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## **2008 Season Review – The season through my eyes!**

I got my 2008 campaign off to a flying start with victory in the 5 Nations Indoor International in Glasgow. I went on to win all my races on UK soil during the indoor season; winning my fourth 800m UK Indoor title (equalling Kirsty Wade's record number of wins at the event), and going on to win the Birmingham Grand Prix for the second year running. For the first time during an indoor season, I travelled to two international races abroad. My results in both (Stuttgart & Stockholm) were finishing in second place to the legendary Maria Mutola, but putting good international opposition behind me.

After qualifying for the World Indoor Championships as part of the Great Britain & NI team, I comfortably progressed through the heat and semi-finals of the Championships to take my place in my first individual global final. In an unpredictably slow tactical race I found myself finishing in fifth position and without the medal I so desperately craved and thought I was capable of achieving. In a true run fast paced race I knew I was at that time one of the three quickest women 800m runners in the world. With many lessons learned from that experience I was left to reflect on what could have been and what mistakes to avoid in the future. (Just twelve months earlier if someone would have told me I would come fifth in the World Indoor Championships and be disappointed I would have laughed – I guess it shows how far I have come, and still where I aim to go!)

Outdoors began slowly yet solidly as I struggled to overcome my annual bout of post-indoor season illness and a niggling achilles and knee problem. Furthermore my dad was unwell and I was worried about his condition. My first two outings were at the Hengelo International meet and at the BMC meet in Manchester. I came home with two under-par finish positions but with both times in the 2.00 mins region there

was little to panic about so early in the season. However just days before the Manchester meet ,as a family we were traumatised to discover that my dad was now classified as terminally ill with bowel cancer and the condition was taking over him very quickly. I did not want to compete in Manchester – being on the track racing was the last place I wanted to be or felt I should be and my mind was frantic with worry. Qualifying for Beijing had been a long-life dream however, and a dream of my Dad's in particular. I realised the race there was a vital part of the season's plan and so I competed there to keep the dream going. Funnily enough my Dad was mad that I had been beaten in the Manchester event. Mum said he had planned to tell me off the next day when I went to visit. (Little did he know how ill he was and how it was actually his illness that had lead to my under-par performance). If only I did get that telling off the day later, I willed that he had to energy to but alas he was too frail just a day after being so passionately disappointed at my defeat. The next day, with the family around his hospital bed, he passed silently away (Keith Meadows, aged 65 – 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2008). The heartache continues!

Dad was a fanatical fan of my Athletics career and I knew I had to deal with the numbness, disbelief, anger and emotional that grief brings in order to fulfil my Olympic ambition and the ambition that my whole family now needed more than ever. Just to see a brief smile on their face for a moment would be worth all the years of dedication and hard work that it has took just to be in the position to be in contention for an Olympic place. Having received my first invite to a Golden League meet, and of which my Dad had knew of and had proudly told most of the hospital ward a few weeks earlier, I took the brave decision to still travel to the meet in Oslo just three days after Dad had died. Running for him and my family, I recorded 1.59.67 – an Olympic A standard time, and only my second outdoor sub 2 mins performance to that date. It gave my whole family a much needed boost. I returned home for the funeral.

On the day of the funeral, I learned that I had been selected for the Great Britain & NI team in my first individual outing in the European Cup competition. This is a meet where the top 8 nations in Europe compete to win the inaugural title of European Champions. Ironically the first two meeting since Dad's death are the sort of meeting he had longed to watch me in. His daughter competing in world class athletics! In the European Cup competition I took victory in a tactically astute race, gaining maximum points for Great Britain & NI. Dad would have been celebrating in front of the television at home for sure given the chance.

Then typically in Jenny Meadows fashion (my close friends, family and training group will vouch for this) when I seem to be in supreme form with my goals all achievable, I get ill. The stress of the past few weeks catches up with me and I am full of a cold and throat infection and unable to compete in the UK Champs incorporating the Olympic Trials! The very competition I have thought about for the past twelve months. Feeling at an all-time low I wait for the result of the race to see what situation this leaves me in. Thankfully only two athletes impress and meet the guideline for Olympic selection so I have just one week left to get myself well and

find a race to perform well in to prove my fitness and earn selection. Just hours before the Olympic selection deadline I line up in my second Golden League meet, this time in Paris, and somehow sniffle and splutter my way to a personal best of 1.59.11 – another Olympic A standard performance. Instead of celebrating I complain about what could have been if I was 100 per cent fit and healthy. I think I may have broken into a quick smile also, but just a quick one! Twelve hours later I am named in the list of 2008 Olympians. Am I happy? More relieved! But I know my Dad would have proudly said: 'My daughter – an Olympian!'

A week of intense training to catch up on the two weeks I have just missed through illness and at the end of the week I have to compete in the London Grand Prix. Not ideal but I run, understandably finishing down the pack but still a solid 2.00 mins clocking.

The Olympic Games was a massive privilege for me. Something I have worked towards for the past nineteen and a half years since taking the sport up aged seven and three-quarters. Little did I know back then of all the up's and down's that I would have to face on my journey to become an Olympian. Would I do it all again – probably! My performance at the Games – progressing through my heat and qualifying for the semi-finals, then finishing in sixth place in a performance of 1.59.42 was an average result for me. Whilst it wasn't far off my personal best and actually my third fastest time ever, I did feel at some stages of the season that I was in massive personal best shape. I just think I did remarkably well to achieve what I did considering the emotional upheaval I had to deal with. I think it was almost impossible to expect me to perform better than ever before at the Games. I know improved performances are inside me, I will just have to wait for next year to produce them.

I have made many lifestyle changes in the past twelve months, the biggest giving up my job, in order to help me prepare in the best possible way for my training and competitions, and as a result I have progressed in my training workouts – indicating that vast performance improvements were just around the corner. Hopefully I can continue to maintain this lifestyle and continue to make such improvements and my performances will reap the rewards.

2008 has seen me progress so much as a person because of the obstacles I have had to face and am proud to have overcome. Although 2008 did not turn out to be the breakthrough season I had hoped it would be after such a successful indoor season, my highlights include winning all the British Indoor meets, making the final of the World Indoor Championships, winning the European Cup, reaching the semi-final of the Olympic Games, being invited to compete in three Golden League meets, qualifying for the World Athletics Finals, and running sub 2 mins on a further four occasions.

I look back on 2008 with a mixture of emotions and some highs and lows. Here's to a successful 2009!



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