researcher, a musician...
- K Yeah, it's important that I do something that isn't sport related that I can get away with, em, yeah my friends as well that's important
- J And when you're away from an athletics setting, say you're at work or in a situation that really has nothing to do with athletics at all, do you still think of yourself as an athlete, actually I guess you've already explained that – you've said that when you're in a certain setting you'll think of yourself as the sort of role that's involved with that setting
- K Yeah 'cause I'm so focused on what I'm doing that that kind of takes over
- J So generally if you're at work, it's almost like you forget you're an athlete for that period of time – would that be right?
- K Yeah

- J Ok, I'd like to get an idea about how you feel about yourself when you don't meet your goals in athletics. Could you describe that for me please?
- K Em, I set myself personal goals, like realistic goals that I think I can achieve and if I don't achieve them or something goes wrong I never think of it as being a disappointment, it's always just a learning experience. If something's gone wrong then ok, yeah, it might not have gone great, it might not have been a great competition but what have I learned from it? And I can always take something away from every training session and every competition, something that just helps me and then next time I can build on that, em, so you know, if I don't achieve a goal, ok, I haven't done what I wanted to do but I can always take something else away from it. You've just got to always see the positives no matter what the negatives are
- J So failing to meet goals would have no greater impact than...
- K Well obviously it is disappointing and I do get disappointed with myself but I never let myself, or very, very rarely let myself get over awed by the whole, "I didn't win this, I didn't win that." It's very rare that that happens, em, I always think, "Ok, you messed up that but what went right", and I'll think, "Well the second part of my turn was amazing and I know what I need to do now to work it into the third turn", or whatever, but yeah I get disappointed but I don't dwell on it
- J And is that the way you are in the other areas of your life?
- K Totally, yeah
- J And what would you say that aspects of your life are that make you feel good about yourself as a person?
- K Em, I don't know, probably just making sure other people are happy to be honest. It makes me happy when other people are happy and if I can do things to help people out then that makes me happy
- J So you wouldn't be the type of person who places your self-esteem in the athletics side of your life?
- K No
- J So this section is about the stressful experiences for this season that's just finished. You've put down on the log sheet that in mid July you experienced an injury and that was probably one of your more stressful events. Could you just describe that for me?
- K Yeah well through hammer you get a lot of knee injuries and niggles and stuff 'cause of the pressure and I'd started to get pain in a different place from where I usually get it, em, and it was round my knee caps and then I started getting it round my other knee cap as well and I got really worried about it 'cause I didn't know what it was. I knew it wasn't tendonitis which is what I

usually get 'cause it was in a completely different place and a completely different pain, em, and it was really painful. I couldn't figure out what was going on and walking was quite bad as well and I couldn't get to the physio for ages 'cause there were no appointments so I didn't know what to do training wise 'cause I didn't know if what I was going to be doing would be affecting it so it was quite sort of stressful until I got it sorted

J What do you think it was particularly about the event that made it stressful for you?

K Just not knowing exactly what was wrong 'cause I've known hammer throwers who've had similar kinds of symptoms and ending up having to go and get surgery for it and I was just panicking that that was the season over and that I was going to have to get surgery on it

J And is that why you put down on the log sheet that you saw it as a sort of threat/loss?

K Yeah 'cause it could've been like basically the end of the season

J And did you feel that the event endangered any goals that you were working towards?

K Em, yeah because it was just before, like we still had the UK Leagues to go and obviously they were good competitions and I wanted to throw well in them.

J And can you describe what sorts of emotions you experienced when you were first faced with the situation?

K Em, I was probably a bit gutted actually 'cause I was thinking that I wasn't going to be able to carry out the rest of the season and there were still some good competitions left so probably just a bit disappointed more than anything really

J And who or what did you blame?

K Em, I didn't really blame anything, it's just part of the job really. Injury just comes along and you just accept it. It obviously wasn't anything that I'd done wrong, it must've been a slow build up thing 'cause at the start it wasn't a kind of initial pain that just came on so I just took it as part and parcel of the event so I didn't blame anything really

J And how much of your time was spent thinking about it?

K Only when like I don't know, I stood up and it suddenly hurt. I thought, "Ouch that hurt", but I wouldn't sit and obsess about it, I'd just get on with my life to be honest. I'd just go into the gym and do stuff where it didn't hurt, like upper body stuff, but no I didn't think about it much. I mean obviously I'd say

to people who said, “How’s your knee?”, I’d talk about it then. I’d say, “Oh it’s still sore”, or whatever

J So when you were away from the athletic environment you really weren’t aware of it?

K Unless it hurt me, no, I didn’t think about it at all

J And did it have any impact on your sort of sense of self-worth?

K Em, not really no

J Did it affect the way that you saw yourself as an athlete?

K No because I was still me, just because I was injured and couldn’t quite do what I’d been doing for the last couple of weeks, no

J And you put down on the log sheet that you saw it as a threat/loss but also that there was a bit of a challenge as well. Can you explain that for me?

K Well after I finally got to see a physio and they were saying what it was that was causing it was more a sort of problem to do with my quads being too tight so I had a lot of exercises to do to loosen in off, and once I knew what it was it was just a case of getting on with it and getting sorted and getting back out there so I was quite happy to find out it actually wasn’t anything serious...after that I just continued my exercises and didn’t really think about it, but yeah it was just the challenge of how fast I could get back up to where I was before so I didn’t lose any more time with it really

J So would it be fair to say just to summarise it that initially you saw it as a threat and pretty uncontrollable but a lot of that was due to the fact that you didn’t know what was going on and then when you found out from the physio what the root of the problem was you were able to see it as obviously more controllable and more of a challenge?

K Yep, yeah

J So now I’d like to get an idea of how you coped with this stressful event, so do you think you could maybe talk me through what coping strategies you used? I know you’ve already noted some down on the log sheet but if you maybe just elaborate for me?

K Em, well when it first kind of happened as I say it was a kind of slow build up injury so it was like niggles and niggles that just got worse and worse and worse until I got to the stage where I was like, “Right, I need to do something and go and see a physio”, em, so the first thing was, “How can I sort this problem?” I couldn’t get a physio appointment for a while so then I was thinking, “I can still walk and everything so what other training can I do that’s still going to help me with my throwing?” So mainly it was a lot more core stuff and weights and that kind of thing and not quite as much throwing ‘cause

that was obviously what was affecting it the most, em, probably like I think I talked to people about it, you know just kind of not making a big thing about it but people would say, "How's your knee?" and it just kind of gets it out of your system and stuff and things and then people sort of support you and then I went to the physio and I found out what was wrong with it and it wasn't anywhere near as serious as I thought it was so that was really good so I was like, "Right, now I know what to do." I had to go and do a different stretching programme so basically I went and did that, went back to the physio and got reassessed and he was like, "Yeah, that's coming along nicely, just keep with it", so then it was a case of doing stretching as much as he said so that I could get back to where I was before and not lose anymore time

J So how much time was there between seeing it as a threat and it becoming more of a challenge would you say?

K Just the time until I got to see the physio 'cause as I say it was a different kind of injury so I was honestly in the dark, I didn't have a clue what it was. It could've been serious and it might not have been serious so that whole period when I just didn't know it was definitely a threat

J And out of those coping strategies which ones were more effective would you say?

K Just, I don't know, I just always think positive about things, like you need to just do your rehab and you'll be fine. I mean you just understand that perhaps your training wasn't quite right, you hadn't quite hit the nail on the head with what you were doing and had to alter it ever so slightly, you just learn something from it but I don't know, just trying to stay positive and thinking, "Ok, it's not a major thing. It's going to be ok and you know how to prevent it in the future", that kind of thing

J Would you say that your involvement with athletics changed in any way as the situation unfolded with your injury?

K Em, not really 'cause I mean I was still in the gym. Because I wasn't throwing that was a bit of a pain because just with the time that it was in the season I needed to be out there doing more throwing than anything else, em, but apart from not really going down to the track, that was the only thing that really changed 'cause I couldn't throw

J Do you think that your response to this injury would've been any different if you'd experienced it at a different time in your athletic career?

K If I experienced it during winter training I wouldn't really have given two thoughts about it. I would just have gone to the physio. I mean obviously if I'd seen the physio quicker it wouldn't have been as much of a threat because I would know that it wasn't as serious as I thought it may have been, but if it happened sort of out of season I wouldn't have been quite as worried about it as I was because I would still have had the time to get back up and if I'm not

throwing during off season it's not quite as disastrous as it would've been when it happened because obviously it was right in a big patch of competition

J And you said that you felt pleased to find out that it wasn't a serious injury. Having talked through how you interpreted the situation and coped with it, how do you think those things would have been different had it been a serious injury – how do you think your view of the whole thing would've been different?

