



'I LOVE THE CHALLENGE OF BEING BETTER THAN YESTERDAY'

Double Winter Olympian, **Aimee Fuller**, talks to us about breaking barriers to succeed as both a pro snowboarder and game-changing TV broadcaster, plus the transformative power of exercise

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Resilience, adaptability and confidence are just some of the qualities that Team GB double Winter Olympian Aimee Fuller has in abundance. It's these same star qualities that have helped the former pro snowboarder carve out an equally successful second career in broadcasting. As the first woman in history to land a double backflip in competition back in 2013, Fuller has continued to turn the rulebook on its head by spearheading new and exciting ways of presenting. This is true, whether she's getting her guests out of the studio and taking them for a stroll to spill their motivational secrets on her popular *Monday Mile* podcast, or giving the term 'roving reporter' an inspiring spin for the BBC's coverage of the Great North Run by running the full 13.1 miles, all the while interviewing fellow participants live and somehow remembering to breathe.

Considering that Fuller tells us she has 'been told "no" many times' during both her careers, her impressive CV is testament to her determination to break down the various barriers that have blocked her chosen path over the years (there isn't a lot of opportunity in the UK for snowboarding, for one thing). Yet,

it's her ability to turn each failure or disappointment into an opportunity for growth that has helped her transform every 'no' into a 'yes'.

Growing up in Kent, Fuller started skiing on a dry ski slope and riding a quad bike at the age of four, but it soon turned out that both modes of movement were far too slow for the young adrenaline junkie. After upgrading her quad bike to a 50cc motorbike at the age of six and taking up motocross until she was eight years old, Fuller admits she soon got a bit bored of the repetitiveness of skiing. However, that feeling quickly changed when, she saw a snowboarder in action for the first time.

'The minute I saw him get airborne over the ski moguls, I knew that was what I wanted to do,' she tells *WF*. 'Unfortunately, they didn't have snowboards small enough for me at the time, so I put those dreams on hold and did gymnastics between the ages of 10 and 12, instead. So, if you combine the speed and skills of motocross - reading the lines and transitions of the track - with being the elephant of the gymnastics group, you've kind of got the perfect combination and base for snowboarding.'

THE BACK STORY

Fortunately for Fuller, she finally got to give the sport a go at the age of 12 when her family moved from the UK to the US. 'I went to school in Washington DC, and when a guy who fancied me invited me to go snowboarding in Pennsylvania, I fell in love with it and not him,' she says with a laugh. 'I loved the fact that there was this "no rules" approach, and I saw snowboarding as a blank canvas for creativity because you literally have just a blank slope and you can do whatever you want on it. That's the core of snowboarding for me.'

However, when her family moved back to the UK when she was 16, Fuller was left 'absolutely devastated' that her dreams of snowboarding professionally appeared to be over. So, it was lucky that her talent had already been spotted by former professional snowboarder Erin Comstock while Fuller had been on a summer camp in the US.

'I had no idea I'd been noticed, so when I got a phone call from the Roxy European Team Manager during the first week of starting my A-levels at the Sullivan Upper School in Northern Ireland, I couldn't believe it when I was invited to go to Switzerland three weeks later,' she explains. 'That trip

changed my life because it was there the doors were opened, and it felt possible for me to follow my dreams. After that, I joined the GB junior team, spent little time at school and invested all my energy into snowboarding, which was a pure passion.'

FIT FOR SLOPES

As a pro snowboarder, Fuller focused on strength and conditioning training away from the slopes, with lots of heavy lifting, including squats, core work and deadlifts. She also did a little bit of running and lots of cycling off-season to build her aerobic base and give her the explosiveness plus endurance she needed to do a run on the slope, recover and go again – for hours on end. But it was only between the 2014 Winter Olympics and her second Games in 2018 that yoga became a crucial part of her snowboarding journey.

'I was a little bit older going into my second Olympics – well, when I say older, I mean I was 24 or 25, and I would be competing again at the age of 26 – but when you've been throwing yourself upside down for years, it takes a toll on your body,' she says. 'So yoga became incredibly important to me. I would always do it without fail for 20 minutes before I snowboarded, and for half an hour after riding. It became my discipline, even if I was exhausted, and I used it to prep my body pre- and post-snowboarding, but also as an opportunity to focus and think about what I'd done for the day or what I wanted to achieve the next day.'

Fuller tells us she also found the grounding nature of yoga especially useful while she was travelling the globe on the World Cup circuit to qualify for her second Olympics. 'I had my most successful year in 2017, finishing third overall in the World Cup Big Air Super Series Tour and being ranked in the top five in Slopestyle, which were my two main disciplines, and within that year, I travelled to China, America, Canada, France, Switzerland, Italy and Australia... So, my only controllable when I landed on the other side of the world was the fact that I knew I had my yoga mat in

my board bag. It became my way of stabilising my mind and my body whilst everything else was going on at a hundred miles an hour.'

LIFE AFTER OLYMPICS

Not surprisingly, it was this frenetic lifestyle – along with a desire not to be defined by snowboarding alone – that would become a determining factor in her decision to retire from the sport she loved before she even got to the 2018 Winter Olympics.

