

WE'RE TALKING TO...

ALICE TAI

The British para swimmer talks about how she motivates herself, plus her hopes for this summer's Tokyo Olympics

WHAT'S BETTER: WINNING MEDALS OR WINNING AWARDS?

'Last year was amazing – winning seven gold medals at the World Para Swimming Championships in London. But getting recognition at award ceremonies [Alice was named Athlete of the Year at the British Swimming Awards and won *The Sunday Times*' Disability Sportswomen of the Year 2019] means so much more. The only household name I knew when I started out was Ellie Simmonds, so when I meet strangers who know what I've achieved in the pool, I think it's crazy. Para-swimming is still a developing movement, so receiving external recognition outside of the para-swim bubble is the coolest thing.'

HOW DO YOU BALANCE YOUR TRAINING WITH STUDYING?

'I train with the Ealing Swimming Club at the Everyone Active Northolt Leisure Centre doing eight or nine two-hour pool sessions a week at 5.30-7.30am and 6-8pm – not very sociable hours – and I also do three to five gym sessions a week with lots of bodyweight arm-strengthening exercises as I mainly use my arms in the pool. In between, I study Neuroscience at Middlesex University. It's 90 minutes from where I live, but I use the journey time to consolidate my knowledge. I look forward to my rest day on Sundays!'

HOW DO YOU STAY MOTIVATED?

'After the World Championships, I struggled with motivation because I'd achieved everything I'd wanted to, so I took a few months off. I'm going out with one of the Italian swimmers, so there's lots of banter about who's going to do better in Tokyo – I don't want him to beat me!'

ARE YOU EXCITED ABOUT THE TOKYO OLYMPICS?

'I'm quite chilled about it. Before Rio, I was really stressed as it was my first major competition. I didn't enjoy the process. This time, I'm not feeling the pressure so much. I know what I'm capable of, and all you can do is try your best. The 200m individual medley is my weakest event as my breaststroke isn't great, so I'd love to get a PB in that. And I'm looking forward to experiencing the Japanese culture!'



Alice with her seven gold medals



Alice trains up to nine times a week



HOW DO YOU RELAX?

'After Rio, I made a real effort to separate Alice the athlete from Alice the person, because I realised I didn't have anything outside of swimming. So, I signed up for a two-year music course. It was more about having a social group than getting a qualification, and was great fun. I now have some friends in Manchester who I'm in a band with and I like to visit them to rehearse. I play guitar and bass, and sometimes do backing vocals. At home, I like chilling with my flatmates by watching movies and getting a takeaway. I like a relaxing bath but, living with three guys, the bath is always dirty, so I haven't had one in a while!'

WORDS: Joanna Esworth MAIN PHOTO: Marcel Grabowski. SWIMMING PHOTO: Getty Images. Alice Tai MBE is an Everyone Active Sporting Champion and swimming ambassador (everyoneactive.com).