K I think I probably would've been a lot more upset about not being able to complete the season. I mean obviously I would've been disappointed not being able to go and do the remaining competitions I had and stuff, em...

J Do you think your coping would've been any different?

K Yeah I would just have seen it as...I wouldn't have been, you know obviously apart from being disappointed I would just have thought, "Well these things happen, that's just the nature of the sport", and I just would've taken it and gone with it and done whatever I had to do to get over it and get back so, yeah, apart from being obviously more upset and disappointed about it, no once I knew what it was and what I had to do then I would've just got on with it and done it, just accepted it 'cause there's nothing that you can do about it

J And how do you think you'd react to it with you were faced with it now? Would it be any different in any way, or...?

K No I think it would be the same, I would just have done exactly the same probably

J Going back to the questionnaire that you filled out for me, which measures how strongly you identify with the role of being an athlete, it has remained pretty consistent. Obviously I have a measurement from you at the start of the season and end and it's gone down by a couple of points. Do you think there's any significance in that or...?

K Em, maybe because it's the end of the season and I've had a bit of a break and a bit of a holiday and stuff and I've experienced normal life and I'm not quite as focused. My life's a bit more relaxing because I don't have the, not the stress of competition, but you don't have the whole planning and preparation bla, bla, bla, so you can be a bit more laid back, you can go and do what you want to do and move your training about but that's probably why yeah, just 'cause it's the end of the season

J And overall how satisfied would you say you are with your performance this season?

K Not very because this season's been a funny season for me because em, I've changed my technique, I've gone onto full turns so it was more of a transitional season and at the beginning of the season we thought, "50 metres will come", and then it didn't and in training suddenly it just clicked but it was

right at the end of the season and then I basically ran out of competitions, em, but now that I know it wasn't just a fluke one off and that I can do it in training then I'm really looking forward to next season 'cause I think, "Ok this season I didn't quite hit what I wanted to hit in competitions but next year I'm going to be fitter and have a year's experience with a new technique under my belt already and I'm just going to come out next year and absolutely whoop everybody!"

J Would you say that your image of yourself as an athlete has changed in any way as a result of your experiences this season?

K Em, I think this is the first time I've actually had a glimmer of self belief in myself as an athlete and actually seen myself as being somebody who could really be up there 'cause somebody has told me that I have that potential and now that I've actually thrown the distances that I've been throwing in training I'm starting to believe it and that's the first time that's happened...and that's probably changed. I don't know if that would change what I feel like, probably not, I'd probably just be exactly the same you know, as in how I cope with things, but now I've just got that belief and it's a bit more kind of good

J Right, I'm just going to go through another stressful event you experienced this season so going back to your log sheet it was in August when you were at a competition, can you explain what happened for me please?

K Right basically it was a pretty big competition. It was a UK League and I was really, really up for it and in the car I was like totally hyper and bouncing off the walls and I just knew it was going to be a good day. I got there and in my warm-up throws I felt really relaxed. I was keeping my head up, I had my spot brilliantly and all my technical stuff felt good. The competition started and my first round throw was solid. It wasn't great, but you tend to be a wee bit shaky in the first one anyway, so I was quite happy with it, it was definitely a positive throw to get in. The second round I improved more than that and I felt really good and then in the third round I just had a really fantastic throw. There were a couple of wee technical bits wrong but the distance was pretty close to my Pb so I was quite pleased with that, em, and I just felt awesome and I knew it was going to be my day and it was all going to come together, but em, unfortunately I didn't make the cut into the next round so I only got 3 throws and I didn't get in the top 8. I was 9th and I was just absolutely gutted afterwards because I think I had so much energy inside me and so much stuff built up because I knew that everything was going to well and then suddenly....I suppose it wasn't beyond my control but the opportunity was taken away from me, em, ok, technically it was my fault because I didn't throw far enough to go through but because that was taken away from me everything just all came out and I was just totally gutted and inconsolable about it

J And what had been your goal at that event?

K To get a Pb

- J And how important was it to you that you achieved that?
- K That day it was very important because I knew I could do it and I knew inside that there was no doubt that it was definitely going to happen, I just knew it
- J You put down on the log sheet that at that time that there was a sense of loss, can you describe what other sorts of emotions you felt at that time?
- K I was just really annoyed with myself that I hadn't considered the fact that I might not get through to the next round. Because I'd been drawn into this kind of false insecurity because in the last UK League I did I got through to the final with an absolutely atrocious throw all the big girls hadn't bothered to turn up so I was annoyed with myself for not considering that this time they might all actually turn up and I might be really pushed to get into the final because I'd just automatically assumed that I was going to get through and had I actually thought about it for like 3 seconds and thought, "Wait a minute, you're up against the top throwers in Britain, be realistic", then I would've thought, "You've only got 3 throws to do and then that would have affected my whole outlook for the competition, but I was probably more pissed off with myself than anything because there was just one thing that I'd done wrong and it was just really annoying, but I was just gutted
- J So obviously you blamed yourself
- K Yeah, totally
- J And how much of your time was spent thinking about it afterwards?
- K Em, afterwards I left the competition area which I don't ever do and I was in tears and people were trying to like cheer me up and stuff and I was just angry and upset and I went and flung stuff about all over the place which I don't really do a lot and then I just went and sat by myself which I needed to do to just sit and think through it and yeah I was angry with myself but then I reasoned with myself thinking, "Well you know, it's just one of those things", and I calmed down and after about I don't know, 10 or 15 minutes I just thought, "Well you know now what you can take from this experience, you know the kind of arousal level you have to be at to be able to perform at the right level and you know what state of mind you need to be in and you know exactly how you felt and if you can get that feeling again then it's going to be a good day", you know I was just trying to think of how I'd gone through that whole process in the morning, like what it was I did that mentally put me in that position, so once I thought about it and realised that ok, I'd made a bit of a mess up of it and it just wasn't going to happen I just thought, "Oh well, I'll just have to do it next week!" (laughs). About 10, 15 minutes later I was apologizing to everybody for being upset and acting like a total big woose girl! And then I went and did the discus and had a total laugh!
- J So basically it was the whole idea of it being negative but you were able to turn it around to be positive

- K Yeah I mean initially I was absolutely fuming with myself, absolutely fuming which I don't really do that much but after I had time to like get all the emotions out and obviously the crying was a big part and I just burst with emotion and it all came out and when I had time to calm down and stop swearing at myself in my head then when I actually thought about it I thought, you know, "These things happen, it's just one of these things, what can you take from it? Move onto the next thing." Now I know I can do it I just need to do it basically.
- J And did it affect your sense of self-worth?
- K I think I was probably just a bit disappointed thinking that it was a bit of a wasted opportunity
- J Ok so the next questions are about how you coped with the event and you've already actually detailed that, you've got the fact that you cried, obviously that was letting your emotions out, you started throwing things around so again that was letting your emotions out, you tried to reason with yourself, again you tried to be more positive about it and to see it really as a learning experience. Is there anything else that you'd add in there that you did at all?
- K Em, I probably just tried to forget about the whole sort of feeling bad about it and just tried to you know, not dwell on it and think, "Oh if I'd done this, this would've been different." I just didn't, not that I didn't think about it, but I didn't want to think about it in a negative light and continue to blame myself for something which once it was over with was in the past and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it so that's probably the only thing – I didn't really think about it negatively as a wasted opportunity or something like that, it's just something that's happened
- J With the previous stressful event you talked about how you spoke to other people, did you use that coping strategy this time as well?
- K Yeah, well I think quite a lot of people knew that I was quite upset about it so they didn't really talk to me about it, like they didn't really initiate the whole, "How did you do?", 'cause they'd never seen me act like this before so they were quite scared of me but em, I think I talked to a load of hammer people who understood or the field eventers who understood what it was like not to make the cut and I sort of explained what happened and they just sort of sympathized with me really 'cause I think pretty much everybody's been through it at some stage and people were just really helpful and supportive
- J And would you say that there were any of those coping strategies that were more successful than others or...?
- K Em, just basically turning negatives into positives, I always, always do that no matter where it is in my life. I always take a negative and turn it into a positive because it's the only way really that I can like live with things. I've had so many things happen to me that have been negatives that if I did that I'd

just be a complete wreck in the corner, just kneeling gibbering to myself, so I always try not to think about the things that have happened and have gone wrong and always try and take something good from anything really. If you think of negatives all the time it just pulls you down and I think your performance suffers because even if you're not the best in the World and you do have a positive outlook, like even if I'm up against Lorraine Shaw who's the British number 1 and I know there's no way in hell I'm going to be able to compete with her, all I need to do is think, "I know my entry sling is better than her's", and it just has to be one tiny wee thing and I know that I'm better than her at something and that's all it needs to take me. I just need one wee positive thing and once you start thinking one positive thing you start thinking more positively about other things and it's like a domino effect, once you start thinking one thing it clicks over onto another thing and then it just brings your whole level up and it's just amazing how I've learned, obviously I've spoken to a sport psychologist about it and she was saying that you've got to be positive and it just starts with one thing and it's so true

J Going back to the other coping strategy that you mentioned – reasoning with yourself – what did you do to reason with yourself?

