



'I WANT TO BE RUNNING INTO MY 50s'

Olympic long-distance runner **Eilish McColgan** talks about coming back from injury, and why she's putting her health and longevity ahead of breaking PB's or winning medals

Words: Joanna Ebsworth Photography: Revive Active

When you read this interview with long-distance runner Eilish McColgan – conducted ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, while she was altitude training at the ASICs training camp in Font-Romeu, France – you will already know whether her battle to get to her fourth Games resulted in a medal or not. But, as *Women's Fitness* found out, winning another Olympic gold really wasn't a priority for McColgan, since suffering one of her most challenging years ever in the lead up to Paris 2024.

In fact, as McColgan puts it bluntly, 'It's all about the longevity of my career and my health at this moment in time, because I want to be running into my 40s and possibly even my 50s. I want to still enjoy running, just like my mum [World champion and Olympic medallist long-distance runner, Liz McColgan] who is 60 and runs every day, and that is far more important to me than trying to rush back to fitness for one competition.'

'Ultimately, I still think I've got a good couple of years left in the sport, even at this elite level,' she explains. 'I look at Sara Hall [41] and Keira D'Amato [39] who are top marathon runners from the US, and even Australian long-distance runner Sinead Diver [47], who was selected for Paris 2024, and that gives me a lot of inspiration. At 33, I think I could still be going for another 10 years. I could still potentially compete in six Olympic Games, and that means there are a lot more races ahead, so I'm not rushing back for one.'

Overcoming setbacks

Following her 'very good year' in 2022, when she won gold at the Commonwealth Games in the 10,000m and set a new tournament record of 30:48:60 – another British record to add to those she holds for 5,000m, 5K and half-marathon distances – McColgan says she was 'running faster than I've ever ran before' at the beginning of the 2023 running season. Then, a knee injury meant she was running in pain for four months.

'Nothing was showing up on scans, so we really didn't know what was causing the pain,' McColgan tells *WF*. 'But then I had knee surgery and had six months where I didn't run at all. I've been told by so many different doctors and physios that it would be a big challenge just to get back to running completely pain free, and that I could be running with pain for the rest of my life. So, to be honest, my main goal this year was to get back to running without experiencing any pain, and to be able to do at least some races.'

'It's been a very, very long-winded process to get back to where I am now,' she continues. 'It began with aqua jogging, then very light gym work to start putting weight through my knee again, before progressing onto the Spin bike and then a cross-trainer. Eventually, at the very start of this year, I started training on an AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill before I was finally able to get back to running outside. I'm just hoping that I can keep

that momentum going. When I look back to where I was six months ago - not running at all - I think that in itself is a huge step forward'.

Going for goal

McColgan was able to enter the 10,000m event in the Paris 2024 Olympics thanks to her qualifying time from the previous year, but reveals she was unable to race in the marathon because she wasn't running enough during the qualification period. 'After Paris, I'll be looking to do a couple of road races, possibly something like The Big Half in London or the Great North Run half marathon in September. And after that, it will be all eyes on the marathon build-up,' she says positively. 'I still have big ambitions for things I haven't

achieved on the road yet and, I suppose, at this point in my career, I've done everything I want to do on the track. So, I'd like to run a quick half marathon and then find a really good marathon to aim for, probably in the winter, or certainly towards the start of 2025.'

When we ask her why she doesn't have any plans to take a break after the Olympics and rest up, McColgan tells us matter-of-factly that, 'long-distance runners don't stop. People often think everyone takes a break after the Olympics, and, if you're a 100m sprinter or a javelin thrower then, yes, you can do that. But distance runners go straight into a road-racing season from the end of summer, and all the way through to the start of the next year, and that's better for me,

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McCOLGAN'S TIPS FOR RUNNING SUCCESS

Club together

'Having a good support network is everything. I made all my closest friends at my local club, and it's where my training partners were, too. They kept things fun and held me accountable, especially on the days when I didn't feel like training. This is why I think belonging to a club - whether it's a running club or a regular Zumba class - is so important. Committing to training by yourself is hard, but having the support of other people around you makes it far easier because you have a reason to get out of the door and meet them.'

Make it habitual

'People get confused by the word motivation. Where do you find the motivation to train? How do you stay motivated? And I obviously have days where I wake up and think, "I can't be bothered today". But effectively, this is my job, so I have to find the motivation to train because no one else is going to do it for me. That said, I do believe once you get into the routine, it becomes a habit. When keeping fit becomes part of your daily routine, it becomes your new normal. You just need to push away that little voice that says to not bother today.'