'Before I arrived, I'd already decided I was done with the travel and pushing my body to the limits,' she explains.

'I decided I would never be just a snowboarder, because I'm more than that, and I was excited to move on'

'And through being interviewed for snowboarding, I'd already found my new passion. I've always loved talking to people and learning about them, and I decided a few months before the Games that I'd use them as an opportunity to manifest and put out there what I wanted to do next. I decided I would never be just a snowboarder, because I'm more than that, and I was excited to move on, progress and learn something new.'

As luck would have it, Fuller got her big break during the Winter Olympics when she received a text from a producer at the BBC while she was celebrating one of her friends winning a gold medal. 'It was about 2am and I was already several vodkas deep, and dancing on the tables, when I was asked if I wanted to join Radzi

Chinyanganya on the breakfast show the next day. So, the vodka went down, the water went in and I went straight home to bed, and I absolutely smashed it the next day – to the point where I got asked to go back the day after. I absolutely loved it.'

From there, Fuller created a YouTube series called *Fuller Life* to showcase her ability to speak on camera, which soon led to an invitation to commentate on a big snowboarding event for Red Bull TV and work on the BBC's *Ski Sunday*. But it was her determination to showcase her ability to present on subjects other than winter sports that inspired her to start her *Monday Mile* podcast in 2021.

'A constant challenge of my broadcasting career is that I've been told I should only speak about snow as a snowboarder,' she says. 'But I've used my podcast as a practice ground to speak to around 150 people from all different backgrounds. Over the years, I've talked to the likes of Ben Shepherd, Paddy McGuinness and Sue Barker, but I've also interviewed the head of forensic psychology in a prison and the man who created the Eden project. In that way, I think snowboarding has helped me to learn how to transcend out of the boxes that people can put you in, and I've used my skillset to open doors and be different to the next presenter. Because who else is going to run a half marathon and present at the same time? Well, I'm going to if no one else is. I just need to convince the BBC to let me do it for the marathon next – that's the plan, anyway!'

LEARNING NEW SKILLS

Fuller admits she's always 'loved the challenge of being better than yesterday' but says that while her snowboarding days might have looked wild and crazy, it took years of experience and lots of risk assessing to keep progressing to the next step as an athlete – which is a skill she says translates into her everyday life today.

'With snowboarding, it's a very gradual process, because you might start practising a jump at one metre and then be able to do it at two



'One of the biggest things I've learnt from my sporting career is that you can't neglect your mind and you can't neglect your body'

metres three weeks later,' she explains. 'And that's the same as the relationship I've ended up having with running. Initially, I started out with two-and-a-half miles of running, because my feet were mashed up from snowboarding, but the next minute I was running five and thinking "Oh, can I do seven?". Like anything in life, it's all about practice. And that also applies to my padel tennis playing, which I do with my best friend Katya [Jones, of *Strictly Come Dancing*]. Half a year ago, we could barely hit the ball, but we recently came second in a tournament and we were so happy!'

MOVING FORWARD

These days, Fuller says she rarely goes a day without doing some kind of movement because it 'makes her happy'. Aside from going to hot yoga two or three times a week, she also likes to play padel and do boxing with Jones for the 'creative, educational and social aspect'. But she admits that running has now replaced yoga as her controllable in life, for helping her to switch off.

'No matter how far I go, I always feel a huge sense of achievement after a run,' she says. 'When things don't go the way we hope, we can always change the narrative and feel better just by running an extra mile or two, because then you've surpassed what you were going to do that day. And it's not always about smashing my body, either. One of the biggest things I've learnt from my sporting career is that you can't neglect your mind and you can't neglect your body. You can't get away with running six days in a row without stretching.

'Equally,' she continues, 'I've learned that it's better to take a little-and-often approach, so walking has become my everything. When I was snowboarding, I didn't walk much at all - I used to just lift and sit about when I wasn't on the slope - but now I walk everywhere to hit my steps for the day and it's great for my mental health'.

Although Fuller confesses to not enjoying strength workouts as much as she used to because she associates



it with her training as an athlete, she still performs one strength training session a week, so she has 'the strength to keep running and continue progressing in all the sports I love - and so I can still do a front flip on a snowboard if I have to for some reason'. And if you're hitting the slopes yourself this season, Fuller advises that strength training at least twice a week is an absolute must.

'You want to have strong quads, and strong hamstrings and glutes, especially, because when it comes to turning and powering through turns, a lot is driven through the glutes and core - you've then got to be able to withstand that pressure through the

hamstrings,' she says. 'You've also got to be strong in range by putting both your strength and flexibility to the test, because you don't want to be all soggy and floppy. That's why I recommend Cossack squats - they require engagement from the obliques, hip adductors, glutes, quads and hamstrings as you transition from side-to-side while developing your flexibility and stretching out the calves and hips. I also do normal squats as well as single-leg Romanian deadlifts. I'd suggest incorporating yoga, too, because you want to be mobile and agile to move freely on the mountain, along with a bit of cardio, so you can ride longer and get better!' 