

20 AUG 2016

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MODERN PENTATHLETE: ARTHUR LANIGAN O'KEEFFE (IRL)



Modern Pentathlon is a sport that tests the mind and body to the limit, enforcing a change in mindset five times a day.

So how does the brain work as the pentathletes switch from discipline to discipline, and how do they stay in control?

We asked Margaux Isaksen of the USA, who finished 4th at the London 2012 Olympic Games, and Arthur Lanigan O'Keeffe of Ireland, the 2015 European champion, what goes through their mind and how they control their body during this energy-sapping, mentally-draining event.

On the day the men's medals will be decided at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, we hear from Arthur Lanigan O'Keeffe (IRL).

## The Morning

My body wakes up two minutes before my alarm clock sounds during big competitions and unlike any other day, the alarm is not received with dread, but relief. Finally it's go time! I head straight to breakfast and eat lots of carbohydrates to fuel my body for a long day ahead. I usually just joke and chat to coaches and teammates while we eat... it's a relaxed feeling. Once I step on to the bus to travel to the venue, I put in my earphones and drink caffeine to get my mind and body pumped up to race.



**The Swim**

As soon as the warm-up starts, I am in the water. I like to do a long warm-up with lots of sprints, as I can feel a bit sleepy in the morning and this wakes me up. After the warm-up, it's time to visualise the perfect race (every breath, tumble and stroke I'm going to take). Once I stand on the blocks I am ready for battle, repeating to myself "no pain, no gain".

When I hit the water my mind turns to the plan. The first 50m is long and controlled. The second 50m I concentrate on turning over my arms. This is where you need to be brave. It's easy to back down at this part of the race in anticipation of the pain to come. Once I hit the 100m mark I bring in my legs much more aggressively and really go for it.

The last 50m is pure guts! At this stage the pain is unbearable, and I try to maintain composure and focus on technique while digging as deep as possible. When I touch the wall I am in a painful daze, gasping for air, but then suddenly snap out of it and remember to check for the time. This is the moment giving 100% is worth it. As soon as I leave the pool my mind moves to the next event.



## The Fence

This event is the make or break for me. It's all about controlling and harnessing your mindset and emotions. I fence my best when I allow myself to express myself, and commit fully to my attacks instead of allowing doubt to creep in. After each fight it's important to reset and focus on the next. It's very easy to get wrapped up in a previous fight (especially if you felt hard done by).

In order to help me stay focused I often repeat WIN (What's Important Now). It reminds me to stay in the moment, because ultimately 'this moment' is the only part I can influence. During the fencing I fuel constantly and when I feel a dip I know it's time for caffeine! I love fencing with a crowd behind: the more noise the better. I feed off the energy of my supporters and it definitely brings me to a different level.



## The Ride

Nerves, nerves, nerves. Why? Because even though I come from a riding background, it is the only element of pentathlon you cannot fully prepare for, as you have no idea the kind of horse you will be given. First things first, you have to walk and learn the course, so you can react instantly when you need to make those important adjustments with the horse.

Every horse is different and with so little time to get acquainted, every minute of the warm-up counts. Once I enter the ring my nerves, the crowd and every other thought vanishes. All I think

about is reacting to my horse and working with him to complete the course with as little damage as possible.



## The Combined Event

On the start line I am aware of who is around me and what kind of runners they are, but all I focus on is my process. I pick a spot about 50m from the shooting range that I use as a marker to change mindset from running to shooting. I focus on three words while shooting: breath, sights, up! This helps me stick to my technique and stop thinking about how my opponents are shooting.

Once I hit my target I try to hunt down any opponents while staying as relaxed as possible. As soon as I hit the last 800m it's time to expend every last ounce of energy. Every muscle in your body hurts. Your lungs are screaming and this is where your biggest opponent appears. Your mind.

Will you give in to the pain and slow down or will you push through, hunting your opponents and that finish line with everything you have left?

When I cross that line I will have given everything. Everything. The emotions can vary at the end of a race, but if victorious there is no feeling like it. Nothing sums it up better than this quote by Vince Lombardi:

*I firmly believe that any man's finest hour, the greatest fulfilment of all that he holds dear, is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle - victorious.*

## The aftermath

First I jog for 20 minutes to get rid of lactate in my legs. I usually then go for a big feast with my team-mates and, if it's the Olympics, it would be rude not to have a party!

Recovery is key. My usual ritual would involve a recovery drink post race, and a healthy, hearty dinner with a hefty amount of carbs. Ice baths and massages are usually in the mix. Post-Olympics however, I'm going to treat myself and go straight for the pizza!

*All results from the Rio 2016 Olympic Modern Pentathlon competition can be found [here](#).*

*If you have any questions about the format of the competition we answer them in this [essential guide](#).*

*To find out which broadcaster is covering the Games live on TV in your country, follow the link on [this page](#).*