K I just talked to myself, I actually talk to myself in my head and say, "Right, once you've calmed down what went wrong? Why did you go wrong? What could you have done? Right, ok so you did this fair enough, what can you do next time to mean that it's not going to happen again?" It's all self-talk, not necessarily out loud

J Earlier on in the interview we talked about this idea of you compartmentalizing your life, so when you're in one area of your life you're not really thinking about the others. Do you think that that kind of behaviour could have any impact on how you deal with stressful events in athletics?

K Em, yeah because if something bad happens in athletics it doesn't flow over into any other part of my life because it's a completely different area of my life and I know a lot of the skills obviously transfer over but you know, I'm not going to sit and dwell on something that's happened. If something goes bad at work then that's work and if I do athletics or I go out with my mates or play the trumpet and that's a total escape, and then next time I'm back in work I'm back on the problem or whatever, or maybe if I've got a bit of free time I'll think about it but I don't let it, or I try not to let it interfere, and if something goes wrong in athletics then I'll try not to let it interfere with work stuff 'cause it's just a total different area of my life and em, it just makes things a lot simpler because then you're not just overloaded with stuff in your head and always thinking about it. I think I'd go absolutely nuts if that happened 'cause I do so much stuff and if I let that happen I mean seriously, I wouldn't be able to cope 'cause I'd just constantly be going, "Aaaagh!" You've got to be able just to tell one part of your head to shut off and focus on whatever it is that you're doing at that moment.

J Well I think we've come to the end of the interview, that's just about all I've got to ask you. Before we finish do you think there's anything that we failed to discuss or that you'd like to add?

K Em, no

J Any comments or suggestions about the interview process itself?

K Not it was absolutely fine

J Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3 – JAMIE

- J Obviously I've interviewed you before so I've got some background information on you. Since the last interview can you update me on your age and whether your occupation has changed?
- G Well I'm 28 years old now so I've got a wee bit older, eh, and I'm still working for Scotrail but climbing the ladder a little bit within the company but currently undertaking a lot of training courses
- J And I've obviously got an idea of what your achievements in athletics have been. Could you just summarize them for me again and let me know if you've made any further achievements since the last time I interviewed you?
- G Right well my achievements have been a long time ago, eh, they started as a school boy when I represented Scotland in the European Schools' Championships, eh, where I'd also won a bronze medal. I've won a gold medal at British Schools' Championships. I've represented Scotland at most age groups, eh, I was second in the New Year Sprint and I've qualified for the Commonwealth Games a few years ago now and also I've made the All Time Lists as well which is no mean feat in the 100 metres sprint. Since the last 4 or 5 years it's been an uphill struggle mainly as I say 4 or 5 years now when I did change jobs it entailed a lot of shift working and a lot of short notice on-call work which has really curtailed any chances of putting decent quality training in so really since the last 4 years I haven't been able to get any consistency to my training and also consistency to my racing so I'm afraid I'm a wee bit lacking on achievements in the last few years
- J The last time I interviewed you I had caught you at a time when you had increased your commitment to athletics and the importance of athletics had increased and you talked about how at that time you were working towards meeting some goals. How have things progressed since then?
- G Well immediately after that interview things progressed quite well for a short period of time but then obviously work commitments started to jump on my back again and pulled me down so eh, there was a period of about 3 or 4 months after Christmas when training was just awful and as I say that was mainly due to work load really and then after that I tried to come back into the coming season with a short period of training behind me and it was arguably successful
- J Ok and the last time when I asked you what it was that motivated you to do athletics you talked about the goals you wanted to work towards but your main focus was really on the social aspects provided by athletics. Has that changed in any way?

- G Well, eh, again one of the factors coming into play is the amount of time that I have to spend away at work so obviously the social aspects of athletics are there for the taking you know, and there are a lot of nice interesting people that I'd like to actually socialize with but again when I've got early shifts and late shifts I've not always got the time to spend as much time with them as I'd like to but still I very much enjoy going away for weekends. I enjoy going to races so in that aspect the social aspect is still very important. I get lots of enjoyment in going to hotels and eating lots of good food [laughs]
- J And what about the goals that you had been working towards – that sort of achievement aspect – has that changed in any way?
- G Eh, obviously everything has been liable to a bit of ongoing change, eh, due to a few factors like picking up a few injuries again and eh, again work commitments so the goals have had to change a bit along the way
- J So is the fact that you want to meet goals still partly motivating you or...?
- G Oh yeah I've got a few of my own personal goals that I'd like to achieve
- J So what's the main thing that's motivating you to do athletics then? Is it social or...?
- G It's a bit of everything really, a bit of everything
- J And how important would you say that your athletic participation is to you?
- G Eh, it's fairly important but as I say it's not exactly critical. If I couldn't run tomorrow I wouldn't exactly, ok it would be upsetting for a while but not as bad as it would be for a great number of athletes that I know
- J What about in relation to the other areas of your life?
- G Well, eh, it's not as important as work and my relationship and other aspects in my life but it's still hanging around in the background you know. If you invest a bit of time into something you still want to do reasonably well at it, you know you would be upset if things weren't going well but I feel more passionate about other areas of my life that athletics isn't all that important in the whole scope of things
- J And is it important to you in any way that other people recognize your athleticism?
- G Well it's nice that other people see you as being fast or whatever and it's always good to get praise off of other people but it's not something that I particularly strive to gain recognition from other athletes you know, I'm more doing it for my own personal goals and achievements
- J Ok and how big a part of your identity would you say that being an athlete makes up?

- G Eh, quite a small proportion actually. Obviously when I'm at the track I perceive myself to be more of an athlete but when I'm away from the track I don't really think of myself as an athlete as much, not in home life, certainly not at work, eh, ok I talk about it to people but I never refer to myself as being an athlete to anyone now
- J So would you be able to give me a sort of clearer idea of how big a part of your life it makes up, like for example a percentage?
- G Well probably athletics would fall somewhere between sort of 25 and 30% I would imagine but obviously if I did have more time, obviously it's restricted the time that I give to athletics but if I did have more time I would be putting a bit more emphasis on athletics. Having said that I would always strive to maintain a balanced lifestyle, you know keep it in proportion with other things in my life as well
- J That was a strong theme that came out in your previous interview, this idea that you don't like to throw all your eggs in the one basket. What do you think if anything has shaped that attitude?
- G Eh, for me it's definitely previous experience where I've ended up doing that in the past and eh, it's all blown up in my face. I've realized from past experiences and things going wrong and when things go wrong it's a dangerous thing to be just so focused on just one particular subject or activity
- J And that was your incident with the commonwealth Games wasn't it when you got injured?
- G That's right yep
- J Ok, and just how balanced would you say that your lifestyle is just now then?
- G Pretty balanced yeah. I'm juggling a lot of things about in the time that I've got. My time management has to be quite good. It's pretty good
- J And you've already touched on this. Apart from athletics what other areas of your life are important to you?
- G Well eh, obviously work is very important, my relationship, also study to achieve various qualifications done through work as well that I've got to do in my own time so it's really fitting in all these things as much as I possibly can and then obviously time to relax as well...and holidays!
- J And you mentioned earlier that when you were at the track you would see yourself as being more of an athlete than when you were at work. To what extent do you consider yourself an athlete when you're away from the athletic setting?

