



Kessler Foundation Podcast Transcript:

Obstacles are made to be Conquered – Meet Adaptive Sports Athlete Catarina Guimaraes

Recorded January 2020 [Listen to it here.](#)

00:00

[Sound of person running]

CATARINA GUIMARAES:
00:04

I remember when I was 12, doing a workout where I just ran a 100 meter, walked 100. I did it about eight times and it was a gas. Track was what made me involved in the world of adaptive sports.

ANGELA SMITH: 00:20

[music] She's 15 years old and she's a rising star on the North Jersey Navigators, which is an adaptive sports club for juniors with disabilities. She competes in track and field, swimming, triathlon, and soccer. She currently holds the number one US ranking in her division in the 100 meters and the long jump and is number one in the world in her division in the 800 meters. She won two bronze medals at last year's Parapan American Games in Lima, Peru and was the only female player to compete at the 2019 Friendship Cup Soccer Tournament in Dublin, Ireland. When Katrina is not training or studying-- and she is an excellent student. She was telling me about all the AP courses that she's taking as a sophomore. She plays the violin in her school orchestra. She sings a cappella in the after-school choir, and somehow found time to write and publish two young adult fantasy adventure books. All the proceeds from the sale of the books go to the Navigators and the Challenged Athletes Foundation. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Katrina [inaudible]. [music]

GUIMARAES: 01:38

I was born with Cerebral Palsy. It's the way my brain communicates with the other parts of my body. It affects my left arm and then both my legs, which I know standing up here and watching that video, some of you are probably like, "What? That doesn't really look like anything. She can run pretty normal," which was not always the case and recently, I've been working a lot harder to keep it that way. But I was diagnosed when I was two. When I was learning to walk, I would walk on my toes but my toes would be turning purple. It'd be painful. I wouldn't be able to get up the stairs, and eventually, my parents were like, "There is something wrong with this child." So we went to a bunch of different doctors and it turned out that I had a neurologic condition called Cerebral Palsy. I know now that with Cerebral Palsy, it's very important to stay active and continually doing things because the more in pain if you don't do anything all day, then if you go out and do a training session or just stretch or something like that. So from a very young age, I started doing sports. And the first sport I started was Taekwondo. I did it for 10 years. I am a second-degree black belt in Taekwondo. Taekwondo started as more of a therapeutic kind of way to work with my CP because on my toes, Taekwondo, of course, you had to stay grounded. I had to use my left arm a lot, which actually I used to be able to extend my arms evenly. I haven't been training in Taekwondo so it's kind of receded back to its normal state but it's still better than most because a lot of people don't have that therapeutic way of dealing with their disability and their arms are very [catchy?] and stuff like that.

GUIMARAES: 03:33

So, Taekwondo was how I learned to ground myself with my CP, and then eventually I started doing other things. I did rock climbing for a while, which was another kind of therapeutic way because it focused, again, on reaching with my arms and I had to



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trust my legs, which is very hard to do as a CP athlete because everything is mental, right, because you have to think about everything. And when you are doing rock climbing, you have to trust your legs, which even to this day, I sometimes have trouble of doing starts and they would be so bad because I can't trust myself to carry myself through the starting block. And rock climbing became a very good way to build up my confidence in trusting my legs. At age eight, I competed in Atlanta, Georgia. I did it for two consecutive years. Unfortunately, the team disbanded due to financial difficulties, but later on, I found myself immersed in the world of track. I started when I was 12 and I was used to being the slowest all the time. They have this competition when you're in elementary school. It's the 40-meter dash. I trained for three months. I got dead last. It was kind of sad. We are better now. I started training. I wasn't that serious about it. I would have trouble running the 100 and then we trained at the same track that I did last year, and Saturday, I did a 600-meter workout. I remember when I was 12, doing a workout where I just ran a 100 meter, walked 100. I did it about eight times and it was a gas. Track was what made me involved in the world of adaptive sports. I have made so many friends with Cerebral Palsy and Spina bifida, missing limbs.

GUIMARAES: 05:31

Most of my friends have some sort of disability and that is all due to track and what the Navigators have basically done. What I do most days now, I wake up at 5:00 in the morning. I get up in the morning and I stretch. I do core. I do some strength work and that is all just to prepare me for school, which is another challenge all on its own. But I have learned throughout my life, a very important part of having a disability is dedication because you have to kind of take things with stride and my main quote, which was on here, it's "obstacles were made to be conquered." And I feel like that is so important because there is a reason why challenges are put in front of you and it is because there is something in you that tells you that you can get through those. That motivation that I learned was through all the sports that I've done because when I was little, growing up with Taekwondo, I am very tiny. I am five feet tall. Kind of petite and I had a disability. So doing Taekwondo, as a young, young, child, was a struggle because everyone was taller than me and bigger than me and had longer arms and longer legs. It was interesting. So every morning before class, we would recite these things called The Principles of [inaudible]. The main principles were character, self-confidence, respect, perseverance, determination, integrity. Before all those words, we would say what this is and why we do it. So perseverance and determination have always stuck with me because I would fall a lot. I still fall a lot. As a CP, you fall a lot. It is something that happens and perseverance and determination is what tells you to get back up after you fall because that is the most important part, is not how many times you fall, it is how many times you get back up.