Set a target

'Entering a race will help you to stay accountable. When you enter your first-ever 5K or 10K race that's taking place in so many weeks, it's on you to make sure you get out the door and get your training down, otherwise you'll have a pretty horrible racing experience. But I reckon that doing something you're afraid of is a good thing. If you feel overwhelmed by all the information out there, hire a coach so you can discuss your training, remove the guesswork and get help on making those hard decisions, rather than trying to do it all alone.'

Stay healthy

'Take a supplement to support your training. It's very important for me to maintain a strong immune system because an illness can completely derail my training for weeks. That's why every morning for a couple of years now I've been having a sachet of Zest Active by Revive Active (£29.95 for 30; reviveactive.com), because it has 25 active ingredients to support the immune system and boost energy levels. Coming back from injury, I also take Revive Active's Joint Complex supplement (£39.95 for 30 sachets) to help protect my joints as much as possible.'



Photography: Michael Steele/Getty Images





'When I stand at the start line, I know it's not just for me but for my whole family'

to be honest; the timing is better because it gives me longer to prepare.

'Hopefully, I'll be back to my full fitness by then and looking to set PB's and break records again,' she continues. 'So, in a way, having something to focus on after the Olympics has been good. The public might be focused on the Olympics but there's so much more to come for us long-distance runners, including the 2025 World Athletics Championships back in Tokyo, and the 2025 European Road Running Championships.'

'It's not been an easy year so, for me, being on the start line is the first success, and being at a point where I'm competitive against other British athletes and even European athletes is the second success. The third success would be getting close enough to being back to where I was beforehand.'

Mental fitness

McColgan admits she's had to change her winning mindset 'a little bit' to see beyond Olympic success this year, and is dealing with the pressure of the public's expectations by simply ignoring them. 'It's fine for people on the outside to look in and say, "Oh, you should be more competitive" or "You should come home with a medal otherwise that's not a success", but they're not the ones that have lived through what I'm living through, having missed that amount of training.'

'I know what I've been through in the past year with everything,' she elaborates. 'Aside from struggling with injury, it's been a stressful time for my family as well, losing my stepfather and my granny within a space of a couple of months, so I really don't focus on what the average person sitting on the sofa thinks. I only care about what my mum

and my dad think, and what my boyfriend Michael [Rimmer] thinks, who helps to coach me as well as my mum. They know what success is for me, and I think the fact that no other track and field athlete has made it to four Olympic games for Scotland says a lot about how hard that achievement is.'

'It's not easy,' says McColgan. 'People get injured, or get sick, or start families and do other things. We're not robots, so making four consecutive Games is incredibly challenging. And maybe, at this point of my career, it's a little harder to come back from injury because I'm not as young as I once was. I remember having my first big surgery in 2011 and recovering from it super quickly, but there also wasn't so much riding on me coming back from injury either, because running was a hobby then. Now, much later in my career, this is my actual job and there's a lot riding on it. I'm not like a footballer who gets a salary just to sit on the bench every week!'

Breaking barriers

McColgan's relationship with running has changed dramatically since she started training at her local running club for fun at the age of 12. And it's probably fair to say that, for many of those early years, she ran in the shadow of her mum, Liz McColgan's sporting legacy. Which begs the question: how does it feel for Eilish to have broken all of her mum's PB's in the British 5K, the European 10K and the British half marathon, leaving only the marathon as her last milestone?

'You know, even from a very young age, my mum always said that I would one day be better than her, run faster than her, and break records. But I never believed it because, for me,

RUN WITH EILISH!

Revive Active is holding a running event with Eilish McColgan on Monday September 9, called 'Come Run With Me'. What makes this event truly special is that Eilish will personally visit the winning club to join their run. That's right - she'll come to YOUR club and run with you and your club members! To enter, head over to Instagram (@ReviveActive_UK) and Facebook (@ReviveActiveUK). Find the competition posts and tag your club in the comments. The more club members that enter, the more chance your club has of winning!

running really was just a hobby,' she explains. 'I was never that kid that was amazing at running, and I had a really rough couple of years going through puberty, so I felt really far removed from what my mum believed I was capable of. But then I had a big sort-of breakthrough in 2017 where I broke one of my mum's records for the first time and I couldn't believe it.'

'I remember I called her after the race and I was just so excited,' says McColgan. 'Rather than feeling like an "I beat you" moment, it felt like we'd done it together. And from there, year on year, I just kept breaking her PB's. There's always been a bit of banter between us but it's more supportive than anything else. When I stand at the start line, I know it's not just for me but for my whole family. They've been there for me no matter what - through the highs, the lows and the moments when I've literally hit rock bottom - so I want to make them proud. I definitely feel empowered by their support.' 🏃‍♀️