

Cheerleader in Bid for Two World Titles



Thursday, 21 April 2016

A Sports student from Leamington Spa has been awarded a scholarship by the University of Worcester to support her bid to win two world titles in one week.

Rachel Edwards, 21, who studies Sport & Exercise Science at the University, is an international cheerleader with Team England. She will fly out to Florida later this month to compete in both the International Cheerleading Union (ICU) and the United States All Star Federation (USASF) championships.

For those who think of dancing with pom-poms when they hear the word cheerleading, Rachel is swift to set the record straight. "That's sideline cheer, it's very different from the kind of competitive cheerleading that I do," she explains. "Competitive cheerleading is a tough, physical sport. Think gymnastics. There are stunts, tumbles, jumps, and overall style to blend together. Level 5 stunts – like a 'double up' – are really hard to execute. You have to spin twice from the floor and land on top of a base that's provided by your team mates."

Rachel has been cheerleading since the age of 11, when she took up the sport as an extra-curricular activity at school. "It's an extremely physical sport," she said. "I've always done competitive sport from a young age, and cheerleading is as tough as any I've done. It has certainly given me a high level of fitness, not to mention confidence and self-belief."

She continued: "The ICU champs see each country enter one team. I have been selected to compete by Team England. The ICUs most resemble the Olympics. The USASF competition is for club teams from around the world, and you qualify by winning your own national championships. I'll be competing with my club – Coventry Dynamite."

Rachel has been awarded £400 by the University of Worcester's Scholarship panel to help meet the costs of her title ambitions. "There is no sponsorship support or funding within cheerleading," she said. "All the athletes pay for flights, accommodation, even their kit and the tournament entry fees. Without this scholarship, this opportunity may not have become a reality."

The ICU championships take place on 21st and 22nd April, and the USASF tournament follows hot on their heels, running between 23rd and 25th April 2016. Both competitions will be held at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando.

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