GUIMARAES: 07:44

Eighth grade, I was sick. I got a call from my coach. He was like, "Kat, Kat, guess what?" I was like, "What?" He's like, "You got selected to go to the adaptive sports USA, a competition in Ireland." And I was like, "Ooh, that sounds cool." From then on, it was a lot of training. So that summer was the summer that I knew that I wanted to do track. Doing 300s consistently is not fun for anyone. No one likes it, even professionals. They don't like it. I can tell you that right now, they don't like to do it. But they do it because they know that it's not how bad it is right now, it's when you're standing on the podium because you just won a silver medal in Ireland. That's why you do it. It's not because of it, and in Ireland, I was introduced to international



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competition, which is very challenging because there's so many people. So after that competition, I was motivated. I was like, "All right. Let's go. What's next?" Because there was just that drive to continue to do more. I was able to meet all these athletes and see what it was like in the world of elite level competition. And I got to say it is kind of crazy but there are so many people that are just so focused and so there, and all of them know that they're here and they're like, "I want to win. I want to be a part of this," and they all have their own set of standards on what is good, what is bad. And because everyone's a different classification, everyone has a different disability, different level of disability, it is very strange to see someone is missing a foot, run a 12-second 100. I'd be like, "Oh, that was so bad." I'm just like, "Yeah. I wish that was bad." But I also learned. I was like, "Okay. This is where I need to be. There is where I need to keep training and pushing," and I came back and I was like, "All right. Now I know that I can sort of do, so let's make our goals bigger."

GUIMARAES: 09:56

So I have a countdown on my fridge. There are 63 days until the next major competition. I know that it's baby steps so that's the first major one, so I'm just working my way towards each little baby step because my goal every time I train is just 1% better. Because if you get 1% better every time, it accumulates. I mean, depending, because if it's in the long jump, in the 100, it kind of gets smaller every time if you get 1% better. And that is where I am now with track. Basically, I am just training and trying to get a podium for Tokyo. Another thing that I have been doing pretty much all my life, is soccer. Soccer's a little bit more challenging because I'm the only female my age that is doing CP soccer right now because a lot of CP athletes-- what happens is they get to a level, elementary school, middle school. Middle school is tough. They can be a little harsh sometimes. Around the middle school age, they stop doing track, 9, 10, 11, 12, or they stop doing soccer. They stop doing these sports because they realize it's like, "I can no longer keep up with you," and they breakdown on themselves a lot. That because of that happens, and I feel like it happens with girls first and it does happen with guys too, they tend to not do these sports because they can no longer keep up with them. That, or they have to spend months in serial casting, so they can't actually run. Serial casting is basically they pull your foot back, put you in a cast, and you're like that for a week. And the next week you come in, they pull your foot back a little more, then you're in a cast, and you're like that for another week. And it happens four to six weeks depending on who you are, how bad. They tend to stop. It's just like, "I can't do these so I'm just going to stop, sit here, do something else." That happens so often, and that's why associations like the Navigators and stuff are so important because it gives people like me and other people with disabilities a chance to meet other people with disabilities and they're all of a sudden immersed in their own world.

GUIMARAES: 12:07

I mean, I call myself the edge of two worlds because I am so with the disabled people. I can hang out with them. We're fine. We're good. We make fun of each other's disabilities all the time. I can't do it in other worlds because in the other world, I sound really mean. But then in this world, there's people asking me for a charger to charge their leg. There's no in between the two. That's why associations are so important because you need these people. And it's like, "I like you. We've gone through the same things." I met this girl. This is the first person I met who was my age with my classification. Because of the fact that I am able for a CP athlete, I never really met someone with my level of functioning before. I had but they were usually



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older, like late 20s, and my wish came true. I would like to think I was ecstatic about it but the competitor in me was like, "There is someone else here and I don't know if she's better than me or not." Her name is Aubrey. She showed up the week after the tri-state meet. She showed up and I saw her and she's 5'8". I am 5', and then her mom was coming over. She was like, "Yeah. She jumps four and half meters in the long jump. She runs a 13-second 100." And I was like, "And there goes my crown. Here, take it," and I was very nervous. But the first event we had was the long jump. That was the first event we had together. So we did the long jump and about two jumps in, I started talking to this girl. "Have you ever had--?" And then she'd be like, "Oh my God. Yeah. Same thing happened to me." And I was like, "Really?" She was like, "Yeah." So then we would go back and forth and back and forth in talking about how I had a problem and she had the same one and then all of a sudden, I was like, "Oh, there's someone else who's gone through this too." And that feeling, as an adaptive athlete, is so nice because you can relate to people that you never thought you'd be able to relate to. A lot of adaptive sports is finding a community within the sports and it helps so much that we're able to do these. Thank you so much for having me.
[applause] [music]

ANNOUNCER: 14:29

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