- G When I'm away from the athletics setting it's something that isn't really discussed that much, especially at work. Not a lot of people at work actually know what I do in my spare time activities, eh, some people do but it's something that's not really discussed that much. I certainly don't think of myself as an athlete when I'm away from work, nor do I really in social time so really when I'm away from the track I don't really see myself as an athlete at all, sometimes I suppose but it depends, depends who I'm talking to or the situation that I'm in at that time
- J That was one of the findings from a previous study that some athletes had almost developed that kind of way of thinking as possibly a coping strategy where they would switch off from their athletic life when they went into other areas of their lives and I like to think of that as compartmentalization, where you have all the little compartments in your life and not one of those compartments crosses over into the other. Is that something that you can relate to?
- G Yeah exactly that, that's pretty spot on actually yeah. I'd say that actually describes my situation pretty well. Again as I previously described that when I'm away from the track I am away from the track and unless I'm communicating with someone over the phone and it's about athletics or a fellow athlete or whatever, there's very few times that I'm away from that that I would contemplate athletics you know, especially not with my diet [laughs]
- J Ok, I'd like now to get an idea of what sacrifices you've made to allow you to participate in athletics
- G Sacrifices, eh, probably the biggest thing is free time. Because of the amount of things that I'm juggling about now I have less free time than what I use to have but that's no bad thing and I enjoy it. The more things you put into life the bigger the rewards, the more things I'll get back from it so I don't mind sacrificing free time. I would like to put maybe a wee bit more time into studying time and also work time as well but obviously everything takes its place and you have to proportion your time accordingly
- J Are there any other sacrifices that you make?
- G Eh, perhaps as I say social aspects, but again that's a lifestyle thing really where ok it's handy that I do athletics and I don't go out and get drunk at the weekend but on the same foot I'm also too busy to want to go out and get drunk and also you save the money as well!
- J I'd like to get an idea now of how you feel about yourself when you don't meet your goals in athletics. Obviously I do have an idea from the previous interview and we'll cover this later but just as a general rule of thumb could you describe that for me?
- G Well obviously if you've invested any time or part of yourself into something no matter what it would be, whether it would be athletics or anything, yeah I will be particularly disappointed but always looking to see where I've gone

wrong and try and remedy it you know, so with athletics I suppose it would initially get me down a bit but you grow stronger from your failures and weaknesses

J And how would you say that failing to meet goals in athletics compares with failing to meet goals in other areas of your life, like at work or your relationship or whatever else?

G Well ok it would be bad yeah but in relation to other things if there were severe failings in other areas of my life I would definitely lose more sleep over that more than I would if I ran a dodgy race or didn't have a good training session or had a bit of a niggling injury or something

J Ok. This section is about the stressful experiences that you encountered this season and I've got some detail on your log sheet here. One of the events was an injury. What I'd like to do is get a picture in my mind of what happened so could you describe that for me please?

G Eh well basically because I'd missed so much training in the early part of the year, the conditioning training phase I then tried to rush things a bit too much and come back in too quick too soon without having the proper build up and I started doing all the high intensity training. Obviously my muscles weren't used to any great intensity of running and therefore my muscles started to give way and I actually ended up injuring my groin muscle quite severely in the lead up to the Scottish Ehampionships which was obviously one of my main sort of goals. I'd sort of picked that I had an 8 or 9 week period that I thought, "Well I'll aim for the Scottish Ehampionships. I'll get a few races in beforehand and I should be running reasonably well, I'll sharpen up nicely for them." Unfortunately a sort of series of injuries held my plans back a wee but so it wasn't the best thing to encounter half way through the season

J Ok and obviously you had this target at the Scottish Ehampionships. How important was it to you that did well at them?

G Eh obviously I'd put in a bit of training and I did want to get returns from it you know, so I certainly wanted to run well. I definitely wanted to make the final and get well in among the top competitors in Scotland just now so yeah it was important to come out and you know, show a bit of face

J And what exactly was it about the injury that made it stressful for you would you say?

G Eh, the biggest thing about the injury being stressful would have to be that it happened at the wrong time, at a sort of critical time when I needed to really practice block work and really get the speed sessions in so it just happened at exactly the wrong time so that was the worst thing

J What did you feel was at stake with the injury?

G My preparation, my preparation for the Scottish Ehampionships

- J And you put down on the log sheet that you saw it to be a sort of threat/loss, Can you describe why that was?
- G Eh, well it obviously threatened my ability to do well in the Ehampionships. Obviously without the preparation I wasn't going to run very well, especially with losing so much training in the Jnuary to April period so really time was a precious commodity and I didn't have a lot of it to get myself ready so it was going to threaten how well I could actually perform and obviously as I said I wanted to show face and beat all these young 18, 19 up and coming athletes you know? So it was also important that from the previous year the people who had beaten me then didn't beat me again this year so obviously that played a big part in it
- J So it was I suppose threatening that the same thing might happen again?
- G That's right yeah
- J Ok can you describe for me how you felt when you were first faced with the situation?
- G Eh, quite annoyed. Initially I just tried to train through it and I think that was the main trouble. It was a tiny wee twinge and then I went away from training, came back again and tried to do another high intensity session on it and just realized, "No, I am injured. Lay off it, take it easy." I was a bit pissed off you know, it was a bit annoying, obviously 'cause I'd missed so much preparation work early on in the year I was not exactly too chuffed with myself to put it mildly
- J So was it yourself that you blamed?
- G Yeah, it was my own fault for not getting the training in but on the other side of the coin there was also the fact that my work played such a big role in me missing so much so I suppose from time to time when I did feel the wee twinge here and there when I was walking around I did feel like, "Damn work", you know, and resentment towards having to do all these hours and stuff you know, so yeah, between myself and a bit of work really
- J And how much of your time was spent thinking about it after you had sustained the injury?
- G Well not a lot, it was really only when I was going in certain movements, moving my leg and moving my hips in certain movements then I would feel it and I would think, "Oh damn, it's not clearing up", so that's the only time that it really sprung to mind
- J And what kind of thoughts did you have when that happened?

- G “Is it not repaired yet? Can I not go and run tonight?”, you know, just again annoyed and a wee bit concerned as in how long it was going to take to repair itself
- J And when you were away from the athletic environment were you thinking about it?
- G Really as I say because of work and my busy lifestyle I didn’t really have a great lot of chance to think about it too much and again just really when it gave me a wee twinge, just when it was hurting me. Again it was just this idea that I was blaming myself for my own stupid mistakes and stuff, eh, and also really how I was going to get to the bottom of the problem, how I was going to sort it out in time to show face at these Scottish Ehampsionships
- J And how did you feel about yourself in general after sustaining the injury?
- G Eh, about myself in general? Probably not a great lot different really
- J Did it affect how you saw yourself as an athlete in any way?
- G Not really
- J To what extent was your sense of who you are connected with your athletic participation at the time?
- G Eh, well I didn’t really see myself as that much of an athlete before the event anyway, eh, mainly because of the amount of training I had missed so my expectations weren’t particularly high so I wasn’t really perceiving myself as going out and doing anything spectacular at the Ehampsionships. I suppose I was the dark horse in the corner, the one who was going to come from behind and maybe surprise a few people at the Ehampsionships
- J In this section I’d like to get a good picture with how you coped with the injury. I already have some information in your log sheet but do you think you could just talk me through in order the coping strategies that you used as soon as you found out that you were injured?
- G Right, eh I suppose the series of events that happened that day when I sustained that injury, eh, well at first I realized that it was injured and I could be in a spot of trouble. I was obviously quite frustrated at that time. Really my first reaction to that was just to sort of calm myself down a wee bit, go a wee walk round the track, eh, I was training out at Motherwell at that time and there was a group of other athletes round there training at the track at that time so basically I went a wee walk round the track with the intention of going and speaking to some of the other athletes, eh, to try and cool of a wee bit, maybe confide in them a wee bit you know, or tell them what’s happened, eh, then really a short period of time after that I was also driving home. I got into the car and it was sore in the car. I was trying to actually stretch it off a bit. I was constantly trying to stretch it off and when we got back in the car I was on my way back from Motherwell with my girlfriend and in the car I basically told

her that I was injured and that it had come at the worst possible time really, so I confided in my girlfriend as much as I possibly could and from that stage on I accepted that I was potentially not going to be able to run in the Scottish Championships and potentially not be able to train for a period of time, eh, when we got back home the first thing that I ended up doing was icing the injury and then getting down to the nitty gritty of thinking of a way that I could possibly heal this injury up as quickly as possible so obviously I could get back to training, obviously not participate in training at the same intensity until the groin had repaired itself, so then I set out in doing other exercises and another wee training programme really involving some circuits that didn't involve using it as much and then I'd set myself a little timescale as well that if it hadn't got any better after 4 or 5 days I was going to go and see a physio but if it wasn't that serious I didn't want to just go and throw money away on the off-chance that they might be able to help it, so I thought, "I'll let it settle down first and then see what happens", so after that I think I tried to do as much as possible really to take my mind off it or spend more time doing other things really

- J So when you say you were spending more time doing other thing was that to take your mind off it or was it...
- G Well really it was because I had the extra time because I wasn't training and I had more opportunity to do other things
- J Was it still on your mind at that point?
- G Hmm, really by that time it had sort of dissipated, I was no longer really thinking about it. I'd accepted that I was going to be out for a period of time and then I just got on with it from then on
- J Ok, was there anything else you did at all?
- G Eh, I suppose take sort of mental notes and think, "Well ok, I'll learn from this experience, you know it's obviously a mistake so where can I go from here? What have I done wrong, and in the future to try and not let it happen again"
- J Ok, so you've obviously given me quite a detailed picture of the coping strategies that you used. Going back again to when you first discovered the injury, how long would you say it took for the negative emotions to subside?
- G Eh, really I suppose about 20 minutes or so. That was obviously the period of time up until I could confide in my girlfriend at that time
- J And was that something that helped you get rid of the negative emotions?
- G It was a problem shared you know, a problem's halved. It's always good to see that someone else has got your interests at heart as well
- J So would it be fair to say that from that point it became more positive?

