

Rising Rowing Star Earns GB Place



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A University of Worcester graduate has been selected to race for the Great Britain Para-rowing team at the forthcoming World Championships having triumphed over adversity and injury to win her place.

Giedre Rakauskaite, 26, from Worcester, started rowing at the age of 14 when she was spotted by a talent scout in Lithuania, but barely a year later her life was turned upside down by a car accident.

"My leg was pretty badly injured," she said. "They were talking about having to amputate, but I told them they had to try harder to save it, and as I went in to theatre the surgeons said they'd see what they could do. When I woke up, I had no idea if they had been able to save my leg or not. Obviously I was pretty relieved to find it was still there."

Following the accident, Giedre couldn't walk for almost a year, but as soon as she was back on her feet, she wanted to be back in a boat:

"I used to turn up at the rowing club on crutches," Giedre said, "and I could tell that some people were thinking 'what's she doing here? she can't even walk', but when we got out on the water and I beat them all, I used to feel pretty pleased."

Giedre first came to the University of Worcester from Lithuania to study [Sports Coaching Science](#) for six months as part of the Erasmus study programme in September 2011, but she liked life in Worcester so much, she decided to make it her home. She started her full programme at the University in January the next year and completed her degree in 2014.

"I chose Worcester because they had a good rowing club at the University, and the UK is the top nation in the world for rowing," she said. "I loved studying here because we had so many opportunities to get hands on with coaching rather than just reading about it in a book."

"And the rowing was excellent too," she added. "With the University rowing club I learnt how to row 'British style', applying power in the right places to maximise results."

After she finished her studies Giedre decided to stay in Worcester. She secured a job as a rowing coach with the Hereford Cathedral School, and joined Worcester Rowing Club (WRC).

In 2015, a coach from WRC met a recruiter from British Rowing whilst attending an event at the University Arena, and recommended Giedre as a possible star of the future.

Although Giedre had never thought to compete in para-rowing specifically, after a range of tests and assessments with the GB para-rowing squad, she was invited to join their development programme.

Two years on, and ten years since her accident, Giedre has taken a major step toward achieving her dream, achieving selection for the GB Para-rowing squad's premier boat, the mixed coxed four – the gold-medal winning boat at the last two Paralympic Games.

She will now compete at the World Championships in Sarasota-Bradenton, Florida, USA, which run from September 24 to October 1.

"I always wanted to be an international athlete," Giedre said. "But this is just the first step, now I want to go on and win things, and work towards winning a place in the boat for Tokyo 2020."

"I never do things recreationally," she added. "All I care about is winning and giving 100%. Even if a job only needs 80% to get it done, why not give it 100% and see what you're capable of? I've always worked hard, even when there wasn't an obvious reason to. It's the only way I know."

"When I first got injured I wondered if my dream of being an international athlete had gone, but now I feel like the window has opened where the door had closed."

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