- G Well yeah, basically as I say after that period it was like, “Ok, fair enough. I’m injured now, let’s accept it and get on with it”, so from that point onwards things were going to take a bit more of a sort of positive light and there was no point in looking backwards, the damage was done so let’s move onwards and forwards
- J And how effective would you say that your coping was?
- G Eh, I would say pretty good.
- J With hindsight do you think there’s anything that you could’ve done that would’ve made it even more effective?
- G I don’t think so, I don’t think there was anything else I could really have done to get over it any better
- J Ok going back to this idea of you adopting a very balanced lifestyle. Do you think that that could’ve had any effect on the way in which you coped?
- G Well definitely yeah, I would think so, eh, obviously this whole idea that when I’m away from athletics I don’t think about athletics hardly so effectively when I was away from athletics then I wasn’t particularly paying a great lot of attention to injury or any problems or whatever you know, so work and other bits and pieces did pay off and it was a good opportunity to get some DIY done as well!
- J Going back to a question I should’ve asked you earlier, why was it important to you that you beat athletes at the Scottish Championships who’d beaten you the previous year do you think?
- G Eh, I suppose pride has to play a big part in that and also I’m naturally quite competitive anyway in most areas of life but possibly I don’t want to get beat by people that have beaten me in the past that definitely shouldn’t have been beating me so I suppose it was a bit of pride
- J Some athletes tend to feel that if they underperform or get injured or if something negative happens in athletics, they tend to feel that that threatens their image of themselves as an athlete. Is that something that would apply to you in this situation at all?
- G No, I didn’t really have a great image of myself as an athlete then anyway so it didn’t particularly threaten me. It was really more as I said just the old pride that was coming into play
- J And obviously your response to this event is very different to the way that you’ve responded to negative events in athletics in the past
- G Yeah, well in the past I suppose I’ve invested myself a wee bit more from time to time. I think we talked about the timing of the Commonwealth Games before. That was obviously a lot harder to cope back then because I had put

much more time and effort into preparing for it but in comparison to this year I couldn't really expect to run particularly well 'cause I hadn't put the time and effort into it so it wasn't really a big issues if I didn't do that well

J And I'm aware that time doesn't permit for us to go through another stressful event from this season but I'd like to get an idea of whether the way you coped with this particular event is similar to how you've coped with other stressful events in athletics

G Eh, I would have to say yeah, eh, I suppose I do take the view that I don't dwell on situations or whatever arises, sort of accept it and then start to get on with it, eh, I try to analyze it and find out where I've gone wrong and try to fix it as much as I possibly can and so therefore I suppose I'm actually looking on the positive side of things and taking the positives from everything, em, I suppose with the situation in the summer by losing out on training it did give me more opportunity to do DIY and other things so what you lose on one hand you gain on the other

J Do you have any advice for other athletes who might not be able to cope with stress in athletics as effectively as you?

G Eh, I would say it would have to be not to dwell on the situation, try to put it to the back of your mind as much as possible, eh, try to do other things you know, eh, at the end of the day it is only a sport and sport should be fun so try and keep it fun, eh, also don't lose sight of what's really important you know, I think that's the main thing

J Overall how satisfied would you say you are with your performances this season?

G Eonsidering the preparation I had for this season I would say my performances were pretty good. I was quite happy with it. Obviously if I'd trained my arse off all year and run those times I wouldn't be as happy, but yeah I'm pretty satisfied

J Ok and in what way if any has your image of yourself changed as a result of your experiences this season?

G I don't think my image has changed at all and previously I didn't see myself as any big athlete and I still don't see myself as any big athlete so I don't think it's changed me

J And to finish off with your questionnaire responses, which measure your level of athletic identity between the start of the season and the end of the season, have remained fairly consistent. Do you see your level of athletic involvement changing in any way in the future?

G Earrying on like this I don't think so, I really don't think so. Again going back to the idea that it's still just a sport so everything has its place so yeah I suppose it is important to keep fit or whatever you know and it is enjoyable

but I don't see myself dedicating more time than what I already have just now and also with my work commitments as well it is pretty difficult to commit any more time to it

J Ok, well that's just about all I have to ask you but before we finish do you think there are any important factors that we failed to discuss or any comments or suggestions that you'd like to make about the interview?

G No it was all right

J Ok thank you very much for your time

G Ok thank you.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

STUDY 3, RACHEL

- J First of all I'd like to get some background information from you so to begin with could you tell me a bit about your age and your job?
- R Ok, I'm 27 and I'm currently working part-time at the Royal Bank of Scotland as a teller and I do athletics the rest of the time
- J And what would you say have been your main achievements in athletics so far?
- R Em, I'd say, well I've been to the semi-finals of the World Championships twice and then I made it to the Olympics in Sydney. I came 6th at the Commonwealth Games, 8th at the European Championships, 4th at the World Student Games, won the AAAs twice, that's about it I think
- J And thinking back to when you were younger, what sort of age were you when you first got involved in athletics?
- R I was about 12. I just got involved through like a sort of open day at the local club so I got involved then and just sort of carried on from there
- J What would you say it was that was motivating you to do athletics at that age?
- R Em, it's the sort of thing I was always good at at primary school and my dad had seen an advert in the paper, like I never thought of doing it like remotely seriously, I just did it at school. And then my dad saw an advert in the paper and said, "Why don't you go along and try it and see if you like it?", and then when I went I found I was quite good and I sort of carried on from there really. The better I did the more I wanted to do it
- J So would you say it was something about the achievement side of things?
- R Yeah I'd say so. I mean at first it was just really sort of pure enjoyment but I mean I didn't do very well in my first season and I don't think if I'd have carried on not doing very well because obviously the training's quite hard and I think unless you're seeing results it's quite difficult to motivate yourself to keep going, so like the next year I did really well and I was like, "Oh this is really great and I had more sort of long term goals."
- J So when you said at first it was just enjoyment what sorts of things did you enjoy about it?
- R Em, I mean I only used to go at first once a week and I suppose I just enjoyed meeting new friends and I quite enjoyed the exercise and doing something different and I did enjoy the competitions but I think I've always been quite competitive so I want to do well and when I wasn't doing that well it was a bit

disappointing but obviously not enough for me to give up and I sort of kept going and took it a bit more seriously. I started training maybe 2 or 3 times a week to try and see better results and then I did see results from that

J Ok. Going back again to that early time in your athletics career, how big a part of your life would you say it was making up?

R Em, at first I'd say it was just one of many things I did, you know I played instruments and I went to swimming, I did dancing, you know I did sort of various other things so it was just really one of kind of many things I quite enjoyed doing, but you know as the years went on I kind of gradually gave up other things and sort of devoted more of my time to athletics so by the time I was about 16 or 17 it was really the only sort of outside interest from school and just sort of socializing that I had, em, so I say then was when it became the most important thing to me in terms of something outside of education and friends

J What do you think it was about it that gave it such an important position in your life at that time?

R I mean from when I was about 13, 14 I started seeing success and I think I knew and I suppose my coach told me as well that I was going to have to sort of gradually put more time in if I wanted to progress to where I eventually wanted to get to, so from training once a week I went up to eventually training maybe 4 times a week when I was 16 or 17 and I think I just knew that to do that I had to give up other things 'cause I just didn't have enough time in the week to do everything I wanted to do and do my school work, so I think it was just really the success and aims of what I wanted to do with it that made me want to take it more seriously, whereas anything else that I did, I was ok at them but I was never going to be any great pianist or you know, country dancing champion or that kind of thing, you know?

J So when you reached that sort of age what sorts of things did you miss out on if any because of athletics?

R Em, not a lot I wouldn't have said. I suppose I used to go to athletics maybe 2 nights a week or something whereas other friends probably didn't really do much, they'd maybe just do their homework or be on the phone or whatever and I felt like I had enough time during the week to do everything else that my friends were doing, em, I suppose the only thing would be that I didn't ever get a part-time job but having said that I think I'd rather have trained than get a part-time job and my mum and dad were really great with me with money anyway so I didn't really feel that I missed out on anything. I suppose as I was getting older I probably had to start sacrificing a lot of socializing and you know when you started uni and there would be people going out and going to the pub and clubs and that every day of the week, whereas I'd say in comparison I had to sort of cut it down 'cause I knew if I wanted to do well I couldn't really combine the two as I wanted to

- J Ok, when it got to the stage when you started to consider your future career, did athletics have any influence on your decision making at that time would you say?
- R Em, I mean certainly when I was leaving school I didn't think that doing athletics full-time seriously at that stage was really an option. I mean I think if I was in another sport where traditionally people compete really well when they're young like in gymnastics I probably would've done that. But at the age I was at I thought I'd rather go to university and have the degree behind me and see how it's going then and then think about taking a few years out so it definitely didn't affect my choice of university. I'd say that what it did affect was that I had considered doing dentistry and one of the reasons I didn't do that was because I didn't think I could combine the two and I knew that something would probably have to give so I thought it was better to not start off doing that, I was better to start off with a degree course where I'd have more time off
- J Ok, and after your degree did athletics start to influence your decision-making?
- R Yeah, definitely. When I graduated I decided to take at least a year out to see if I could improve that year and if I didn't really think I was improving then I would've gone on and got a job, but because I did make a good improvement that year I sort of felt it was worth pursuing it and sort of carrying on and just being either a full-time athlete or just working part-time and doing athletics
- J Ok. In this next section I'd like to get an idea of how important athletics is to you now. I've got an idea of what motivated you to participate in athletics when you were younger. Has that changed in any way would you say?
- R Em, probably in a way but in a way now because I've had a few years of not doing so well, like every year when I was younger I was either improving or roughly staying the same so I always had a real goal of well you know, "This is what I want to do", whereas now it's almost more getting back to where I was which I think is possibly more difficult so I don't know whether I'm almost keeping going in athletics sort of as a, not an obligation, but I feel that I sort of owe it to myself to try and get back to where I was rather than really thinking, "Oh this is definitely what I want to do. This is what I can do", 'cause in reality I don't know now whether I can get back but in the past I always believed I really could whereas now because I've had a few years of not getting back you sort of start to wonder, "Well I don't know if I can", and I think it was just that, that I don't want to give up on the note that you know, me having such a bad season this year. I don't really want to think, "Well that's as good as I was", 'cause I don't think it is, so it really is a lot to do with that as well
- J And just how important is your athletics participation to you now would you say?

- R I mean it is still really important. You know I've moved through to Glasgow you know to be with a different coach and you know my life is kind of centered around my athletics, you know I'm working in a part-time job so that I can do athletics to the best of my ability, but I think I have quite a balanced lifestyle and that also there are other things that are important to me and it's not the only thing that I do so you know, it is important but it's not the be all and end all
- J Is it important to you that other people recognize your identity as being an athlete?
- R I don't know, not particularly people that I've just met or anything but I suppose, yeah I don't know. Sorry, I don't really know how to answer that
- J No it's a difficult one 'cause I suppose it's one of those things that you don't really think about. I guess what motivates some people to do athletics is really to have a sort of athlete persona and really I just want to try and understand if it's important to you that you portray that
- R It's nice I suppose to be thought of you know as being sort of fit or healthy or successful but I wouldn't say it's that important in that I think a lot of people might think of athletes as being quite obsessive or very straight or you know never going out and I don't really like that kind of side of it but I do like that thought of you know people thinking, "Oh it's good that you're fit and healthy and that you do well in your sport", and I suppose you know for people to think that you've done well is nice as well
- J So just how big a part of your identity would you say that that athlete part makes up?
- R It's probably about, it's quite difficult. I'd say about a half perhaps or 40%
- J And what would you say makes up the other areas?
- R Em, well my relationship's really important to me so that's quite a big part as well and also like friendships and my relationship with my parents. My work to be honest takes up about 5% or something. It's only something I'm doing to earn money. I don't think of myself as a bank teller at all [laughs], em, so I'd say it's just really my relationships with other people that kind of make up the rest of my persona
- J Are there any sacrifices that you've made to pursue your athletics?
- R Yeah, definitely, I mean I'd say because I've graduated with a decent degree I think you know, I have sacrificed a career in that kind of respect in that you know, it's now 5 years since I graduated and by now I'd imagine I could be in quite a decent job and a fairly well paid job and as it is I'm not at all, em, so yeah I have definitely sacrificed in that way and I suppose I've sacrificed in terms of social life, em, I've sacrificed in terms of traveling – I wanted to travel with friends and I didn't go because of athletics, em, I've maybe

sacrificed in terms of places that I've lived. I probably would've liked to have settled more in Edinburgh but in the end I moved to Birmingham for a year and I've come to Glasgow and it's not that I don't like it but I think given the choice of living anywhere I'd rather be in Edinburgh so I have sacrificed in that respect as well...and not eating as many cakes!

- J Yeah, well I know all about that! When you're away from the athletic environment and athletics people, would you say that you still think of yourself as an athlete? [brief explanation about compartmentalization]
- R Em, I think it probably depends on the circumstances at the time as well in that I do think that I probably am quite good at compartmentalizing my life in that when I am at work I do really just think about work and because I'm quite busy I don't particularly have time to think about anything else and again when I'm with friends I suppose I just try and enjoy that rather than thinking about athletics too much, but I think it probably does depend on the time of year as well. Like if you've got a big competition coming up at the weekend you probably can't help but have that kind of impinge on your thoughts and it probably affects your behaviour as well in that you know you're less likely to have a late night or go out shopping or whatever you know, because you'd be thinking, "Oh I've got to rest up for this", or even in terms of having a hard training session that night, that would make a difference to me in that I could be at work and thinking, "Oh God I've got to do this later", but I'd say in general I try not to let myself think about it too much 'cause I just think it would be depressing otherwise, you know I just quite like to concentrate on what I'm doing at the time
- J So in general it depends on the circumstances but in general you tend not to let it overtake your mind
- R Yeah in general I think you know if I'm seeing friends I'd rather talk about other things or find out what's going on in their lives or you know whatever rather than...I think when I'm with my athletics friends I'm probably more likely to talk about it or think about it but I do think I try and sort of concentrate on what I'm doing at the time rather than it taking over my whole life 'cause as I said earlier I'd say it's probably only 40 or 50% of my identity rather than it being 90% or whatever which means that maybe I would be you know thinking about it constantly and I'm not to be honest
- J I'd like to get an idea now of how you feel about yourself when you fail to meet your goals in athletics. Could you just give me a rough idea of how it tends to make you feel?
- R I think I just feel kind of dejected. It depends on the circumstances as well. I think you know if I've really been struggling with injury or something and I don't do well then maybe I more have the attitude of, "Oh well, I've tried but I was probably expecting too much of myself to be able to do what I wanted to do", but if I feel like things have been going well and I don't manage to do what I wanted I just feel really disappointed and I suppose maybe it makes you

question, “Well I’ve spent all this time training and it just hasn’t paid off”, so just disappointment I think is the main thing really

J And how does failing to meet goals in athletics compare with failing to meet goals in other areas of your life?

R Em, I’d say it’s probably a similar feeling. I mean to be honest I don’t have as many goals in other areas of my life in that I’m not really in a career job so I don’t have any sort of job related goals but you know, em, I think I was quite lucky in that I did manage to pass everything I wanted to at uni so I didn’t really have the experience of really not meeting my goals in any great sense, you know and if I did it was never anything that was that important so I’d say it’s probably worse in athletics I think because you give up so much of your life to it that when you don’t do well I find that I’m questioning, “Well what can I do to improve next time? How am I going to manage to make this better?” I think if it’s an easy solution it’s not so bad, if it’s something like just having been injured then you can work out what you can do to try and prevent that but if it’s something like thinking your training hasn’t been right or whatever then it’s a lot more difficult I think to kind of get your head round

J What aspects of your life would you say make you feel good about yourself as a person?

R Em, I don’t know. I suppose everything does really. I suppose my athletics does you know in that if it’s going well or even if you have a good session or something you just come away and feel quite satisfied or I quite like you know when you’re feeling fit and you’re feeling like things are going well. I like the feeling of just feeling fit as well, em, my relationship makes me really happy and I think that when everything’s going well with that and we’re getting on well or we have a nice day or whatever, that makes me happy or also maybe if you’re meeting friends and you have a nice night or seeing my parents if I’ve not seen them for a while. Just lots of things really

J So it’s not as if you get your sense of satisfaction only from athletics, it comes from different areas

R Definitely not, no I mean I’d say I probably get more sort of happiness from other areas of my life in that you know athletics is like you’re kind of striving towards a goal and if you do achieve it it’s very satisfying but the chances are, especially for me recently, I’ve not been achieving them so there’s probably more disappointment than high points, apart from training, you know if training’s going well and you’re feeling fit and healthy then it sort of gives you a good feeling overall

J Obviously I’ve got your log sheet here with your details of the stressful events that you experienced this season. I’d like to just understand a bit more about the underperformance that you experienced at the start of the season. Could you describe it for me please?

R Em, it was like the second race of the season and I'd gone into it feeling quite confident and I'd had a race the week before that had been not as good as I'd been hoping for but it hadn't been disastrous and I hadn't felt that bad after it and I just thought, "Right, I just really misjudged how I ran the race and I'll try and run it differently and just hope for a much better result", and everyone I was running against had never ever beaten me at all so I was going in fairly confident and you know sort of working out what I wanted to do and how I wanted to perform, em, but everything was kind of going to plan until about 250 and then I just absolutely died of death and two girls went past me and I just felt that there was absolutely nothing I could do about it and I just didn't feel like myself. My body didn't respond at all in the way that I would expect it to and I just felt that there was nothing I could do about it and afterwards I felt terrible, like physically, and totally disappointed and upset and just questioning whether I'd even keep going with the season because I just felt so awful, but having said that about an hour or two later I was like shaking uncontrollably, freezing cold and I just obviously wasn't well so I knew from that that there was obviously a lot more to it than just a bad performance, like there was an actual reason behind it that I wasn't well and I'd had a recurrence of a virus I'd had earlier in the season, so in terms of that I suppose it maybe made it a little bit easier to get over because I knew there was a reason behind it rather than just being a total unexplainable sort of dip in performance

J So in that respect did you kind of feel that it was more controllable?

R Em, I suppose at the time there was nothing I could do to control it at all and I think that's what really got me, that I had no way of controlling what happened during that race because my body just wasn't able to cope the way it normally does, em, but yeah in terms of coping with it and thinking about moving on to the next race or what to do I knew that obviously things weren't right within me so I just had to give myself a rest and then get back into training and work out when I was ready to compete again rather than just sort of carrying on in a downward spiral

J Going back to the time when you'd had this underperformance and you're really disappointed and you're experiencing all these stressful emotions, what exactly was it about the underperformance itself that made it stressful for you?

R I think the fact that it was the first race of the season where people would actually have been watching me, like there were a lot of people watching who knew me or who I knew 'cause it was such a big meeting and I think the fact that I would've been going in being the sort of overwhelming favourite, I'd never been beaten by these girls before and it was to me a total shock I suppose to feel like people that I wouldn't have remotely rated to be able to beat me were beating me and there was nothing I could do about it

J And you talked about how you had an idea of how you wanted to perform at that particular event. How important was it to you that you achieved the goal that you'd set yourself?

- R Em, it was important because the first race of the season that I'd had was a bit of a disappointment but not a disaster and I felt a lot more control of things in that race and I think I just thought that I wanted to perform in a way that I thought I could so I felt that by achieving that goal it was going to in turn help sort of set me up to achieving the rest of the goals I had for that season and that I really wanted to have a sort of good race to put me on a platform for getting into other good races and you know, increase my performance sort of week by week, whereas that was a huge blow and was like just totally downhill from what I'd been like the week before and I think it just kind of messed up my whole plans for the season really
- J You've put down on the log sheet that you felt a sense of loss when you were faced with the underperformance. Could you explain to me why you felt a sense of loss?
- R I think it was a sense of loss in that I performed in a way I've probably not really performed in the last few years. I've only been beaten by say two people in Britain and then to suddenly be beaten by another two who had never beaten me before. It just felt like a real kind of shock at the time
- J And could we go over the kinds of emotions that you experienced?
- R Em, disappointment, upset, I suppose disillusionment as well. I mean that's probably the first time that I've thought, "Is this really worth it? I don't want to feel like this anymore. I don't know if I want to do athletics anymore", and not in a serious way that I really thought I was going to give up but just in a way of, "That was just terrible and I don't want to go on feeling like this", em, just upset, disappointment, that's the main two really
- J And who or what did you blame for the underperformance?
- R At first nothing because I felt ok and I was just like, "What was that all about?" But as time went on and I became really ill I knew that it had to be because of the illness. I mean I hadn't been feeling that well that morning but I've raced on plenty days when I've not felt that well that morning and never performed like that so I think I just knew the fact there was absolutely nothing in me you know from sort of 150 to go that there had to be something wrong and the way that I felt afterwards. I think that's what I kind of blamed, was the illness
- J And obviously you've described the stressful emotions that you experienced immediately after the event. How long did those emotions last and for how long were you thinking about it?
- R I'd say for the whole of that day and evening I was quite upset and disappointed but you know I suppose the feelings were subsiding because after a while you just have to think, "Well, it's happened, you just have to kind of get over it", em, but having said that I didn't train for the rest of the week because I wasn't well and I tried kind of not to think about athletics. I stayed at home with my mum and dad. I didn't stay in Glasgow and I didn't go down

to training. I just almost wanted to disassociate myself from athletics because it really made me feel better to think, “Well I’m going to do something else and just kind of forget about it for a few days and then see how I feel”, and then because I wasn’t well I really had to rest anyway, there was no sense in trying to do things and getting myself feeling worse so that’s what I did

J So obviously you detached yourself physically from athletics by not training, would it be fair to say that you kind of detached yourself mentally from it as well – you just kind of took yourself away from the whole thing and used that as a coping strategy?

R I tried to do that. I mean obviously it was something that quite upset me and you know I had to speak to people at the Institute, I had to go up and see the doctor, you know I did have to go and talk about it but in terms of like staying away from my own environment, em, not going to training, I didn’t do anything and it was quite nice for me ‘cause I just thought, “I just have to get away from this”, so it did help me cope

J And when you got away from the athletic environment, did you find that that facilitated your ability to switch off from it or was it just constantly there?

R No I’d say it facilitated my ability to switch off from it because I spent the week at my mum and dad’s house and did things like just you know, going shopping or going out for lunch or you know, just kind of relaxing and watching TV and apart from going to the Institute and going to the doctor I didn’t do anything that directly related to my athletics, em, and I think it kind of helped me switch off because there was kind of no sense in dwelling on what had happened because if I wanted to compete again I just had to try and get over it

J The fact that you were able to do that is something that some athletes might not be able to do. I wonder if that’s got something to do with the fact that you’ve described how you’re able to do this sort of compartmentalization with your life in general. Would you say that that behaviour was something that you were able to use when you were faced with this stressful situation?

R Yeah, I’d say it probably was, em, yeah because with not being in an athletic environment I probably didn’t think about it as much but I do think that being in a different environment and doing things completely unrelated to athletics helped sort of keep my mind occupied elsewhere and helped me recover from it really. I think if athletics was virtually the only thing in my life I wouldn’t have any sort of release, I wouldn’t have anywhere else to go if things weren’t going well because if training and athletics is all you think about then, well what else is there?, you know whereas if I spend time with my family and my friends and you know just do social things and watch TV and whatever then they’re completely away from the athletic environment so I think it did definitely help

- J This section is about me understanding what coping strategies you employed to cope with the underperformance. Do you think you could talk me through those strategies that you used?
- R Em, I'd say that sort of in order of what happened after the underperformance was obviously physically I wasn't feeling well so I had gone inside, em, was just looking to recover physically but at the same time I was looking for some kind of emotional support I think from other people, you know from my coach, I wanted to speak to my coach and maybe try and rationalize, "Well what went wrong and why did it go wrong?" I did speak to him and after that I spoke to my training partners and it was just maybe to have some sort of friendly faces about I suppose, to have somebody who maybe made you feel a bit better about things, just I suppose to have someone who could really sympathize with how you were feeling and maybe people who had been through it before as well and then I suppose then I phoned my boyfriend and then I was crying then which I suppose is another kind of outlet as well, em, but probably not too long after that is when I started feeling really unwell and I think then I kind of knew that there was obviously a bit more behind it than just a bad performance and I think that you know the feeling that I was so unwell and just couldn't really control my body that I just felt well, maybe that was the reason for not performing well and that it was almost a relief in that I suppose I felt that there was a reason for it and it wasn't just like a completely unexplainable bad performance, it was just like something that was affecting my body so that I couldn't perform the way I wanted to, so I suppose that was a way of sort of accepting what had happened and just thinking that I wanted to go home and just to have support of my family and boyfriend and just to be able to kind of recover and move on from things
- J Ok, so we've got to the stage where you're able to accept what has happened. How long did that take would you say?
- R I suppose for the sort of acceptance to happen and knowing that there was a reason for it probably only took about 3 or 4 hours but the fact that physically I wasn't well either wasn't helping but I still was quite upset about it probably for the rest of the whole day I would say. It probably took 'till the next day you know once I'd made the decision, "Well I'm not going to train this week", and it was almost like a bit of a relief thinking, "Right, I can just step back and be away from athletics for a while and try and do something about getting myself better and just maybe detaching myself from athletics."
- J That's quite interesting that you said that because that was one of the things that came out of a previous study was that a very useful coping strategy was that people tended to detach themselves from athletics and maybe focus more on other identities that they had as a means of coping. Is that what you did would you say?
- R Yeah, I'd say it was 'cause I stayed with my parents for 4 or 5 days so it just meant that you know I saw them, I saw my boyfriend a lot, I saw friends. I just kind of relaxed and just didn't do much at all, em, and I think it helped kind of get away from athletics I suppose and then when I actually went to

training the next weekend I kind of felt more ready to go back and also sort of physically ready to go back but then I could formulate a plan of thinking, “Well when will I start competing again and how am I going to prepare for that?” So I think it just helped me kind of move on from the bad experience

- J So when you said you started to move on and plan ahead did it change from being the initial loss to more of a challenge would you say?
- R I suppose as it came as a big shock to me it was hard to know how to cope with it but after I kind of had accepted it and thought, “Well it’s happened, it’s over”, unless I was going to stop running that whole season which I didn’t want to do, I kind of felt like, “Well I have to move on and I have to have the challenge of saying well, when can I compete again and gear my training up for that and just see how I get on at that.” So yeah, I think it sort of helped me get through it
- J And initially when you were first faced with the event you explained that you felt that it impacted on how you rated yourself as an athlete. Was that something that changed as you were coping with it?
- R I’d say because you know thinking about the event afterwards I knew that there was a reason why I hadn’t compete well, like I knew that with being unwell I couldn’t really be expecting my body to compete at the level I expected it to, em, it overall didn’t change the way I think of myself as an athlete because I knew it was just like a bad race for a reason rather than a trend of terrible performances for no reason. I think probably I was having doubts about myself anyway with being in a new training regime and you just never know if it’s working but yeah, I think the fact that there was a reason behind that bad performance, you know I knew that it wasn’t just a case of maybe me not competing as well, but there was a reason for it
- J Out of all the coping strategies that you used – confiding in others, letting your emotions out, detaching from your athletic life – out of all the strategies that you’ve described, what would you say were effective coping strategies?
- R I think something like you know crying as an outlet is just something that’s kind of natural. It’s not maybe something you use as a specific coping strategy, it’s just a kind of natural thing that happens but I’d say for probably a lot of it for me is probably thinking in my own head about if things aren’t going well then what can I do to make them get better or even you know, say this season because things weren’t going well consistently like maybe it was time to have a break and think, “Well for next year what can I change to make things go better?”, em, and I suppose in conjunction with that it also helps to speak to people, you know to speak to people you’re close to and I suppose just to get some support first of all but also I think I’m quite logically minded so if something doesn’t go well then I’m like, “Well why didn’t it and how can I make it go better or how can I change things for next time?” Otherwise I don’t think things will improve unless you’re trying to work out the reason for it

J Ok, I'm aware that we have time constraints and we were going to go through how you coped with another event. Instead of doing that I'd like to get an idea of whether that's how you tend to cope with underperformances, injuries and other negative things happening in athletics in general. Is it this idea of using rational thought, talking to others etc.?

R Yeah I think it is. I mean I think you know if I'm at a competition where perhaps I'm only ranked in the top 20 or 25 or so and I make the semi-final and top 16, well great, you know that will be my goal wherever I go really because I don't like to think that I've just performed at what you know I was expected to perform at, but if I do only perform to the ranking that I was at then it's maybe a coping strategy for me to think, "Well, that's really all I was ranked to be anyway so I haven't done any worse than that. I've just performed kind of at the level I was expected to." But I suppose because I like to try and perform better than that it is a failure to me but it is a way of coping with it in my head to think, "Well that's all I was really expected to do, all these girls have done better than me this season so you'd kind of expect them to be doing better." So I think it's kind of, yeah like a rationalization I suppose

J What about how you detached from your athletic life. Is that something that you've used before?

R I'd say it's something I've not used as much until what happened to me at Loughborough really because unless you're like unwell or something or you just can't train, you know usually when you're injured you sort of have to keep going in terms of trying to keep yourself fit, doing what you can, seeing the physio, em, I suppose maybe what I would do is try and see friends or go to the cinema or do things that are you know enjoyable and not related to my athletics so in that way I kind of try and detach myself but this time I *really* detached myself because I could and I wasn't to train for that week so the best thing for me to do was to get away from it but I'd say the detachment does help

J Ok so I've now got a good picture of how you coped with the underperformance. Obviously we don't have time to go through a different stressful event but you have talked about how you felt that your season as a whole was quite disappointing and I suppose you could describe that as a bit of a slump. Does your coping response to the slump as a whole have any similarities with the way that you coped with the underperformance?

R Em, yeah I'd say it probably does because what I've done, I mean partly because I've not been well as well, is kind of dissociated myself from athletics, em, and I didn't go down regularly at all to training for about 8 weeks I'd say at least, em, I did do bits and pieces and went swimming, you know, did things but I didn't actually go back to the routine for I'd say about 8 or 9 weeks and I think that kind of helped 'cause you know, I went on holiday and just did other things so that it maybe helped me just have a break and I felt that psychologically I just needed a break away from athletics, em, and also during that time I sort of had a good think about things I felt I was lacking and things that I thought I'd want to do better for next season and for the winter

and I sort of had time to reevaluate things and work out a better programme for myself for next year

J Ok so the fact that you took time out from athletics facilitated your ability to reappraise the whole situation?

R I would say so 'cause even like you know after my underperformance during the season I think straight away you know I was working out what I was going to do for next year and how I was going to do things better but as well as that I think I was almost sickened by how badly I'd performed and I just wanted a break completely from athletics so that I could clear my head and feel more motivated for going into the winter and I think it has helped

J Obviously these events have been stressful for you and there have been strong negative aspects of the events but one thing that comes across is that you haven't really fixated on the negative emotions, you have been able to accept things and perhaps not turn them round so quickly but certainly not wallow in a sense of negativity. Is that something you would say applies to most of your experiences of stress in athletics?

R Yeah I'd say so. I'd say probably in the past I've probably coped a bit better with underperformance because I mean unless it was a really major event I didn't really let it bother me too much because I was quite confident in my ability. I'd think if I had a bad race well you know, it didn't really bother me much as long as the next time I was better or at major events I did better, em, so I suppose maybe I found it more difficult this year because of having a trend of underperformances it was kind of harder to cope with

J Going back to your questionnaire responses which measure your level of athletic identity, although they were quite consistent, your athletic identity was lower at the end of the season in comparison to the start of the season. Do you have any idea why that might be?

R Em, I think probably because at the start of the season I was quite hopeful for how things would go and I was probably you know quite motivated in getting into competing and then I think now when things haven't gone well I've perhaps placed less importance on athletics because it's maybe not making me as happy maybe as it did before, em, so I think at the start of the season people are motivated and you have ideas of how you want to do and how your performance is going to be and probably I would see myself more as an athlete, whereas now when I've had a lot of time off and been away from athletics a lot it's not as high up on my priorities as it was

J And would you say that your image of yourself as an athlete has changed at all? I suppose you've already answered that

R Yeah I mean I suppose I just haven't performed as well so I mean in the past I've probably thought of myself as a better athlete than I would now, em, just because of the way my performances have gone

- J And to finish off with, do you have any advice that you would give to other athletes who've perhaps underperformed and experienced other negative events in athletics and perhaps have been unable to cope as well as you have?
- R Em, I think the most important thing to do is to try and put the experience behind you and just try and focus on what you have coming next because there really is no value in kind of wallowing in sort of bad feelings about yourself or about your performance, it's only really going to lead to a downward spiral I think. So if you have a bad experience it's probably best to just put it behind you and just concentrate on the next performance or even like the next year and to rationalize it and think how you can do better for next time
- J Ok. Well that's just about all I have to ask you. Before we finish though do you think that there's anything that we've failed to discuss or do you have any comments or suggestions about the interview itself?
- R No, not really. I think you've been a very good interviewer!
- J Thank you very much, you've been an excellent interviewee!
- R Thank you.